



## **CFPA - Brighter Future Program Final Narrative Report**

**Reporting period [March 2018 – May 2019]**

**Program:** Brighter Future Program/ CFPA, Palabek Refugee Settlement, Lamwo District

**Country:** Uganda

**Start Date:** 1<sup>st</sup> March 2018

**End Date:** 31<sup>st</sup> May 2019

**Total Value:** \$1,000,000 USD

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## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

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**Our special thanks to Mr. Paul Dudley Hart and Mrs. Jane Hart for the support to this partnership.**

**Not only does this programme contribute to meeting immediate needs and longer term development of South Sudanese refugees in Northern Uganda, but also furthers CFPA – MC partnership on the ground.**

## Summary of program progress and performance:

Mercy Corps and CFPA collaborated to implement the 15 month long **Brighter Future** program (March 2018 – May 2019). The overall goal of the program is to meet basic needs and improve food security and livelihood opportunities for refugees and Ugandans in Lamwo District, Uganda, targeting 3,800 beneficiaries (2,660 refugees and 1,140 host community members). Specifically, the program focused on:

1. Meeting basic needs for South Sudanese refugees in Palabek Refugee Settlement, Lamwo District, Uganda.
2. Increasing agricultural production and productivity among South Sudanese refugees and Ugandan smallholder farmers in Lamwo District, Uganda.
3. Increasing off-farm incomes among youth in refugee and host communities by means of micro business or other income generating activities.

The program goal was “To meet basic needs and improve food security and livelihood opportunities for refugees and Ugandans in Lamwo District, Uganda thereby advancing refugee self-reliance and host community economic resilience”. The program therefore aims to meet the basic needs of refugees and host communities while strengthening market systems and resilience capacities, one of the core strategies for Mercy Corps in Uganda. Brighter Future, working together with the CFPA team from China, Ugandans, US Peace Corps volunteer staff, and Mercy Corps, utilized a set of approaches to respond to the refugee crisis, such as unconditional cash transfers, vouchers modality, rapid market assessments, agriculture facilitation and income generation activities in emergencies.

Brighter Future started with official program launch events in April 2018 at the national level in Kampala. At the launch event, there was high attendance and participation of key program stakeholders. The Kampala event included partners and government at different levels including the Office of Prime Minister (OPM), UNHCR, local council, district government, and relevant NGO representatives, Chinese Embassy, Chinese enterprises and media. The program launch and the CFPA-MC partnership were reported through the Ugandan and Chinese media. The program reported into the livelihood sector in UNHCR’s refugee response cluster systems, in which our program objectives were introduced along with CFPA’s strategic partnership with Mercy Corps. The CFPA logo appears on all program staff uniforms, official documents, program vehicles, and public events, including the World Refugee Day. Raising the visibility of CFPA in Palabek refugee settlement will increase awareness of the Chinese NGO participating in international refugee response and prepare for relevant future fundraising opportunities.

Locations for implementation of program activities were identified by working closely with OPM, UNHCR, CESVI and LWF. In Palabek refugee settlement, the program worked in Zone 4, Zone 5A, and Zone 5B with a total population of more than 13,670 people. A baseline survey was conducted to understand the basic needs before beginning our intervention on food, non-food items, shelter, land access, health care, water and sanitation, etc. 677 households, both refugees and host community household respondents, were randomly sampled and surveyed.

### Management summary:

The Brighter Future program has been on target throughout the implementation period and has met its key delivery dates for all objectives of the program, as well as on target to meet its budget objectives. Staff with relevant backgrounds manage the three objectives. Work breakdowns and Standard Operating Procedures were developed to ensure high management standards and efficiency.

SOPs for e-cash transfers were developed based on Mercy Corps' response to the refugee crisis in West Nile. We adopted the SOP and developed an e-cash transfer for the Palabek refugee response. We also developed the SOP of Agriculture facilitation and IGA to provide us the general guidance of our activities.

In terms of implementing unconditional cash transfers, we successfully completed six batches of cash transfers through Stanbic Bank and MTN mobile money platform, totaling 2,500 beneficiaries, and ensuring a 100% success rate. Although there are some small percentages, such as within 0.1% reported cases of complaints in regards to SIM cards being lost, the PIN forgotten and cases of not receiving the transaction notification message. All these concerns were resolved with the help of our staff in coordination with Mobile Money agents.

Increasing access to land was challenging, because most of the land has been used to resettle refugees (UNHCR), while the remaining land near the settlements has been used by other NGOs that implement agricultural activities. To solve this problem, the program team invested more time in negotiating with landowners and local leaders to increase access to land. The team enabled access to 266 acres of land within the settlement through the end of the program.

The agriculture component was greatly affected by climate change with low rainfall in the second half of 2018. This has greatly affected our agricultural implementation, especially in the planting season of July and August 2018. This affected the agricultural production and productivity outcome at the end of the program. In an effort to address this issue, the program team adapted implementation to respond to the context, and changed the types of seeds supplied to beneficiaries to match the planting month/date. The seeds either were resistant to high temperatures or had a short harvest period. After one farming season, the harvest produced by the 40 farmer groups was 8,004 Kgs total of sunflower. Farmer groups were also trained on post-harvest handling and were provided with the post handling tools.

Given the short duration of the program (15 months in total), it was impossible for us to provide ongoing support to farmers to replant and re-invest in their land in the consequent year. The project team therefore decided to boost the sustainability of the agricultural component by improving the internal capacity of the farmer groups. The groups were provided trainings in financial literacy, and were supported to create Village Savings and Loans Associations (VSLA). In addition, 36 farmer groups are actively continuing with agriculture out of the 40 farmer groups formed by the program, while all 40 groups continue to have a functional VSLA and are fully equipped with the tools and resources needed for their ongoing operation.

Income generating activities for youth, despite some delays in activities, made overall progress during the program. The program started with a call for business proposals where 450 small-scale commercial proposals for youth income generation were received and carefully reviewed. Out of the 450 business proposals, a total of 150 IGA group applicants were selected for entrepreneurship training to improve their business proposals. This training combined classroom knowledge training and extracurricular market visits. According to the after-training evaluation, the satisfactory rate of the participants of the business training is 70%. Trainees finalized their business plans based on the knowledge they learned, and started their business with the cash support provided by Mercy Corps under the Brighter Future program. A total of \$100 USD grants were distributed to each one of 100 IGA groups with a total number of 300 young entrepreneur members.

