

ARU School Demonstration Farms - End of Project Report, January 2020 – December 2023



Supporting food security for better educational outcomes at 10 rural primary schools in Lamwo District, Northern Uganda.

Introduction:

The School Demonstration Farm (SDF) project aimed to support 10 primary schools and up to 500 parent farmers in Lamwo District, Northern Uganda, with agricultural and financial management training - to improve income and nutrition for the whole school community and help provide school meals. This was initially a three-year project, funded by an anonymous foundation, which was extended into a fourth year at the start of 2023, to consolidate activities and investments that were dramatically affected by the Covid-19 pandemic and changing local climatic conditions.

The project started well - we were able to continue setting up school farms even after the pandemic was underway, and schools had started feeding programs, however, schools in Uganda were then closed for most of 2020 and 2021 and the after-effects of this continued into 2022. In addition, the changing climate caused crops to fail in 2021 and 2022, which further impeded the project. In subsequent years, parent farmers were provided with fast-maturing and drought-resistant seeds and in the final year, we provided training on permaculture techniques, which rely less on rainfall. During the final months of the project, there has been a focus on ensuring the farms that are still operating are sustainable and self-sufficient, to continue their activities beyond the end of the project.

Project Activities:

1. Assessment and selection of schools and project launch

The project took place in Lamwo District, which was chosen because it was one of the poorest performing districts in Northern Uganda for Primary Leaving Examination (PLE) results, and a refugee-hosting district. An assessment was conducted at 20 primary schools in the sub-counties of Paloga, Padibe East and Lokung, to ascertain availability of acreage at each school, as well as data on pupil enrolment and teachers. 10 project schools were selected, with help from the District Education Office, who were more familiar with the individual schools.

The following considerations were made during school selection;

- No other partners doing similar interventions.
- Availability of arable land for cultivation.
- Low enrolment due to dropouts or absenteeism.
- Lack of school feeding programmes.

The selected project schools were: Logo pii, Larobi, Katum, Aguu, Lalak, Lelapwot, Ngomoromo, Dibolyec, Jamula and Ogakolacan Primary Schools.

African Revival Uganda

Plot 10, Lagony Road, Gulu. P.O Box 1331

Email: info@africanrevival.org Website: www.africanrevival.org

The project launch took place on 6th March 2020, at the district headquarters, where the District Executive Committees, Sub-County Chiefs, Councilor V and Community Development Officers (CDOs) were all present.

2. Formation and mobilisation of SDF groups

After the project schools had been selected, mobilisation meetings with parents and recruitment of parent farmers into the SDF groups took place. We particularly focused on vulnerable single mothers, single fathers, HIV/AIDS-positive persons and those who joined willfully. 400 farmers were initially recruited in March 2020, with an additional 100 joining in May. The design of the project, its targets and objectives were explained to the groups.

3. Needs assessment and enterprise selection

In April 2020, a needs assessment was conducted for all 10 SDF groups, to identify any gaps in knowledge, problems facing the community, farming habits and livelihood status. Farmers mentioned various challenges, such as unpredictable rainfall, drought, pests and diseases, low yields, low produce prices and lack of access to improved seeds. This guided the kind of training/inputs chosen for the project, to try to mitigate these challenges.

4. Covid-19 pandemic

After the Covid outbreak, in April 2020, a strict lockdown was imposed by the government, with travel in personal vehicles banned. A local taskforce was formed at district level and approval was given for our team to travel into schools so farming project activities could continue, however, the pandemic affected the project in a number of ways in year 1:

- Delays: About a month of delays when the government announced lockdown meant the first planting was missed and crop production was reduced.
- Monitoring: We were unable to get into the communities, so joint monitoring with the district could not take place.
- Educational data: Monitoring the outcomes has been disrupted. P7 pupils who should have taken their exams in December 2020 did not do so and enrolment data was disrupted because not all pupils returned to school.

In year 1, an additional grant of £1,114 (Ref: 863-4479) was provided by the anonymous donor who funded the project, with which we purchased: two reusable face masks for each beneficiary (x1,000), face masks for our team and key government staff, handwashing stands and liquid soap for each school and our office, and hand sanitiser for staff. These measures were well received by the local government, and they supported the continuation of our project despite lockdown measures.

