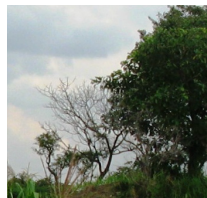


Uganda

Formerly Overwhelmed by Poverty, Ugandan Refugee Farmer Group Now Overwhelmed by Success



For years, life in the Labongali internally displaced persons (IDP) camp consisted of long periods of tediousness punctuated by eruptions of sheer terror. A settlement of some 5,000 households displaced by a campaign of terror initiated by the Lord's Resistance Army, the camp was one of over 100 IDP camps dotting northeastern and western Uganda, refuge for virtually the entire rural population.

Each household resided in a small earthen hut, packed tightly and sharing one toilet and two bathing areas among seven households. A small army detachment provided only a limited degree of security and the IDP camp experienced occasional attacks, resulting in killings, abduction, rape, looting and mutilation. Even such tasks as farming or collecting firewood in the immediate vicinity of the camp exposed individuals to danger. Farmers could not practice their livelihood, and camp residents were dependent on aid organizations for virtually all necessities.

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When peace returned in 2007, the population was reluctant to resume farming. After 15 years of insecurity, many believed that the calm would not last. Encouraged by ACDI/VOCA field staff, however, a group of 30 members (initially 25 women and 5 men) organized themselves into a farmer group and adopted the name of Can Oroma, which means "poverty has overwhelmed us." Initial trainings in agronomic practices, credit and savings, and *Farming as a Business* encouraged the group to adopt commercialized rice farming as a business enterprise in September 2007. ACDI/VOCA provides the same trainings to farmers throughout northeastern and western Uganda, and will eventually reach 60,000 farm households under our PL 480 Title II program.

First, Can Oroma established a credit and savings association. Each group member paid a



Success Story

membership fee of 500 Ugandan shillings (Ush), equivalent to about 30 U.S. cents, and agreed to contribute a minimum of 2,500 USh weekly to the savings scheme. Having very little farm income at the time, group members turned to various small enterprises such as charcoal production and trading in necessities such as soap, salt and food staples to accumulate their initial capital. A renewed vision of self-sufficiency through commercial farming, a business plan, and a commitment to the group encouraged members to save under their difficult circumstances.

By March 2008, the group had accumulated 1,200,000 USh. With this modest savings, the group invested in seeds and hired an ox-plow to open up 10 acres (4 hectares) of land. The group was encouraged by ACDI/VOCA to cultivate improved Nerica rice which, due to its short maturity period, produces two crops per year, as opposed to only one using the local Sindano rice variety. Two successful rice harvests in 2008 created additional capital, which the group further invested to expand and diversify their business enterprises.

As of March 2009, the group now owns two pairs of oxen and an ox-plow. They have begun construction of a warehouse to store their harvest to take advantage of seasonal price fluctuations. Group savings has increased to 1,900,000 USh, with an additional 300,000 USh in a local savings association. Can Oroma plans to expand their rice cultivation to 40 acres, 10 of which will be for

the group and 30 for individual group members (one acre per member). Each group member will also grow one acre of maize for diversity.

Can Oroma group member Evelyn Alobo said, "Each one of us now has improved seeds of rice for planting one acre, and cassava cuttings for planting a quarter of an acre. I have learned good skills for planting rice. Being in group encourages us to work harder. All of us have our children in school. Next year we want to send them to better schools. As we are in a group it is easier to solve problems; for example, if someone is sick or a group member loses a close relative, all members contribute to help the affected household. Some of us have bought cows, goats and local poultry." Group savings have provided members with loans to diversify into other activities such as vegetable production and small shops.

The success of Can Oroma can be traced to ACDI/VOCA's training combined with individual initiative and group commitment. While Can Oroma maintains its original name, it is now a group overwhelmed by success rather than poverty, with accomplishments and demonstrated skills that bode well for a still brighter future.

This story, written by David Lukungu of the Uganda Title II PL 480 program, was the grand prize winner in ACDI/VOCA's 2009 Success Story Contest.