## Key Milestones Table (those that represent significant project progress to endline)

Outcome indicator	Output indicator	Activity indicator	Target	Progress/ Status
<b>Indicator 1: Percentage of refugees and host communities who are able to meet their basic needs</b>			2500	All of the six transfers done with an endline evaluation of 99.9% received all the six transfer conveniently without complaints. This component met its objectives based on the baseline value of 2.7% HHs meeting their basic needs (71 F: 29 M) and Refugee:Host=70:30 respectively
	<b>Indicator 1.1: # of refugees and host communities who receive UCTs every month for 6 months</b>		15,000 (2500 Direct and 12500 indirect)	The Program successfully sent out six monthly transfers from October 2018 to March 2019.
		Indicator 1.1.1: 1 assessment report. 1 criteria for cash and voucher recipients.	1	An assessment report was finalized during initial stage of the program in 1 <sup>st</sup> week of May 2018. The selection criteria developed were then embedded into the program SOP for e-cash distributions.
		Indicator 1.1.2: 1 SOP finalized.	1	The SOP for e-cash transfers was developed and finalized on September 25 <sup>th</sup> , 2018.
		Indicator 1.1.3: 2500 beneficiaries selected, 1 set of electronic platform established, 100% cash transferred to beneficiaries, 10% randomly sampling with 90% satisfied.	2,500	The master list for the 2,500 beneficiaries to receive unconditional cash transfers was finalized in July 2018. The first batch of UCT sent in October 2018, and post distribution monitoring (PDMs) were done three days later with 10% random sampling on every transfer.



**Indicator 2:  
Percentage of  
refugees and host  
community farmers  
recording at least  
30% increase in  
their production  
and productivity.**

1000  
participants

All the 40 farmer groups existing with a total of 1000 registered participants.

	<b>Indicator 2.1:</b> Percentage of refugees with increased access to land for agricultural production.		70%	100% has been achieved as the Program successfully formed 40 farmer groups where each group is composed of 25 members (18 refugees and 7 host community or landowners). At program end, 266 acres of land had been acquired for use that was not previously available to refugees.
		<b>Indicator 2.1.1:</b> 1 assessment report, which contains the implementation recommendation.	1	The assessment report for access to land was finalized
		<b>Indicator 2.1.2:</b> 1 Criteria of selection has been finalized; 1000 beneficiaries been selected	1	One standard selection criteria developed for selecting 1000 beneficiaries to benefit from the agricultural component of the program. .
		<b>Indicator 2.1.3:</b> 700 refugees are facilitated to access agricultural land.	700	700 refugees have shared access to a communal land area of 266 acres (0.27 acres each) for agricultural production and productivity.
		<b>Indicator 2.14:</b> 40 farmer groups have been formed	40	40 farmer groups were formed comprising of refugees and the host communities on a ratio of 70:30 refugee to host.
	<b>Indicator 2.2:</b> Percentage of refugees and host communities having increased access to quality inputs and tillage services.		N/A	The program provided tillage services to 170 acres out of the 266 acres of land acquired through negotiations with neighbouring landowners (Host Community) and provided access to improved quality seeds like Sunflower, sorghum, Soybeans and sesame.

		Indicator 2.2.1: 1 program SOP finalized and all team members implement the program based on the SOP.	1	The program SOP for agriculture vouchers has been finalized, discussed, and shared among the program team members and stakeholders.
		Indicator 2.2.2: 80% Farmers group built linkage with agriculture input suppliers.	80%	Up to four competent agricultural input suppliers linked to 40 farmers groups providing quality inputs for up to 800 farmers (100% achieved)
		Indicator 2.2.3: Voucher provided to 100% selected farmers. 1 pilot taken before formal launching.	100%	100%. Farm tools and seeds vouchers provided to 1000 farmers. 1 pilot taken before formal launching.
		Indicator 2.2.4: 80% farmers group access tillage service.	80%	100%. All the acres cleared are provided tillage services to 1000 farmers.
	Indicator 2.3: Percentage of refugees and host community adopting improved farming and agronomic practices.		20% Increase at household level	74.0% of the target participants registered increase adoption in improved farming and Agronomic practices.
		Indicator 2.3.1: 10 male, 10 female community-based refugees trainers.	20	20 Agricultural Extension Trainers (AETs) recruited considering the disaggregation of 10 male / 10 female, each training two groups out of the 40 farmer groups for 10 months.
		Indicator 2.3.2: Farmers trained in sustainable agricultural practices targeting 1000 farmers.	1000	604 farmers trained to adopt sustainable practices on improved farming and agronomic practices.

**Indicator 3:  
Percentage of  
refugees and host  
community  
beneficiaries with  
increase in income  
of at least 20% of  
the target  
population**

20%  
increase in  
income of the  
300 IGA  
participants

95.7% of the businesses were operational and registered an increase in profits as a result of the intervention.

	Indicator 3.1: At least 20% IGA groups' success rate amongst refugees and host communities.		20%	80% IGA groups success rate amongst refugees and host communities
		Indicator 3.1.1: 1 market assessment conducted, 1 assessment report finalized.	1	1 Market assessment for viable income generating activities conducted and assessment report finalized.
		Indicator 3.1.2: The number of business proposals received.	450	450 small business proposals were received
		Indicator 3.1.3: At least 100 IGA groups formed and trained.	100	150 IGA groups trained and formed.
	Indicator 3.2: \$ value from off-farm activities at household level.		\$20 at household level	From the monitoring, the endline and FGDs, all groups had averagely 80,000 UGX in profit every month. 80 successful IGAs out of the 100 IGA that was established by the program. The average increase in profit in UGX had an equivalent average of \$22.22 USD every month with each HH having an average increase of \$7.4 USD. <b>Note:</b> This indicator did not meet the required target at HH level.

**Progress and Deviations from Plan**

There were no major deviations from the initial work plan however there were changes in the program timeline. The Unconditional cash transfers were meant to kick-start in June 2018 but was delayed until October 2018, when it was completed. This is due to the delay in contracting with the Mobile Money service provider (MTN). The agriculture component was delayed from June 2018 to September 2018 due to long awaited rain in the months of June, July, and early



September. This forced the team to change a number of the seed types to be more favorable for the late season than had been previously planned.