Schools in Uganda were subsequently closed for two full academic years in 2020 and 2021 - one of the longest lockdowns worldwide - and the effects of this continued into 2022, therefore significantly affecting 3/4 years of the SDF project. When the schools reopened at the start of 2022 (year 3), schools reported they were finding it difficult to collect fees, due to parents' uncertainty about whether schools would stay open. After two years away from learning, it took a long time for some pupils to return to school and some did not return at all, due to early childhood marriage and pregnancy during lockdown.

5. Agricultural training

The SDF parent farmers were provided with various training throughout the project. This began with training on agronomy (land and seed selection, planting, plant protection, weeding and harvesting), post-harvest handling (crop maturity, transportation) and storage at all 10 schools. This was supported in year 2 with training on how to produce non-chemical pesticides, manage irrigation/unpredictable weather patterns and propagation.

In year 3, two under-performing schools unfortunately chose to leave the project, but a workshop on Farming as a Business took place in October 2022 for the remaining eight farms, and was a big success, really motivating the farmers at a time when morale was low after a period of low rainfall. At the start of year 4, permaculture training for intensive vegetable growing was conducted. This was field-based, practical training on techniques in soil and water management for maximum year-round yield and included setting up perma-gardens at all eight schools. The first four (best performing) groups were trained by an external expert and observed by AR's Project Coordinator, who was then able to replicate the training for the remaining four groups at a reduced cost.

In years 3 and 4 of the project, pupils were involved in learning various techniques and helping to maintain the school farms.



Pupils weeding beans at Lalak Primary School (left); Pupils at Dibilyec School helping to set up their perma-garden (right)

6. Input distribution and planting

In year 1, the school farms were supported with a range of inputs, such as fencing materials, farm tools, high-quality seeds, some agro-chemicals and fertilisers. All of the SDFs were fenced in the first year, to protect crops from stray animals. Each farm fenced a minimum of five acres, where the project activities were to take place. Seeds were also provided in years 2-4, but the quantity reduced year-on-year, to ensure sustainability. The farm groups were expected to save seeds from harvests for replication in subsequent years.

Seeds for home replication were also distributed, for parent farmers to plant in their own plots/gardens/small holdings, for motivation and to improve nutrition in the wider community.



Parent farmers receiving seed inputs

With guidance and supervision from AR staff, all seeds were planted using recommended best agronomic practices. Careful consideration was made of the predicted timing of rainfall and the planting of crops was spread over two seasons each year. The first planting took place between May and August 2020 and in December 2020 the first crops were harvested and sold.

African Revival Uganda

Plot 10, Lagoon Road, Gulu. P.O Box 1331

Email: info@africanrevival.org Website: www.africanrevival.org

Various crops were selected for different reasons - with sunflower, beans and soybeans being grown as cash crops, while new additions included carrots, beetroot, onion, eggplant and tomatoes - grown to improve household nutrition and help combat high rates of child malnutrition. Fast-growing drought- and pest-resistant varieties were chosen, particularly in years 3 and 4.

In year 4, farmers all wanted to focus on a single crop, but after low yields the previous year, we decided to plant at least two cash crops on each farm and reduce the number of vegetables, to spread the risk and ensure maximum yields. Soybeans, beans and maize were grown in the first season, with sunflower in the second. Eggplant, onion and okra were the vegetables planted, with cowpeas largely grown in the perma-gardens.



Land preparation

7. Research on Co-operatives

In year 2, the SDF farming groups received support from The West Acholi Cooperative Union (WACU), which deals in oil seeds, who purchased 1,500 kg sunflower seeds from them at a better rate than the market price.

In subsequent years, challenges with changing weather patterns dramatically reduced yields and there was not enough produced for larger-scale selling.

We have continued to investigate the viability of the parent farmer groups joining or forming their own co-operatives, to enable them to get better prices for their produce. We have not been able to find an established co-operative that is accessible to any of our parent farmers to join or use regularly, due to their rural location and lack of access to transportation.

