

Lessons Learned from USAID's Integrated Community Agriculture and Nutrition Activity in Uganda

Lessons Learned Series No. 1

STRENGTHENING COMMUNITY RESILIENCE IN RURAL UGANDA



Members of a women's group in Kihhihi, Kanungu district.

Photo Credit:
Robert Mwadime

Introduction

Development programs aiming to increase productivity, wealth, and health increasingly also aim to build the resilience of their target communities. Most are integrated programs or try to layer their interventions in co-located geographic communities. However, many programs still directly provide the resources and services communities need to be resilient, despite the evidence that a facilitative approach that leverages existing local partnerships is more effective in building and sustaining resilience. Partners who are committed to building sustainable programs at scale must influence markets and public systems, encourage local dialogue on the drivers of vulnerability and then work with community-level structures to build specific resilience capacities using multiple, integrated interventions.

USAID/Uganda's flagship resilience activity, the Integrated Community Agriculture and Nutrition (ICAN) Activity, facilitates the building of community level capacities to access and control resources, adopt behaviors for improved health and nutrition, participate in markets, and integrate into social and governance activities. Throughout, ICAN generates lessons about effective approaches to increase resilience capacities at the community level.

This paper describes the community-based approaches that ICAN uses to integrate livelihoods, nutrition, education, and governance interventions to strengthen resilience capacities in remote and vulnerable communities in Uganda. We first describe the places in which we work and the shocks and stresses the areas often face. Then we explain our theory of change, the resilience capacities we work with local partners to strengthen, and our facilitative approaches. Last, we discuss the monitoring and learning process.

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Sub-Regional Context and Common Shocks and Stresses

ICAN operates in eight districts selected from three sub-regions with high poverty levels, malnutrition, and vulnerability to disasters. Despite these commonalities, each sub-region presents a unique socio-cultural, environmental, and economic context that affects its communities' development challenges and abilities to respond to the shocks and stresses outlined in Exhibit I.

Exhibit I. Selected Characteristics of Sub-Regions in which ICAN Operates

Acholi	Karamoja	Kigezi
GEOGRAPHY		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ICAN works in the districts of Lamwo, Nwoya, and Gulu. • In northern Uganda, bordering South Sudan and crossed by road traversing Kenya, South Sudan, and Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). • Works with 79 school communities in 12 sub-counties with a population of 212,780 in 2018. • Some communities in Nwoya border Murchison Falls National Park where there is wildlife-human conflict. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ICAN works in the districts of Kaabong and Kotido. • In northeastern Uganda, bordering Kenya, Ethiopia, and South Sudan. • Works with 28 school communities in seven sub-counties; with a population of 121,390 in 2018. • Most of the population with which ICAN works live in villages near Kidepo National Park; villages have 5-9 homesteads, each with 5-11 households. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ICAN works in the districts of Kisoro, Kanungu, and Rukungiri. • At the southwestern tip of Uganda, bordering the DRC and Rwanda. • Works in 85 school communities in 14 sub-counties, with a population of 286,780 in 2018. • The area features forest conservation, Mgahinga Gorilla National Park, Bwindi Impenetrable Forest, and parts of Murchison Falls National Park. • Most areas are hilly, with much erosion.
EDUCATION		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Net primary school enrollment is estimated at 80% (80% for females). • Net school attendance is 84% 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gross¹ primary school enrollment is estimated at only 25% (23% for females). • Net school attendance is 37% 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Net primary school enrollment is estimated at 85% (86% for females). • Net school attendance is 91%
CULTURE		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strong influence of traditional clan leaders (rwots) on social life. • Lamwo district hosts an influx of refugees from South Sudan. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strong communal bond; daily life is influenced by cultural practices and attitudes enforced by clan elders. • History of civil strife and cattle rustling. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Most households live in nuclear families, in village groupings called bataka/nkozi, established to support households in the event of emergency or a burial.
LIVELIHOOD		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Land is mainly communal; households have average of 4 acres. • Cereals, pulses, and livestock are important for cash and food security. Many businesses have invested in these enterprises. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The majority are agro-pastoralists. • Long history of reliance on government and development agencies resulting in high dependence on handouts. • Little investment by private business. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dependent on agriculture with limited land sizes; most farm and live on the hills. • Opportunities for tourism, cross-border trade. • Main sources of income are beans, coffee, Irish potatoes, casual labor, and trading in local and border markets.
HEALTH / NUTRITION		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stunting <5 estimated at 31%. • Anemia <5 estimated at 71%. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stunting <5 estimated at 35%. • Anemia <5 estimated at 68%. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stunting <5 estimated at 31%. • Anemia <5 estimated at 32%.