### **Detailed Summary of Program Progress:**

**Human Resources:** The program team was successfully recruited by May, and consisted of 2 staff from CFPA, 1 staff from Mercy Corps China, 1 staff from Peace Corps, and 5 local program staff. Local staff included two Program Officers, one Monitoring Evaluation and Learning Officer and two Program Assistants. Additional recruitment included twelve temporary hire Research Assistants to help with data collection during the baseline survey, 20 Community mobilizers with six-month contracts to support unconditional cash transfers, and 20 Agricultural Extension Trainers (AETs) under the agricultural component of the program to support capacity building of the farmer groups and program closure monitoring. The team is gender sensitive with a balanced ratio of female to male at 50:50 respectively.

Two program staff (Agriculture Program Officer and Cash Transfer Program Assistant) resigned before the end of the program, when the program was entering its close out phase, due to opportunities for longer term employment and overseas studies. Given the communication with CFPA about lack of continued funding available for this program, it was decided not to recruit new staff members, and instead promoted relevant staff in the team to acting position for the rest of the remaining program period.

The two program staff from CFPA that included a Program Officer and a Program Assistant came to support the program for a three months period, after which they would switch with another assistant. Due to a long time of applying for a work visa, there is a considerable gap in staffing especially for the volunteers as a number came late and were unable to dedicate sufficient time to supporting the program. We will therefore need to pay a much closer attention to this kind of issue in similar projects in the future. Earlier preparation of visas is necessary, and its recommended to have alternatives in-case of delays in receiving work visas. The suggestion is to either ask previous staff to postpone returning until the replacement's visa is obtained, or increase the speed of applying for the visa.

**Unconditional cash transfer (UCT):** The Program identified 2,500 beneficiaries, who met the project criteria and were provided UCT of \$14 USD through the MTN mobile money platform for a period of six months. This started in October 2018 and continued through March 2019. The cash transfer enables beneficiaries to cover their basic needs such as food and sanitation needs. 1,750 South Sudanese and 750 vulnerable host households received cash every month by use of Mobile Network Operators in order to meet their basic needs for six consecutive months from October 2018 to March 2019. Twenty community based mobilizers were recruited and trained to support in mobilization for UCT during consent signing, cash out, and support in the Community Accountability and Reporting Mechanism (CARM). The usage of the funds were largely divided into three categories with over 70% use to buy food items for the household, 15% saved for starting up small-scale businesses, and 13% used for paying school fees and buying scholastic materials.

**Agriculture Group formation:** Brighter Future Program formed 40 farmer groups of 25 members in each with a 70:30 composition ratio of refugee and host community members. This was to enforce social cohesion between the hosts and refugees. The groups were formed by choosing interested participants that were approved by community block leaders and by Mercy Corps. To join a group it was required that the host community member would provide land at no cost to the farmer. In return, the host members are eligible to receive training opportunities and agriculture inputs, seeds, and tillage services that were provided by Mercy Corps. Most importantly, their land was developed, and can be used in the future. According to the end line

survey, after Mercy Corps stopped investing inputs, there continued to be 36 among the 40 groups who are working together into the next planting season.

**Access to land:** All farmer groups negotiated with host community landowners (35 in total) to access more land. The landowners' family members can join the group as host community members. The host community provided land to the group. Each group acquired on average about 5 acres of land for cultivation in the 2nd season. The modality and incentive for allowing refugees to access land was that for every 5 acres of land one person gives, he/she receives inputs, tillage services, and PHH equipment for one acre that belongs entirely to the landowner. The 40 groups in total accessed 266 acres of land. The host community members still own the land, but under this agreement that was for the entire second cropping season of 2018 (June 2018 – March 2019) until all the crops has been harvested by the farmer groups. The goal was to create access to 1000 farmers to increase production and productivity by using the land.

**Access to tillage service:** The program facilitated local tillage service providers to plough all land acquired for the group and landowners in this program. MC covered all costs of tillage service. In case a landowner had a pair of oxen that could plough, they will automatically become a TSP for this program. This provides more incentive for landowners to provide land, as they can receive additional benefit from providing tillage service to the group. In total, we worked with 23 TSPs who were able to plough about 196.5 acres and on average earned about 840,000 Uganda shillings, equivalent to about 225 USD each.

**Access to quality inputs:** The Brighter Future program covered 100% of the cost to facilitate the entire 40 farmer groups, and for 35 landowners to access seasonal seeds through paper vouchers. MC contracted three service providers who sold seed at an average value of 175,000 shillings to each group. The common seeds purchased were sunflower had 337Kg amounting to 5,445,300 UGX improved seeds input as compared to 8,004 Kgs harvested amounting to averagely 5,602,800 UGX., this was due to the delay and unfavorable climate conditions in the second planting season, drought within the refugee communities leading to stealing some of the harvest and the delays in internal procurement system. Sila Sorghum had 128Kgs as improved input seeds an equivalent of 1,024,000 UGX as compared to 215kgs harvested amounting to 1,720,000 UGX. While Soybean had 124Kgs as improved input seeds amounting to and equivalent of 930,000 UGX as compared to 0Kgs in harvest and equivalent of 0 UGX, and one landowner received sesame 2 input of 6Kg amounting to 48,000 UGX and harvested 0Kg and subsequent 0 UGX in cash.

Item/Seeds	Improved	Input Quantity (Kilograms)	Input Amount (UGX)	Output Quantity (Kilograms)	Output Amount (UGX)
Sunflower		337	5,445,300	8,004	5,602,800
Sorghum		128	1,024,000	215	1,720,000
Soybean		124	930,000	0	0
SeSame		6	48,000	0	0
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>595</b>	<b>7,447,300</b>	<b>8,219</b>	<b>7,322,800</b>

**Access to tools and equipment:** The program also facilitated access to simple farm tools such as hoes, pangas and slashers for clearing the gardens, this was fully covered by the program. On average, each farmer group received tools with a value of UGX 286,000 shillings which is an equivalent of \$77.3 USD. The Brighter Future program also provided vouchers to the farmer groups to access PHH equipment such as Super grain bags, Turplines (Drying Mat), Bulk bins/Basins, Winnowers and harvesting knives, for 39 farmer groups valued at 16,226,000 UGX estimated at \$4,385.4 USD. One group did not receive this assistance as that farmer group had their crops destroyed by weather and animals because of delayed planting. There was then no need to provide them with post-harvest handling tools, as they have nothing to harvest.