During a monitoring visit in June 2023, ARUK Programme Fund Manager, Abi Dar, and ARU Country Manager, Vincent Komakech, met with Dom Idro, Co-Director of an organisation called Capable, which helps local people set up farms and co-operatives and provides finance, counselling and assistance in the Gulu area of Northern Uganda. We explained the set-up of our school demonstration farms and asked how we could go about setting up co-operatives for them. Dom confirmed it would be difficult to make co-operatives work for the SDF groups, due to: the involvement of the schools in the management of the farms and their sharing of the profits, poor leadership and lack of support from some of the communities, and the quantity and number of different crops being produced. Co-operatives specialise in one or two crops grown commercially, they need a minimum of 30 committed members and it is difficult to register as a co-operative, as the forms need to be collected from Kampala and are not returned promptly by the District Agricultural teams. Capable usually process the forms and then deliver them back to Kampala themselves.

8. Village Savings & Loans Associations (VSLAs)

Towards the end of 2020 (after the first planting was complete), the VSLA groups were established. A specialist consultant conducted training for the original 10 groups over two weeks, to introduce VSLA concepts, record keeping and assist the groups to develop their constitutions. Immediately after training, the groups started saving and were supported with VSLA kits and a cash injection of 500,000 UGX per group.



The project design assumed all parent farmers would be part of the VSLA group and vice versa, as the activities complemented one another. In general, parents were willing to be part of the VSLA groups, but didn't always want to help with the farming, but by the end of the project we had established groups with parents working on the farm and saving in the VSLA.

By year 2, refresher training on records, market linkages and value addition had taken place and loans were being repaid with interest, with several small businesses established.

VSLA records are shown below (in UGX):

First cycle 2020/2021

N	School	Group name	Cumulative savings	Cumulative welfare	Cumulative interest	Cumulative fine	Total savings
1	Jamula	Mine keni	3,598,300	629,600	1,325,000	1,654,700	7,207,600
2	Katum	Kacel watwero	5,662,000	787,000	8,470,000	2,808,000	17,727,000
3	Ogakolacan	Riber aye teko	6,833,000	675,000	6,742,000	2,651,400	16,901,400
4	Dibolyec	Mii komi	11,965,000	1,274,000	17,230,000	5,265,000	35,734,000
5	Lugopii	Tic aye lonyo	7,939,000	782,500	6,850,000	2,837,400	18,408,900
6	Lelapwot	Nen anyim	5,936,000	591,200	9,000,000	3,064,000	18,591,200
7	Ngomoromo	Dii cwinyi	12,006,000	1,110,500	14,645,000	2,639,000	30,400,500
8	Aguu	Mar kwan	8,644,000	1,008,300	13,600,000	4,956,000	28,208,300
9	Larobi	Riber ber	9,551,000	983,600	5,440,000	5,305,600	21,280,200
10	Lalak	Dyere kene	5,119,000	877,500	6,920,000	1,801,000	14,717,500
Total			77,253,300	8,719,200	90,222,000	32,982,100	209,176,600

Second cycle 2021/2022

N	School	Group name	Cumulative savings	Cumulative welfare	Cumulative interest	Cumulative fine	Total savings
1	Aguu	Mar kwan	18,596,000	1,329,000	6,672,000	1,190,100	27,787,100
2	Larobi	Ribeber	13,580,000	1,073,500	4,813,300	984,700	20,451,500
3	Lalak	Dyere keni	9,234,000	1,094,000	4,673,700	785,500	15,787,200
4	Logo pii	Tic aye lonyo	15,204,000	1,160,000	4,774,000	892,500	22,030,500
5	Ngomoromo	Dii cwinyi	11,893,000	1,011,500	2,897,000	809,100	16,610,600
6	Dibolyec	Mii komi	7,730,000	1,020,000	3,261,300	712,700	12,724,000
7	Lelapwot	Nen anyim	8,010,000	1,086,000	2,055,000	834,000	11,985,000
8	Katum	Kacel watwero	6,780,000	894,900	1,720,000	721,500	10,116,400
Total			91,027,000	8,668,900	30,866,300	6,930,100	137,492,300