¹ Gross school enrollment includes pupils at any age, while net includes only those who fall into official school age ranges.

One of ICAN's foundational activities is to work with local partners to define the shocks and stresses communities face in order to better identify the resilience capacities needed to address them. The sub-regions face different shocks and stresses (Exhibit 2). Even the same shock may differ in degree or nature from one sub-region to the next. These areas often experience multiple shocks or stresses simultaneously or one after another.

Exhibit 2. Shocks and Stresses by ICAN Sub-Region

Acholi	Karamoja	Kigezi
SHOCKS		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prolonged dry spells • Floods • Refugee influx • Pest infestations (army worm) • Human epidemics (e.g., malaria, zoonotic diseases, cholera) • Drops in produce prices 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prolonged dry spells • Floods • Insecurity and raiding-related fights • Crop pest infestations (locusts/army worm) • Animal epidemics (e.g., foot-mouth, rinderpest) • Conflict (land, tribal, cattle rustling) • Cattle rustling • Human epidemics (malaria, cholera) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Floods • Mud/landslides • Hailstorms (Kanungu district) • Refugee influx • Cross-border insecurity • Human epidemics (e.g., Marburg, Ebola)
STRESSES		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prolonged dry spells (or prolonged rains) caused by climate change • Deforestation • Land conflicts and wrangles • Wildlife destruction • High school drop-outs • High post-harvest losses (mainly of cereals and pulses) • Food poisoning • Human disease (e.g., malaria, HIV, TB) • Animal disease (Newcastle for poultry) • Teen pregnancy • Gender-based violence • Theft from gardens • Fires (man-made) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Drought • Deforestation • Wildlife attacks and destruction • Low school enrollment and attendance • High post-harvest losses (mainly of cereals and pulses) • Food poisoning • Severe acute malnutrition • Animal diseases • Crop diseases, pests • Human disease (e.g., diarrhea, malaria, HIV, TB) • Social exclusion of women and adolescents • Chronic poverty • Poverty/unemployment of youth and adolescents 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Soil erosion and degradation of hills • Wildlife destruction • High school drop-outs • Crop diseases (banana wilt, Irish potato) • High post-harvest losses (mainly of tubers and horticulture) • Human disease (e.g., HIV, TB) • High population growth (land pressure) • Teen pregnancy • Poverty/unemployment of youth and adolescents • Gender-based violence

Theory of Change and Priority Resilience Capacities

Communities and households are resilient if they can prepare for and appropriately respond to shocks, hence recovering better and faster.² ICAN uses facilitative approaches to help communities and households learn from shocks and build their resilience capacities. To do so, we also have to address the capacities of systems and structures that anchor the communities and households. Hence, ICAN approaches influence capacities at three main levels: a) individual, b) household, and c) district, community, and business.

Individual-level capacities. The most vulnerable individuals such as young children, learners, adolescent girls, pregnant and lactating women, and the elderly and sickly are more resilient if they have a stock of health (including mental health) and nutrition that enables them to withstand shocks and stresses better. ICAN measures individual wellness before and during shocks through food security measures, nutritional status (height-for-age), and the Minimum Acceptable Diet (MAD). We also monitor their ability to own and control resources and participate in household, businesses, social and governance activities and decision-making processes.

Household-level capacities. ICAN promotes integrated interventions in five technical areas. Households are likely to be resilient if they build capacities in most, if not all of these areas.