**Capacity building:** MC hired 20 Agriculture Extension Trainers (AETs) to train all farmer groups. Each AET worked with two farmer groups and trained the groups and landowners in sustainable agriculture practices, PHH monitoring, field activities, and guiding the group to ensure that they stick together. Mercy Corps employed a ToT model in capacity building of farmers and landowners. These 20 AETs recruited had a 50:50 ratio of men to women in order to support the 40 farmers' groups effectively. A total of 1000 farmers were trained on group dynamics, different agricultural practices, market systems, post-harvest handling, and were linked to input suppliers and the market.

**Financial literacy and VSLA:** A participatory ToT for financial literacy and VSLA was conducted with group representatives from all 40 farmer groups. The farmer groups were provided with VSLA kits comprising of a metallic cash box, three padlocks, record books, pens, moneybags, calculators, stamps, stamp pads, VSLA manual, chart, and game cards. All 40 VSLA groups remain functional after receiving trainings and VSLA Kits. All have started savings successfully.

**IGA component:** Brighter Future facilitated 300 youth of 18-35 years of age to generate income through self-driven business ideas. 450 business proposals were collected, out of which 150 groups selected and trained (58% Male and 42% Female) on business basics. 100 groups (of three people each) passed the training and were then funded by the Program to start their business. Furthermore, MC organized a business trip for all group leaders. With the support of Gulu main market and a farm called Freedom In Creation, all youth leaders gained practical business experience and basic business skills. The businesses are in various areas of retail, small livestock, liquid soap, and salons. The groups linked with business mentors for improvement in business.

**Monitoring Evaluation & Learning:** The program had a dedicated MEL Officer, supported by the Senior Monitoring, Evaluation, Learning, and Communication Manager. To ensure effective monitoring of the program, an indicator plan and performance management plan were developed to guide MEL activities. The program conducted a baseline and endline assessment to facilitate understanding of community needs, baseline conditions, and program impact. Data from monitoring processes (such as monitoring information, post-distribution monitoring and Focus Group Discussions) were used to feed into program decision making. This guided the team effectively and improved the performance and management of the program.

## Risk Register

**Access to Land for Refugees:** Most landowners prefer renting land for agricultural production and productivity as opposed to the original design of free coexistence between the refugees and the host communities. This practice was carried over from other previous and existing program interventions in the area. The Bright Future program, following the implementation plan continued to support the landowners through formation of farming groups that link them with refugees by agreement. The agreement states that Mercy Corps will provide trainings, provision of agricultural tools, and improved quality seeds in exchange for land used by the refugees for agriculture production in the planting year. After the program ends, the farming group has to continue to invest by harvesting from seeds that they got from the previous planting year.

**Unfavorable Weather Conditions:** There were also unfavorable climatic conditions during this second planting season as the rains were delayed by approximately two months. This affected the planning and most of the activities, especially for agricultural production and productivity. To mitigate the risk associated with this, the program team adapted their approach and changed seeds to be provided to those that better suited the weather patterns (such as more drought resistant seeds like sunflower, sorghum and sesame).

## **Project Structure, Coordination and Influence:**

The project structure is composed of The Country Director, Head of Programs, Deputy Head of Programs, Program Manager, Monitoring & Evaluation, Program Support (Finance, Operations), Program Officers, Program Assistants, extension workers at field support level, and Service contractors, among others.

The program averagely achieved little unrealistic increment in production, productivity, value addition and increased incomes for all plantations amongst youth through income generating activities and agriculture production by using on-the-ground dynamics, and by adopting best practices for the most suitable approaches. Mercy Corps has provided insights on the realities and dynamics in the settlement and the neighboring host communities of Lamwo District. Market linkages were created by engaging with seed companies, agro dealers, and off takers or input dealers, as well as providing program support to the host communities.

In the settlements, Mercy Corps has witnessed other actors carrying out similar livelihoods interventions. The team had consultations with other implementing partners and operating partners delivering similar interventions such as CESVI and LWF to exchange insights and draw learnings on the livelihoods sector. While Mercy Corps has seen a growing interest in a number of livelihoods partners, activities remain relatively focused on farmer group formation, fully subsidized agricultural inputs and income generating activities (IGAs).

Although it is difficult to claim attribution of influence by this program, partners have consistently been asked to comment on our approach by other NGOs entering the livelihoods space and/or considering shifting their approach to one that focuses more on longer-term livelihoods programming. Several organizations are using vouchers via agro-dealers instead of doing direct distributions and some local district traders in Lamwo District have begun stocking agricultural inputs in their merchandise shops during planting season and later switching back to their normal businesses once the season ends. This indicates local traders see business opportunities and Mercy Corps is now assessing the potential for such merchandise sellers to become fully functional, trained, and certified agro-input businesses. This is a long-term process both due to the intense capacity building needs of traders as well as the ongoing direct distributions by NGOs that skew local and national markets.

## **Program Progress Section**

### **Objective 1: Meeting basic needs for South Sudanese refugees in Palabek Refugee Settlement, Lamwo District.**

The program staff who directly manage the cash transfer component is an experienced person with vast knowledge and expertise in cash transfer programming and its effects. The E-cash transfers were systematically introduced for the first time in Palabek refugee settlement by the Brighter Future team through the mobile money modality drawing learning from other programs implementing similar interventions in West Nile.

The project conducted an extensive market survey and frequent pricing assessments in all major market places around the settlement. Unconditional cash transfers were identified as an appropriate activity to meet the basic needs of South Sudanese in refugee settlement, as needed goods are available within Ogili sub-county, Reception Centre, within Zone 4, Zone 5, and other nearby markets. Those markets were frequently used by refugees, accessible, and have sufficient quantities to meet the basic needs of refugees. The vendors are willing and able to increase the supplies.

Price inflation had not dramatically changed in the last year due to the influx of refugees, and price increases were not expected beyond normal seasonal fluctuations in the coming months. Cash distributions were safe and secure at all mobile money agents. The Minimum Expenditure

Basket (MEB) needed to meet the basic needs of refugees were calculated at UGX 50,000 with approximately \$14 USD agreed upon per household.

A Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) was developed and relevant staff trained in the SOP that was regularly updated according to foreseen challenges. This assured that all relevant staff understood Mercy Corps' standards and outlined the processes required to deliver cash and voucher based transfers through selected service providers to refugee and host community households targeted under the Brighter Future Program.