Third cycle 2022/2023

N	School	Group name	Cumulative saving	Cumulative welfare	Cumulative interest	Cumulative fine	Total savings
1	Larobi	Riber ber	14,645,000	983,500	2,897,000	990,200	19,515,700
2	Aguu	Mar kwan	19,028,000	1,162,000	5,613,900	959,000	26,762,900
3	Lalak	Dyere keni	10,906,000	674,500	1,902,500	459,900	13,942,900
4	Lelapwot	Nen anyim	9,870,000	512,500	1,754,000	564,000	12,700,500
5	Ngomoromo	Dii cwinyi	11,353,000	589,000	2,900,200	769,000	15,611,200
6	Logo pii	Tic aye lonyo	13,940,000	1,050,000	2,505,400	873,400	18,368,800
7	Katum	Kacel watwero	11,232,000	1,100,500	2,445,000	780,000	15,557,500
8	Dibolyec	Mii komi	7,349,000	433,000	1,064,000	650,500	9,496,500
Total			98,323,000	6,505,000	21,082,000	6,046,000	131,956,000

9. Share out and utilisation of proceeds

As per the project design, proceeds from the harvests were shared between the farming group (30% for seeds, farming equipment, and to maintain sustainability of the farm), the school (30%) and the individual farmers (40%). All beneficiaries were aware of the split and we supervised and guided the groups to ensure this took place. We didn't observe any tension between the schools and group members during proceed share outs. The share out was both in cash and physical produce, especially maize and beans. In year 3, yields were low, so most proceeds were shared as crops and in year 4, the schools' share of maize was milled to posho for school midday meals. Some sunflower seeds are not yet mature but will be harvested in January 2024, when they will be sold and the profits shared as per the agreed split. Some produce is being stored, awaiting better prices before selling.

10. School feeding

Despite schools being closed for most pupils for the majority of years 1 and 2, over 100,000 midday meals were served to P6 and P7 pupils and teachers, who were able to attend from October 2020 – 5th June 2021. From 3rd May - 5th June 2021, P4 and P5 pupils also attended and received midday meals. In year 3 (2022), 53,570 midday meals were served throughout all three terms and in year 4, a total of 291,507 midday meals were served, though in some schools there was only enough to feed P7 pupils.



11. Distribution of reading books

In January 2022, 106 primary-age story books donated by Book Aid International were distributed to each of the 10 SDF project schools. In 2023, a further 100 books were distributed to each of the five best-performing SDF schools, namely; Logo pii, Larobi, Katum, Lalak and Lelapwot Primary Schools. We have observed the books being used by pupils, under the supervision of the schools' stock masters.



Books being received at Jamula Primary School, January 2022

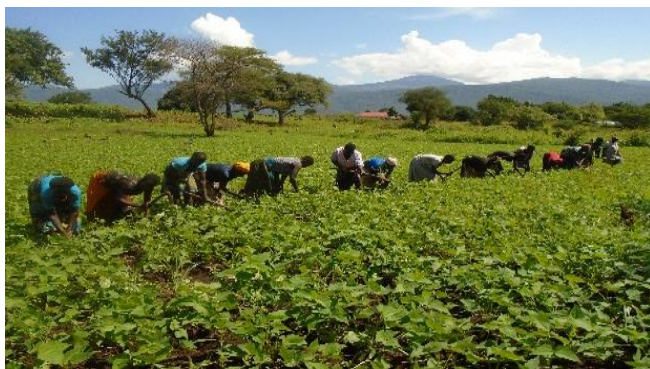
Lalak Primary School, in particular, has embraced this new resource. During a monitoring visit in June 2023, we were presented with some incredible stories written by P7 girls, which they had been inspired to write after reading some of the books AR had delivered to their school earlier in the year. This school will receive a wheelable library and more books in early 2024, as part of AR's new Read Together Project.