- *Access to diversified livelihoods.* Households are more resilient if they can improve farm productivity, have meaningful off-farm employment, save and build collateral for credit, and have productive assets and insurance to rely on during hardships. Right information and reliable markets make vulnerable households willing to take greater risks to diversify production or adopt new behaviors and technologies that increase their economic productivity. Households should safely access the inputs and markets needed to further their economic wellbeing, even during prolonged shocks.
- *Education.* Education provides long-term human capital that helps break the intergenerational cycle of poverty and dependency. It increases a sense of agency, ability to accomplish change, and achieve goals. ICAN helps identify innovative ways for communities to demand and access better educational services and thus increase school enrollment, attendance, and completion—especially among females.
- *Environment and natural resource management (NRM).* This is a crucial aspect of long-term resilience. ICAN supports systems that increase awareness and willingness to invest in NRM technologies, especially those related to energy savings and water conservation at the household level, soil management, climate smart agriculture, human-wildlife conflict, post-harvest handling, and environmental actions for disease prevention and control.
- *Good health and nutrition status.* Households are better positioned to protect themselves during periods of shock if they can access diversified and nutritious foods (especially animal, fruit, and vegetable); access clean and safe water; maintain a clean environment and practices to prevent diseases like malaria, TB/acute respiratory infection (ARI), Ebola, COVID-19, and diarrhea; and seek preventive and curative health services when necessary. It includes dialogue on family planning and delayed pregnancy for adolescents.
- *Social inclusion and participation in governance.* Participation in decision making is key, both in and outside the household. Households cope best with shocks if they participate in forums where a) they can network with others, b) they can articulate their needs, and c) their voices are heard. Cohesion within households and prevention of gender-based violence (GBV)— especially during shocks—are key in enabling resilience.

² ICAN considers multiple wellness measures—household wealth/income, nutritional status (mainly stunting), and primary school attendance rates.



Community/district-level capacities. Formal and informal governance are key in addressing social norms that affect the wellbeing of vulnerable households. Often communities look to government, local elders, faith-based institutions, or councils for leadership in shock response. Governance systems with the appropriate capacities can provide an enabling environment for households and individuals to strengthen their capacities.

- *Leadership and accountability.* Leaders can mobilize communities to action. Leadership is needed in setting by-laws, making plans/policies, and raising and managing resources for mitigation and response. It is important that the culture and policies allow youth and women to participate, including in leadership positions.
- *Creating incentives and market linkages.* Democratic decisions, open and functional markets, and conducive legislation can motivate poor households to enter markets. Markets have to be innovative and responsive during shocks. Communities need access to linkage infrastructure, communication (radio), market spaces, health facilities, and financial services.
- *Partnerships, cohesion, and harmony.* Most societies seek to avoid tensions within and between communities. Regular meetings between groups to monitor peace are necessary but so are trusted conflict mitigation services. Partnerships within and between public and private sectors are key, as is strengthening social networks within and across communities. A sense of trust between businesses and communities is essential, especially in times of shocks.
- *Collective responsibility.* Communities may need to respond to shocks and adapt to ways that benefit the entire community, e.g., prevention of erosion and floods; management of water points and other natural resources; changing societal attitudes on early marriage, GBV, education, and social inclusion. Sometimes collective action is needed in the enforcement of laws and standards.

Exhibit 3 presents key resilience capacities in ICAN's target communities and households. The capacities are categorized as **absorptive** if they are intended to minimize household and community exposure to the negative impact of shocks and stresses, **adaptive** if they are to enable households to make informed choices in response to longer-term preparation for shocks and stresses, and **transformative** if they are to build and strengthen local systems and networks.



Exhibit 3. Resilience Capacities at Household, Community, and District Levels



	⬇️ ABSORPTIVE	⚙️ ADAPTIVE	🔄 TRANSFORMATIVE
<div>  INDIVIDUAL </div>	<div>  <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nutritional status of women and children • Minimum Acceptable Diet (MAD) </div>	<div>  <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Confidence, aspiration, motivation of AGYW, school children • Attitude change of young women and men on FP, WASH, gender, leadership </div>	