The team conducted a door-to-door assessment within the program area and selected beneficiaries as per the Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) selection criteria. 4307 refugee households were reached from 13 Blocks in the settlement, and 698 host households participated in the survey from six villages in Ogili sub-county, Palabek settlement, and Lamwo district.

The program team with the help of community mobilizers managed to successfully select 2,500 beneficiaries. Beneficiaries were chosen based on the selection criteria of vulnerability for unconditional cash transfers and its ranking scores out of the host community household surveyed.

The program team designed a selection tool with weights assigned to the respective selection criteria, and the higher a household scored, the higher the chance of being selected to benefit from the unconditional cash transfer component. The selection process was done by Mercy Corps' program team and was based on the response the participating households gave during the door-to-door survey. The answers were later linked to the assigned weights in the selection tool.

S/N	Condition	Ranking	Scores out of 12
01	Persons with disability (PWD)	3	
02	Elderly (50+ years)	3	
03	Orphans/ Child headed	2	
04	Foster Parent	2	
05	Pregnant women	1	
06	Single/ Divorced/ Widow	1	

The selected participants were later verified by the Monitoring Evaluation & Learning Officer with the support of the respective local leaders from both the refugee and host communities. This was done to ensure transparency, accountability, and a sense of ownership of the program. The participants who were later discovered not to have met the selection criteria were removed from the draft list. To further emphasize transparency, the first draft of program participants list was presented to the respective local leaders for their signature to endorse and affirm the participants. After a master list of 2500 beneficiaries was produced, MTN was contracted to work with the program following a bidding process based on the justification that MTN's network identified as the strongest network in the settlement and the convenient modality of mobile money transactions. Other mobile service providers put in a bid, including Airtel, Stanbic Bank, DFCU Bank, and Post Bank, but they were deemed to have poor network or efficiency.

The decision to select electronic money was chosen due to its nature of safety, ease of use, cost effectiveness, and the availability and stability of the mobile telephone service network in and around Palabek refugee settlement. This meant ease of cashing out the E-money by the program



participants. More importantly, e-wallet is a financial inclusion tool that can serve refugees. Families can send money to refugees through e-wallets. Money that is not urgent to use can be temporarily stored in the wallet without needing to deposit in the bank. Having a SIM card is also good for their communication within the settlement and other relatives and friends outside the Palabek refugee settlement. Although most of them do not have a mobile phone, a number of participants opted for cheap and basic mobile phones for communication and transaction purposes. The data also showed that when our project was close to the end, the mobile communication and e-wallet providers at the refugee settlements are more than just a single provider\_MTN. Other suppliers such as AIRTEL are also eager to enter the market with 50,000 potential users. This situation is the result of many negotiations between our project and MTN, AIRTEL and other suppliers in the early stage, bidding, and direct capital injection.



MTN SIM Card registration exercise (Photo: Mercy Corps)

The program participants were mobilized for registration of MTN SIM cards at their respective communities and the SIM card registration schedule was planned and drawn by the program team. The schedule clearly stated the venue, days, dates and time for the registration. The schedule was later shared with the UNHCR office in the settlement, office of the Prime minister of Uganda at the settlement, fellow partners working at Palabek refugee settlement and all the local leaders. The program participants were required to come along with one of the following mandatory SIM card registration documents by

MTN Uganda as per the directive from the *Uganda Communication Commission*. **For refugees**, a valid refugee identity card and a valid Office of the Prime Minister’s Refugee Attestation certificate is required. **For Host community members**, a valid national identity card or a valid passport is required.

A detailed master list was created which contained the following details: the name of the community, name of point of contact and telephone number, name of alternative point of contact and telephone number, and the name of the program participant. The master list also contains the identity card type of program participants, status (Household head or Not), gender of program participants, age of program participants, registered alternate, family size, contact number for receiving E-Money (if registered), the transfer amount, and the selection criteria met.

A summary of selected verified (MEL team and local leaders) beneficiaries per zone/block and parish/village as shown in the summary table below shared with the community leaders of both the refugees and the host.

### Summary of refugee and host participants:

ZONE	BLOCK	# OF BENEFICIARIES	TOTAL FOR THE ZONES
ZONE 4	8	97	419
	9	113	
	10	209	
ZONE 5A	1	91	806
	2	165	



	3	142	
	4	104	
	5A	217	
	5B	87	
ZONE 5B	6	57	525
	9	121	
	10	169	
	11	178	
<b>GRAND TOTAL</b>			<b>1,750</b>

PARISH	VILLAGE	# OF BENEFICIARIES	TOTAL
APYETA PARISH	APYETA NORTH	75	<b>638</b>
	APYETA SOUTH	153	
	APYETA CENTRAL	121	
	APYETA WEST	92	
	APYETA EAST	98	
	ODUBE	99	
FARMERS WHOSE CROPS WERE DESTROYED		112	<b>112</b>
<b>GRAND TOTAL FOR HOST COMMUNITY</b>			<b>750</b>

### Signing of the consent forms

After all the above were finalized, the program participants were mobilized to sign the E-Money consent form which is a requirement by Mercy Corps' finance department before transfers can be disbursed. The form contains the following details:

Name of the payee-program participant (registered name in the master list and E-Money account of the SIM card), other name of E-Money registered, if different from the payee, E-Money registered number, location, purpose of the payment, transfer amount, signature/ thumb print, and remarks.

The consent forms were signed by the program participants for all six transfers, because it is a mandatory requirement by Mercy Corps' finance department. The program team always drew a comprehensive schedule for consent forms' signing and shared with all the relevant stakeholders that included UNHCR, Office of the Prime Minister, fellow partners in the settlement and the respective community leaders. The community mobilizers always mobilized the participants as per the schedule to participate in this activity. After the participants have signed the consent forms, the e-version is scanned and sent to the country director and finance director for approval and finance review respectively, and hard copies kept in the office, after which the finance department disburses the credits into the program participant's E-money accounts.

The purpose of signing the consent form prior to each month's mobile cash payment is to dynamically monitor the beneficiary's situation and confirm that the beneficiary is still at the refugee resettlement site. If the refugee has left and cannot sign the consent as scheduled, his e-

wallet will not be able to accept mobile cash from the month of departure. The flow of people at the Palabek refugee settlements often occurs, which poses certain difficulties for project implementation. In addition, some elderly people are not used to using SIM cards and can't remember their PIN numbers. It is often the case that the PIN is forgotten, and once a month, the signing of consent form can be used to provide services to the vulnerable groups on a regular basis. At the same time, it is also convenient to collect data after cash issuance and detect cash usage.