Monitoring and Evaluation:

Despite school closures and Covid-19 lockdowns during the first two years of the project, there was continuous internal monitoring by AR's Project Coordinator, Caston Okello, as well as ARU Country Manager, Vincent Komakech, and ARU Finance & Admin Manager, Monica Aguti Pinkett (who assisted the VSLA groups). Joint monitoring visits with district education and agricultural teams allowed us to review the successes and challenges of the project with local authorities. During the first visit, near the start of the project (before lockdowns were imposed), district and sub-county teams visited the farms at Aguu, Dibolyec and Logo pii Primary Schools, where they met parent farmers engaged in farming activities. They observed the following baseline challenges; low enrolment of pupils across all schools, lack of feeding programs, low payment of PTA funds and poor pupil performance. The officials recommended that parents should supplement SDF proceeds, to ensure midday meals were prepared in schools, and encouraged parents to work hard to achieve the project objectives.

Joint monitoring visits were not possible later in 2020, up until the middle of 2022. In 2023, visiting officials observed midday meals being prepared in schools, produce being stored at schools and noted increased enrolments. They applauded the effort made by both the teachers and parents in ensuring implementation of SDF activities. However, they also heard of challenges, such as theft of crops. The district officials instructed their CDOs to follow up with the official registration of the SDF groups – we have assisted the groups to apply but are experiencing delays at the District Office.



Project Outputs:


- **10 School Demonstration Farms** were established, of which seven are still operating successfully. A total of **50 acres** were fenced and planted, with additional plots of land also being cultivated.
- **500 parent farmers** were initially enrolled and trained in agronomy, post-harvest handling, VSLA/financial management. 349 parents are still actively participating in farming and VSLA activities and have had additional training on Farming as a Business and Permaculture techniques.
- **8 perma-gardens** were established in schools, with individual replication of several per group.
- **10 VSLA saving groups** were established and all are still active, with **478,525,200 UGX** (approx. £106,000) saved in total across all groups, over the four years of the project. Many parent farmers have increased their income and are now saving for school/PTA fees, food, medical expenses and other investments. Over **60 small businesses** have been established (35 female, 25 male beneficiaries), ranging from small-scale market vendors, small bars, local brewing, produce sales, auction vendors and commercial agriculture for both field crops and vegetables.
- Over **8,555,600 UGX** (approx. £1,900) shared with schools to improve quality of education, in addition to raw crops for school feeding.
- A total of **452,039 midday meals** have been served to pupils during the course of the project, despite prolonged school closures and poor yields for half its duration.

African Revival Uganda

Plot 10, Lagony Road, Gulu. P.O Box 1331

Email: info@africanrevival.org Website: www.africanrevival.org

Project Impacts:

- **Food security has improved** in parent farmers' households. When the project started in 2020, 38% of beneficiaries surveyed said they ate three meals a day. Monitoring after the harvest in 2021 indicated that this had risen to 80%, and at the end of the project this figure is 85%. Pupils are now receiving midday meals at school, to help them concentrate better on their learning. Before school feeding, 10% of pupils usually did not return for afternoon lessons but now all stay.
- **Nutrition has been improved** in the communities involved in the project, as a result of them growing fortified beans and producing a variety of vegetables. One outstanding benefit is the medicinal properties of beetroot, which several parent farmers have reported has helped alleviate symptoms of sickle cell anemia in their children (see example testimonial below).
- Schools, individual parent farmers and members of the wider community have embraced **permaculture techniques** and are now able to grow vegetables, even without rainfall, to further improve nutrition. In addition to the eight perma-gardens set up at project schools, over 35 more were replicated in local households, as well as several further afield. There has been practical involvement by both teachers and pupils from P5, P6 and P7 at all of the schools, which has helped further spread the knowledge.
 