 HOUSEHOLD	<p><i>Livelihoods/Financial</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Member of VSLA or farmer group • Saves and borrows with a purpose (SWAP) • Diversifies productive assets (e.g., home items, farming equipment, animals, rentals) • Linked to input and off-take markets for crops or livestock • Financially literate • Diversifies on-farm and non-agricultural income sources • Linked to financial services (e.g., bank accounts, access to credit, insurance) • Accesses extension services and information for production • Uses agricultural practices that increase crop and livestock productivity • Uses production technologies that mitigate shocks (e.g., early maturing seeds, vaccination, pest control, drought resistant crops) • Has relations with producer groups and markets in and outside of community <p><i>Governance/Social Inclusion</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participates in community planning activities (e.g., PTA, CDO and PDC meetings) • Participates in community joint action meetings • All school-aged children are in school • No GBV at the family level • Cultural, religious, or educational systems address gender dynamics in households (i.e., control of resources and sharing of care roles) 	<p><i>Environment</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uses weather information in farming • Uses technologies to mitigate effects of weather (e.g., terracing, fallowing, wind breaks) and improve soil and water management (e.g., mulching, manuring) • Uses technologies for water catchment • Plants special trees to repel mosquitos • Uses energy-saving stoves and solar energy • Plants live fences • Uses environmental practices to promote safety and health at home (e.g., water drainage near homes, planting medicinal species) <p><i>Nutrition/Health</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feeds sick children appropriately • Consumes diversified, nutritious diet • Feeds children diversified, minimum acceptable diets rich in animal-source foods • Uses child spacing methods • Grows nutritious foods (e.g., OFSP, iron-rich beans, vegetables, pawpaw, avocado) and hunger crops (e.g., cassava, sweet potato, cowpea, early-maturing crops) • Has a permagarden to produce/preserve vegetables year-round • Accesses consistent source of animal-source foods (e.g., mukene, milk, eggs) • Accesses WASH facilities (i.e., toilet, handwashing) • Practices malaria prevention methods (i.e., sleeping under mosquito net, screening, IRS) • Accesses safe food that can sustain family for 3+ months
 COMMUNITY	<p><i>Livelihoods</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mechanisms for sharing market and extension information (e.g., using megaphones, radio, SMS) during shocks • Village agents link to inputs and output markets during shocks • Finance markets (including insurance) responsive to shocks • Disseminates market information • Functioning local pro-poor financial systems and products, input and off-take markets • Functioning structures for aggregation (e.g., BSPs, producer organizations) • Training of VSLAs/farmer groups on farming as a business and non-farm enterprises • Trained and active BSPs to link to markets and extension services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Effective systems to disseminate market information and provide extension services • Platforms for public-private partnerships that support input, finance, and off-take • Guidelines on formation and management of community groups to avoid conflict • Institutionalized forum and market approach for training new BSPs/VAs • Policy for use of BSPs/VAs as a model






- Governance**
- 
 - Trained and tooled disaster/shock response teams (e.g., volunteers, scouts)
 - Community disaster response plan
 - 
 - Community-level campaigns (e.g., back-to-school, GBV action)
 - Governance champions trained on disaster management and resilience
 - Youth and women leading community activities
 - Attendance at community meetings
 - Activities for vulnerable groups like out-of-school adolescent girls (e.g., holiday camps, FAL classes)
 - 
 - Community-level structures (e.g., cultural leaders, LCI, PDC, SMC) trained on disaster management and response
 - Functional forums and tools for community accountability
 - Community resilience plan (or disaster management plan) in place
 - Structures and forums for community conflict resolution (e.g., peace committees)

- Nutrition/Health**
- 
 - Screening and referrals
 - 
 - Monitoring public health, malnutrition
 - On-going community nutrition activities (e.g., parent-led school feeding, WASH campaigns)
 - Functional community referral systems (e.g., for FP, SAM, disease)
 - Functional health/nutrition interventions for school children and adolescents
 - 
 - Effective structures to disseminate health/nutrition messages
 - Effective structures to train, incentivize, and supervise VHTs
 - Functional and recognized referral link to health/nutrition services

- Environment**
- 
 - Timely disseminated weather information
 - Functioning community-based early warning system
 - Community joint NRM actions (e.g., hill/water or forest management, tree planting)
 - On-going school-facilitated NRM activities (e.g., tree planting)
 - 
 - By-laws on use and/or management of natural resources