## **Objective 2: Increasing agricultural production and productivity among South Sudanese refugee and Ugandan smallholder farmers in Lamwo District**

Mercy Corps has learned from this program from the coexistence with refugee and host community members that inform future iterations of a similar program. The Brighter Future program began with land negotiation with landowners, formed 40 farmer groups of 25 members each with a 70:30 composition of refugee to host. This was to enforce social cohesion between the host and refugees.

These groups were formed out of convenience and through community and local leaders, but with the guidance of Mercy Corps. In order to join a group, it was a requirement that the host community should be able to provide land at no cost to the farmer. The mix of the farmer groups was to initiate access to land and ensure how best refugees can collaboratively share the available resources without compromising their livelihoods and relationships with host community farmers (by using host services to build goodwill with landlords). All farmer groups were facilitated through negotiation with 35 host community landowners to access more land.

On average, the land acquired is 5 acres for each farmer group. The modality and incentive with giving land was that for every 5 acres of land one gives, s/he receives inputs, tillage services, PHH equipment for one acre that belongs entirely to the land owner and are supported with improved seeds for planting. In the event that the landowner is part of the group, s/he was to benefit from the group harvest. The 40 farmer groups accessed 266 acres of land.

- **Access to land:** Access to land remains a key challenge for interventions focusing on agriculture, especially if there is an emphasis on commercial farming. In conversations with farmers throughout Palabek refugee settlement, Mercy Corps observes that “repeat refugees” who may have been educated in Uganda and have existing relationships with the host community, are likely to have increased access to land due to knowledge of Ugandan systems, the environment and social connections. Accessing land outside of the refugee settlements requires negotiating with host landowners if refugees are to farm bigger plots viable for commercial agriculture. Secondly, both host and refugees are lacking accurate measuring of land. To address this challenge, Mercy Corps worked with refugee and host community farmers employing GPS and Google Map technology to determine the precise location and size of landowners’ plots. Encouraging refugees and host landowners to form farming groups that could together access training and inputs, these groups created a platform to facilitate negotiations around land access that would otherwise have been impersonal. Mercy Corps provided further support in engineering expertise for land measurement training and worked with host landowners in the farmer groups to mark and measure their plots. The new information about the size of their land, the social connections forged with refugees in the mixed farming groups, and the economic opportunity of more land being worked each season incentivized landowners to allocate more land for refugees to cultivate their crops.
- **Access to information and goods:** The key source of information on markets was through friends and neighbors. People indicated they received information about commodity prices in the market places from agro dealers, NGOs, agricultural extension

workers, and traders as a result of the intervention. Access to basic inputs appears to have been widespread, indicating they accessed hoes/rakes/axes. Crops produced for consumption and sale consisted primarily of groundnuts, okra, leafy vegetables, sorghum, sesame, maize, beans, onions, and cassava, however the program did not meet the season for most of these crops and narrowed down to crops with potential productivity.

Perceived challenges related to farmers improving their yields consisted of changes in climatic conditions, limited land access within allocated plot, lack of tools/ equipment, pests, diseases, and lack of skills. Although access to basic tools was widespread, farmers believed that access to more equipment would have better supported their ability to both farm and clear their land for tillage.

- **Access to tools and equipment:** Mercy Corps facilitated access to simple farm tools such as hoes, pangas, and slashers for clearing the garden. This was also fully covered by the organization. On average, each farmer group received tools of a value of 286,000 shillings. Mercy Corps also facilitated access to PHH equipment such as super grain bags, turplines, winnowers, harvesting knives for 39 groups where on average, each farmer group received tools with a value of UGX 390,000 shillings and equivalent of \$105.5 USD.
- **Engagement with Tillage Service Providers (TSPs):** Mercy Corps initially engaged 23 tillage service providers in Palabek refugee settlement, introducing them to new markets among the refugee and host communities. The agreements were structured to provide refugees with a potential leverage point for negotiating increased access to land. For every five acres of land given by the host, the host would get one extra acre of land to be tilled via plough and are supported with improved seeds for planting. Mercy Corps would fully pay the TSPs agreed price of 140,000 UGX (\$37 USD) per acre of land tilled. Mercy Corps facilitated (100%) local tillage service providers to plough the land for the group and landowners.

In the event that the landowner had a pair of oxen that could plough, it was automatic that he would be a TSP. This provided more incentive and desire to create a business case for these TSPs by ensuring creation of good and permanent relationship with the groups, and enable the tillage service provider to realize a business opportunity in their areas. 23 TSPs were able to plough 194.5 acres of tilled land using oxen and ox-plow, and on average each earned 840,000 Uganda Shillings. This was to increase incomes among the locals through the provision of tillage services and ensure an increase in acres of land for farming to enhance the increase in production and productivity.

- **Engagement with Seed Companies:** Seed Companies were engaged through the Brighter Future program, and are committed to expanding business at the Palabek refugee settlement. The program facilitated the negotiation of lower prices for agro-dealers to purchase seeds from the seed companies. Thus the cost of doing business in the region for agro-dealers was reduced. The seed companies' commitment to engage and work collaboratively with small agro-input businesses supported growth in inputs and outputs for businesses in the region.
- **Input and Output Partnerships and Capacity Building:** The agro agent network supported by the project has steadily grown in and around Palabek settlement, with agro-dealers working with Mercy Corps to identify several new partners. Mercy Corps supported the development of selection criteria for agents as well as assisted in assessing potential new and old agents alongside the agro-dealers. Mercy Corps introduced dealers to entrepreneurial refugees in the settlement and the host community,

who have some previous business experience and already-established shops/ kiosks with customer bases that they can build on.

Majority of the agro-agents identified and assessed by agro-dealers over the past few months are mostly youth under 35 years old. These newly established agro-agents have begun selling seeds in the settlement through the project and have reported increased sales of other items from their shops due to what they believe is a result of their ability to procure agricultural goods that were previously not available in the settlements.