- Parent farmers used their own shares for: seeds for home gardens and meals at home, saving in the VSLA, setting up small businesses and paying for school fees/school items for their children, thus benefiting the whole family. 30% of proceeds were put back into the farming groups, who used it to hire additional farmland outside of the school, hire oxen for ploughing and purchase hybrid seeds that supplemented what the project provided.
- We have data to show how each project school used their 30% share of farm proceeds, which included: supporting salaries for volunteer PTA teachers, repair of school structures, school feeding and salaries for cooks, provision of first aid kits, scholastic materials, liquid soap and sanitary items. This was particularly helpful throughout 2021, as during the school closures the government did not pay schools their usual primary education grant.
- **Volunteer teachers** showed more commitment after receiving wages out of the 30% school share in Dibolyec, Larobi and Lalak Primary Schools. However, as teachers were paid over lockdown, many schools chose to keep crops for school feeding in those years.
- **Increased enrolment and reduced overall dropouts** across all SDF schools, from a total enrolment of 6,335 pupils at the beginning of 2020, when AR started implementing the project, to 8,217 in 2023. Near the beginning of the project, 95% of teachers said pupil attendance had improved. In year 1, the headteacher of Ogakolacan Primary School noted *"It's my first time to see this tremendous commitment of the parents in payment of the school fees, compared to past years where fee payment was a big tension between the school and the parents."*
- **Increased number of pupils registering for Primary Leaving Exams (PLE)**, in part due to school feeding. Across the eight schools still participating in the project, at the end of year 3, 204 pupils sat their PLE and of these, 62% passed. This is an increase compared to the same schools at the end of year 2 (2021), where 210 pupils sat PLE but only 54% passed. This said, PLE results are not a reliable indicator of project impact, as results and overall attainment of pupils was affected by the Covid-19 pandemic. In year 1 (2020), no PLE took place at all and in year 2 it is not surprising that the pass rate was lower, following prolonged school closures.

African Revival Uganda

Plot 10, Lagony Road, Gulu. P.O Box 1331

Email: info@africanrevival.org Website: www.africanrevival.org

Testimonials:Opoka Ronald Lakica, 36yrs, Parent Farmer, Aguu Primary School

Mr. Opoka told us that the agricultural training provided by African Revival really inspired him to set up agricultural enterprises. He grows eggplant and onions but focuses on eggplant as they are more drought resistant. In a single season, he now makes a profit of more than 2.5 million UGX. He told us that the income he is getting from growing vegetables has enabled him to fund his elder son's studies, to allow him to sit UCE this year; buy two pairs of oxen for cultivation; buy a plot of land in Awenolui border point market and other assorted household items.

Obaca Kizito Ocira, 47yrs, Parent Farmer, Dibolyec Primary School

Mr. Obaca says the agricultural training provided by African Revival made him change his mindset - from subsistence cultivation to becoming more market-oriented. He now grows onions, tomatoes and cabbages and he plants so they mature when there's scarcity of those products in the market. He has invested the profits and borrowed from the VSLA to produce sesame, the sale of which has paid school fees for his 7 children.

Aero Lucy, Parent Farmer and single mother of three primary school children, Ngomoromo Primary School

"My child who is now in P5 had been suffering from sickle cell since 2014 up to 2022, when I joined the SDF group and was told of the nutritional benefits of consuming beetroot, especially to pregnant mothers, sickle celled persons and diabetic patients. I used to take my child for treatment on a weekly basis at Kitgum General Referral Hospital, which left me without any money. Thanks to consuming the beetroot I can grow, my daughter is much improved and was able to sit her P5 exams."

Lucy now grows beetroot to sell in both Kitgum and Lamwo. Her daughter's testimony encourages many people in her community.

**Challenges:**

This project has faced many challenges, which have significantly affected it:

- Covid-19 - The pandemic caused schools to close for two full years, from 2020 to 2021. Only P7 candidates were allowed to return in 2021 to complete their studies and sit for PLE. Educational data for monitoring the outcomes has been disrupted and pupil enrolment at the start of year 2 dramatically dropped. Midday meals have therefore not benefited as many pupils and teachers as we had planned.
- Industrial action by the UNATU teachers' body, which lasted for more than a month in the second term of year 3, while schools were still catching up after the pandemic, affected syllabus coverage and reduced enrolment at all the project schools. Pupils were sent home and enrolment unfortunately did not return to term one levels in the third term.