Mercy Corps facilitated all 40 farmer groups and 35 landowners to access seasonal seeds through paper vouchers. The program contracted three (3) service providers that included Tak-Tak, Dano-Aye-Wata and Dano-Lonyo who sold seed to each group using market systems approach. The common seeds purchased were sunflower, sorghum, and soybean. One landowner received the sesame 2 seed. The demand of seed was based on the season the farming activities kick-started. The program targeted the second season with registration starting from the 1<sup>st</sup> week of July 2018 to 2<sup>nd</sup> week of August 2018. The second season however should be noted to have inadequate rainfall as compared to first season that starts from March – June. The farmers had choices like sunflower, sorghum, and soybean that do not require a lot of rain. This limited most farmers to select seeds that could perform well, and earn more income.

- **Access to Trainings and Farmer Support:** Mercy Corps hired 20 AETs to train all farmer groups with each AET working with two of the groups. The 40 farmer groups and landowners were trained on 12 different sustainable agriculture practices, like good agronomic practices, organic farming, post-harvest handling, cost benefit analysis, value addition, Site selection, soil management, water conservation method, Pest and disease identification and management, enterprise selection, VSLA and financial literacy. The AET also monitor field activities and guide the group to ensure that they stick together and receive adequate knowledge and information of farming. An example of this is to make sure the farmers know how to put the smaller plots of land into proper use.

The agriculture facilitation component employed a TOT model in capacity building of Agriculture Extension Trainers, farmers, and landowners, to ensure sustainability of knowledge dissemination and group work that leads to development. 20 AETs and 40 farmer group representatives attended TOTs on post-harvest handling, financial literacy, and VSLAs. This equipped them with knowledge and skills to disseminate to their farmer groups. Farmers now have knowledge and skills on how to reduce post-harvest losses and produce agricultural products of high quality that earns them more income than before.

The Brighter Future program engaged a consultant to develop curriculum and conduct TOTs that foster a fun way of learning and steps away from the usual classroom training approach. This influenced behavioral change in relation to expenditure, investment choices, and utilization of financial products from informal and formal institutions at the smallholder farmer level. With this knowledge farmers are in position to manage their finance well and access financial services from the financial institution or VSLA to overcome challenges of inadequate capital to invest in farming. This aims to facilitate and develop a savings culture that allows farmers to access money for doing farming in order to ensure an increase in production and productivities.

We had a field visit as a model for one of the interventions in building capacity of participants and information dissemination. During PHH TOT 60 participants were taken for the field visit to experience what others have done, or do, to earn a living. These participants were in a position to witness the practical application of their training. The visit encouraged participants to see farming as a business and maintain the farmer groups. 36 out of 40 farmer groups have managed to access land and have started planting for the first season of March – June 2019.

- **Access to Markets and Market Behavior:** Mercy Corps conducted frequent assessments to get updated information on the situation of these refugee farmers. Our understanding is that access to land remains a critical challenge for refugee farmers to gain a real increase in agricultural income. The endline looked in-depth at how income levels and markets access changed for refugees at different levels. The 40 farmer groups were linked to the different market actors, and to the seed/produce buyers who come from a different location. This allowed the farmers to avoid the cost of delivery to a further distance market, because of the direct access provided through the linkage to the buyers.

During the second season of 2018, several farmer groups linked to previous agro-input dealers to buy improved and quality seed. This showed a new trend in the market system in a humanitarian setting. During monitoring, we learned that some more agro-input and output dealers opened their branch in the settlement to tap those farmers who usually travel to the town in an attempt to access seeds and other farming inputs.

### Challenges

- Feedback from monitoring and Agriculture Extension Trainers indicates that refugees claim to have little energy to plough land due to inadequate food supported with by OPM and UNHCR.
- The limited number of tillage service providers with efficiency of the tillage caused by dense tree coverage in the land, as well as inadequate arable land in the settlements.
- The refugees showed low interest towards farming at the beginning, citing the physiological effect of war. But through training and sensitization from AETs (Agriculture Extension Trainers) they were able to encompass farming as a means for earning income and eliminating food insecurity in households.
- Unfavorable weather during the second season affected crops like soya bean leading to poor performance crops. Cultural practices like leaving the animals to graze freely by themselves during the dry season have also affected the yield of crops, since they were grazing on planted crops. This heavily affected sorghum production, as the animals ate all of the sorghum crops. Not a single group was able to harvest sorghum.

### Key Learnings

- Mixing of refugees with host communities has built up good working relationships and enhanced easy access to land that ensured sustainability to farming practices.
- Introducing tillage service has created a big opportunity for the host community to do farming as a business, enlarged agricultural production area, and enabled beneficiaries or participants to spend time for other income generating activities.
- Engaging tillage services provided opportunity for farmers to see the advantages of farming on larger piece of land for increased production and productivity.
- Engaging agro input and output dealers in refugee's settlement has enhanced beneficiaries' access to quality seed, and farming inputs, as well as business coverage of input dealers.
- Training and capacity building helped to improve beneficiaries' knowledge in farming that ensured production of quality products, increase in production, and use of quality seed to increase productivity.

**Objective 3: Increasing off-farm incomes among youth in refugee and host communities by means of micro business or other income generating activities.**

#### Step 1: Creating awareness

The team discussed internally about different kinds of approaches to reach youth with potential ideas of business. With the concept that local people already have ideas, the conclusion was to



create awareness of opportunities and request those potential business groups to provide us with their own business proposals.

To better serve the purpose of awareness, an advertisement was made by the team which included a written instruction, a demonstration graph, and a business proposal template. Through the community leadership structures, the team successfully reached refugee and host communities within and around Palabek refugee settlement.

This approach proved successful. Within a period of 4 weeks, the team received 450 proposals, which provided sufficient candidates of potential business proposals.

*Illustration of business proposal (Photo by Mercy corps)*

## **Step 2: Proposal screening Process**

While creating awareness was an important factor for programmatic success, the team also realized the importance of equality. A scorecard was formulated to ensure that the process of shortlisting was fair and transparent. Two staff worked to score the 450 business proposals and the top 150 for the first phase of the selection process. The final 150 groups were subjected to training in small scale-business training to improve on their business proposals and later, the team selected 100 target IGA beneficiaries out of the 150 trained and supported with business grants.

## **Step 3: Recruitment of business mentors**

The Brighter Future program hired business mentors, which was a critical activity of the business component. The business mentors were required to have technical skills, but also business experience so they could understand the difficulties and requirements of the groups better.

A scope of work and a concept note for business mentors were developed. Eight mentors were recruited, starting to work from September 2018 to April 2019. These eight mentors worked closely with 100 IGA groups by providing training, mentorship, and monitoring of the program. The successfully selected eight mentors came with business experience in restaurants, retailing, animal raising, liquid soap making, and entertainment.