- Motivation of parent farmers - Prolonged school closures at the start of the project slowed momentum and changing weather patterns drastically affected yields in years 2 and 3, further de-motivating farmers, although the introduction of permaculture training this year has helped to mitigate this challenge.
- Cultural issues - Lamwo District was a challenging region to work in, with the DEO confirming that attitudes are generally poor, with communities expecting handouts and having low motivation to play their part. We were not aware of this at the start of the project. Two under-performing farms left the project at the end of year 2 (Ogakolacan and Jamula Primary Schools), due to lack of commitment from the school leadership and difficult community attitudes. We reluctantly decided not to give any further seed inputs to these groups and they did not continue with farming activities. In year 4, tension between teachers and parent farmers at Dibolyec Primary School over ownership of fenced SDF land caused production to cease. There is a wider issue with the headteacher, and we fear the SDF will not continue at this school, despite our best efforts. These issues have been reported to the DEO.
- Climate change has dramatically affected weather patterns in Uganda, which manifested in drought, causing a huge decline in yields in years 2 and 3. In year 2 there was a five-month long dry spell from May-September 2021, which had a devastating effect on beans and vegetables that had been distributed in March 2021 and planted in early April. To counter this, other crops were planted in shifts - some beans were planted late in August and at least some good yields were realised. In the second planting and in subsequent years, AR distributed faster-maturing seeds, including a hybrid sunflower variety and soybean MAKSOY 3N variety, which is drought-resistant and high-yielding. Farmers tried to adjust the timing of planting at the onset of rain, but in year 3, very little rain fell and what did fall was completely unpredictable. Rain fell early in March but ended after a few weeks, in mid-May. The dry spell extended from May to mid-July and caused wilting of beans, stunted growth of soybeans and reduction in the size and number of the seeds. Crop productivity and yields were minimal. Not enough rain fell in the early months of the second season either. The planting of beans and sunflower that started well in early May at all eight schools, ended abruptly due to the dry spell that set in for close to three weeks. Some of the remaining seeds that had been held back were planted in August and early September, to try to coincide with peak rainfall. Weeding continued for the crops that were planted early and the farmers were told about the benefits of early weeding for plant protection and yield maximisation.
- Fruit trees - Due to the challenges with the climate, we did not provide fruit trees as planned, as we did not think they would survive. We therefore didn't provide fruit dryers either.
- Early grade reading assessments (EGRA), which we planned to use to show increased attainment of pupils, were unfortunately not a reliable way of measuring project impact. The first assessments we were able to implement took place after prolonged school closures and results were poor across the board. Academic attainment has been recovering ever since and we did not feel that repeating the EGRA in year 4 would show any significant improvement. Academic attainment is related to many other factors than just school feeding, although this has had a positive effect on enrolment and retention of children in school.
- Simisim (sesame) harvesting in faraway areas during June-September every year caused absenteeism of pupils across project and neighbouring schools in Lamwo District and a decline in the number of participants at SDF group activities. Farmers travel to distant farmlands and take their children with them to help with the harvest.
- Some VSLA groups reported a drop in savings in the final cycle, due to the global cost of living crisis, as well as drought and famine that affected the district and left most households struggling to provide food for their families in years 3 and 4.

- Staff challenges – The first Project Coordinator, who had been under-performing, left at the end of year 2, and Project Officer Caston Okello was promoted into the Coordinator role. In year 3, a new staff member was recruited to support Caston in the Project Officer role, but her contract was not renewed for year 4.
- A project motorbike was stolen at the end of year 2. A police report was filed, but the bike was never recovered. African Revival provided a replacement project motorbike.
- Theft of crops from some farms has been witnessed in the final year of the project. The affected farms were Lakak, Ngomoromo, Aguu and Larobi. The cases have been reported to the local council, but nobody has yet been reprimanded.
- Other challenges included: low soil fertility on two farms at the start of the project, rain affecting threshing at some schools that did not have adequate storage facilities, stray animals damaging crops due to inadequate fencing and crop damage by ants.

Recommendations and Sustainability:

Engagement meetings took place with all the remaining SDF groups, to discuss the sustainability of the SDF project. All the farm groups were asked to develop comprehensive strategies and plans on how they would continue in the absence of funding from AR. A summary of these discussions is shown in the table below:

N	School/farm	Plan for sustainability
1	Ngomoromo	The members are very willing to continue, but they want to relocate to land outside the school, because cases of theft on the farm are high. The school committed to mobilise funds out of the PTA collection to support the farm. The members confirmed the 30% group income will be saved to finance farming activities next year.
2	Lelapwot	The group members said they will set aside funds realised from the sales of proceeds to help them continue the project. They said part of the welfare fund from the VSLA will be used to hire outside land to increase production.
3	Lalak	The headteacher and parent farmers agreed in the presence of the DEO that they will have a budget starting next year to support the SDF. One teacher has been appointed to be responsible for the project.
4	Aguu	The group will continue saving in the VSLA and part of their funds will be set aside to procure improved seeds. Group members with oxen also pledged to plough the farm at low cost, in order to reduce expenses.
5	Katum	The group plans to hire more acres of land next year and engage in soybean production. The chairperson of the SMC, who is also a group member, also promised that the school has agreed a budget to help finance the farm.
6	Larobi	The school administration was very positive and told the parent farmers they should specialise in maize. The school will have a budget for seed procurement.
7	Logo pii	The school agreed together with the parents to contribute some funds to support the farming. Group members pledged to continue working together.
8	Dibolyec	We fear this farm will not continue – group members were de-moralised after a disagreement with teachers at the school. The headteacher is a challenge here.

- AR has asked the District Education and Agricultural Offices to continue checking and supporting the school farms. We have given them phone numbers, a summary of challenges and current activities at each SDF. We have made all the relevant introductions and assisted the farm groups with their applications for group registration, but there are delays with processing. AR staff will continue to monitor the groups too, as we pass by during future project monitoring.
- Parent farmers should practice more commercial agriculture to try to link with bigger buyers and agro-input dealers, for more profitable returns. There has been linkage to bulk buyers, for example Mukwano Group, who buys oil seeds (sunflower and soybeans) in bulk for processing. The groups now have direct contact with them.
- The school PTA should be responsible for managing the SDF groups – they could then ensure the share out of proceeds was fair. Our experience has been that the parent farmers want to be rewarded for their efforts, rather than the emphasis being on supporting the schools.
- Farmers should diversify their enterprises to counter changing weather patterns – we have implemented perma-gardening at the schools to mitigate these effects.

Budget:

This project was funded jointly by African Revival, £20,004 from Big Give Christmas Challenge 2020 and a grant for £76,842 from an anonymous foundation (ref: 863-3896). The original project budget was £150,202 for three years. Despite the project continuing into an additional year, actual spend was £127,438. The large underspend was largely due to Covid lockdowns, which reduced travel costs (visits, monitoring, fuel and meetings in Kampala/Arua that did not take place) and phone airtime. Large savings were made on staff costs, medical insurance (we found a cheaper supplier), laptops (which AR provided for free from donated stocks), internet, fencing and seeds. A full BvA is available on request. Subject to agreement of our Board of Trustees, unspent funds will be re-allocated to a similar project, likely the setting up eco-clubs in 10 schools in Amuru District, Northern Uganda.

Conclusion:

This project has achieved most of its initial objectives, despite being hugely affected by several factors outside our control, including the Covid-19 pandemic, negative community attitudes, poor school management/leadership and the changing climate. We successfully set up school farms and VSLA groups, provided agricultural and financial management training for 500 parent farmers, improved income, standards of living, development, health and nutrition, ensured midday meals were served at schools, and improved attendance/enrolment. All 10 schools, VSLA saving groups continue to operate. 7/10 groups are continuing with their farming activities and are confident they will continue to thrive beyond the end of the project. We managed to mitigate the effects of climate change by procuring high-yielding and resistant varieties of seeds that worked very well for our farmers. We have trained them in permaculture techniques that will allow them to diversify and further overcome the challenges caused by unpredictable rainfall. The project schools will continue to benefit from school feeding and income shared by the farming groups, as well as donated story books, to improve the quality of education for thousands of children.

Thank you for your support!!!!

Report prepared by:
Caston Okello, ARU SDF Agricultural Project Officer
Abi Dar, ARUK Programme Fund Manager



African Revival Uganda

Plot 10, Lagony Road, Gulu. P.O Box 1331

Email: info@africanrevival.org Website: www.africanrevival.org