## **Step 4: Capacity building - business skills**

A set of training curricula were tailored for the 150 groups to understand income generation activities based on SWOT analysis, with the purpose of group members clarifying together their initiatives, strengths, weakness, opportunities, and threats. A more extensive study capacity building was provided for more than 3 months to the 100 IGA groups on a one off activity, including value chain analysis and marketing and cash flow projection, so that the groups could rewrite more feasible ideas of their IGA.

## **Step 5: Finalize the selection of groups**

In order to measure the training outcome, the team developed a quiz. The top 100 groups were then selected, based on the quiz results and attendance. Based on what they learned from the training, many groups renewed their proposals with new knowledge and ideas.

## **Step 6: Build linkage between mentors and groups for sustainability**

After the 100 group were selected, each mentor was paired with 12 or 13 groups. Through group formation, business groups started to build linkages and personal relations with their mentors. From the mentors' reports, it was clear that this decision led to positive movement. All mentors were familiar with their groups and understand those businesses. Moreover, they provided advice and instruction with their own initiative.



The outcome of the linkage-building was outstanding. The team constantly received reports that mentors and business groups kept in touch after the period of service. It was predicted that this relationship will continue to exist in the future and generate benefits for both mentor and mentee.

### **Step 7: Exposure visit – Study tour**

To give even greater opportunity for those potential businesspersons to grasp skills and business ideas, the team arranged a business tour for 100 groups. The whole activity took place from the 4-7 October 2018.

In this trip, the team provided an opportunity for groups to learn more about value chain in the Gulu Main Market setting, which showed them how one of the most successful markets in Uganda functions. Brighter Future believes that seeing multiple areas of Uganda and styles of business allow attendees to get more ideas for their on-going or start-up businesses.

Brighter Future linked business owners of barbershops, restaurants, small-scale commerce shops, and butcher shops, where majority of our business groups focused. These business owners gave lectures on business record keeping and marketing. These conversations with current business owners improved the confidence and business knowledge of the IGA groups.

### **Step 8: Allocating funds through the mobile money system**

To make sure the fund is rightfully used, the program team decided to allocate the money at two separate times. For the first time, 50% of the fund, which was about \$50 USD, was transferred to each one of the 100 IGA groups by their mobile money account. One month later the second payment was made based on the previous records and accountability.

### **Step 9: Close mentoring and monitoring**

After the first transfer, the team mentored and monitored groups closely, with the help of our community structure and business mentors. Three-rounds of visits were made to each group to ensure the money was used properly. To measure mentor's performance, a reporting template was developed for mentors to use when they reached out to those group. This template provided huge advantages later when groups questioned the criteria of the second transfer. It was declared that only successful groups may receive the second transfer. In addition, groups were also required to acquire receipts when they procure anything with funds from this program.

All groups were monitored based on the template and requirements provided from the team. Several challenges occurred during the monitoring process. 1) About 20% of groups decided to change their business to different sectors. 2) Those groups that implement animal raising could not provide receipts because this kind of deal is not a recorded business, and 3) Group members ( each group consisting of 3 members) sometimes did not work closely with each other.

To address those challenges, the program team worked closely with business mentors to: 1) recheck their business type and the status. 2) Make on-site visits for those groups that work in animal raising to monitor their work and evaluate the condition. 3) Frequently mentor those groups to ensure they work together and facilitated the constructive internal communication.

In the first round, 68 businesses were considered as successful through routine monitoring information, and 15 were put on a waiting list for further evaluation as enough data was to be collected to verify their successes. In the second round, on-site visits were equally done to double confirm the outcome of the first and second grant transfers. As a result, 80 of the groups out of the 100 groups were considered to be successful from the monitoring information.

### **Step 10: Allocate the other 50% of the funds to successful groups**

The last 50% of the funds were allocated to the 80 successful groups at the end of April 2019 through mobile money. With the help of our community structure and business mentors, the consent signing for the second batch of funds was finalized. All 80 groups signed on the consent form and the funds successfully transferred to their account.

### Key Challenges

- **The limited time frame and short intervention makes it challenging to see long-term impact on a livelihoods program:** There was a delay in the seasonal rainfall from June to August 2018, which affected most of our agricultural activities. However, in September the farmers started receiving reliable rainfall. There was also a delay in the cash transfer as planned because of massive assessments on the beneficiaries spread in big geographical area, as well as identification of service providers.
- **Management and structure were a challenge in this program:** The Brighter Future team was a combination of staff from different organizations, with different cultural backgrounds, languages, and knowledge. Mercy Corps' program management and standards are strictly required along the program lifecycle. This however, made staff confused at times in the proper way of reporting, consuming more time than expected.

### Lessons Learned:

**In design:** The Brighter Future program was in UNHCR's livelihoods cluster system with all program activities focused on livelihoods. Holistic analysis of livelihoods is vital for understanding how to increase the sustainability of livelihood interventions through best practices. This needs to take into account agricultural and non-agricultural elements through access to market information, the capacity of government and private sectors, and market conditions at all levels (nationally and internationally). It is important that rural interventions addressing these complex livelihoods, focus on wider and bigger context, instead of commodity production only.

### In Implementation:

Such activities as induction of "Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation" (village-level monitoring), especially the participation in registration for unconditional cash transfers, as well as formation of farmer groups and meetings for increased access to land, are generating interesting results that enhanced community ownership. These practices need to be fed back into project learning and future program design. Time, duration of the intervention, and continuous support are crucial factors to ensure smoothly developing and strengthening community livelihoods networks.

Farmer Extension Groups is a strategic activity toward building strong and functional local farmer organizations in the future. This activity helped refugees to increase access to agricultural land. At its earlier stages, this activity allowed a good network to develop within and among villages in sharing knowledge and experiences in agricultural production. Although constraints included low productivity, limited access to inputs and market, weather changes combined with limited access to agricultural land coexistence of farmer groups (both refugees and host communities) was an important measure to increase access to agricultural land for refugees.

**In monitoring and evaluation:** Successful interventions require ownership from the participants. Participatory feedback for Community Accountability and Reporting Mechanisms (involving beneficiaries and front-line staff) need to be built into Monitoring and Evaluation system to support in coordination and communication. This can be an important mechanism for learning from emergency livelihoods interventions.