- 
 - Disaster/shock response structures in place
- 
 - Analysis of market system and social risks to shocks
 - Functional disaster management committees
 - Up-to-date disaster risk analysis and disaster management and response plans
 - Database of active groups and CBOs in the district
 - Youth are actively engaged in leadership positions

- 
 - Functional private sector forum responding to shocks
 - Functional market-based extension services, linkages, and producer groups
 - Budget for DDMC and disaster response
 - By-laws and enforcement structures to build cohesion and rights
 - Functional and sustainable platform to train VHTs, BSPs/VA, broadcasters
 - Policy to engage youth and women in politics and leadership roles



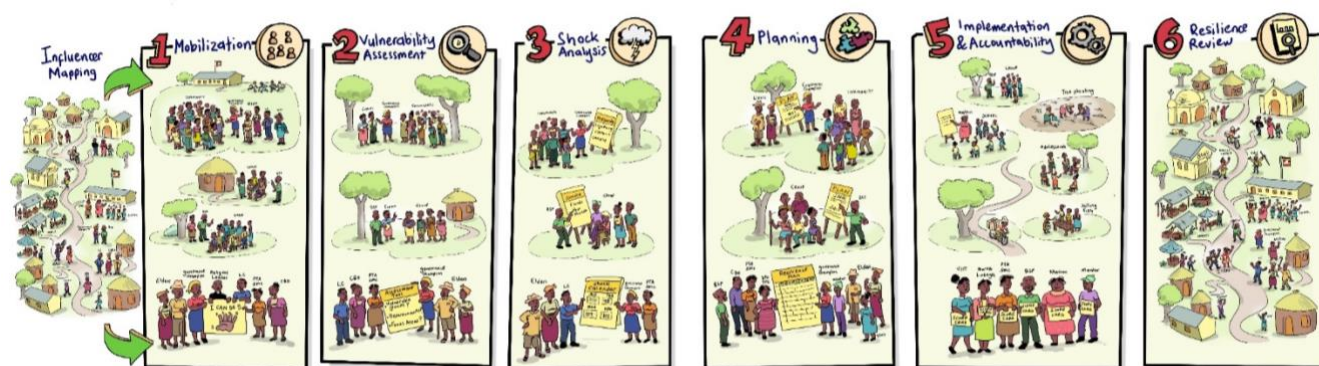
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 - Civil society and media participate in shock task forces
 - Functional radio messaging, mobilization, information sharing
- 
 - Institutional capacity building of local CSOs on disaster management
 - CSOs and media trained on disaster management and roles
 - Media actively engaged in disaster planning and response

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 - Forum to strengthen local NGOs/CBOs (e.g., civil society, media)
 - Policy on participation in local planning process and district budget conference

Facilitating Community-based Resilience Capacities

Rather than directly train or provide services to households and communities, ICAN uses a facilitative approach that strengthens the resilience capacities of existing local structures. The approach also contributes to Uganda's Journey to Self-Reliance. The ICAN process, illustrated in Exhibit 4, starts with mapping relationships among structures that influence education, livelihoods, food security and nutrition, and governance in the community: civil society organizations (CSOs), local government, places of worship, schools and academia, media, actors in formal and informal markets, and cultural and other groups to understand how they can contribute to building resilience. ICAN brings together the most relevant structures to discuss what challenges their resilience. It then works with development partners, district government leadership, and local civil and private sector structures to explore the community's opportunities for building resilience. The following sections describe the approaches ICAN uses.

Exhibit 4. ICAN's Community-based Process to Build Resilience



1. Strengthen institutional capacity of CSOs to conduct resilience programming

It is important to have local institutions that can implement community-based resilience programming. ICAN works with four local partners (one each in the sub-regions of Acholi and Kigezi and two in Karamoja) to assess organizational capacity and develop plans to build institutional and programmatic capacity to do the following:

- Manage donor funds and other resilience development resources, including strengthened operational and finance/administration systems.
- Participate in local government disaster planning and response activities, representing the interests of the target communities.
- Use participatory methods to a) mobilize communities to define what a resilient community looks like and how to build that resilience, b) build the capacity of communities to assess their vulnerability to shocks, and c) build capacity to plan for mitigation and response.
- Establish, mentor, and support community structures to strengthen resilience capacities of communities, households, and vulnerable groups.
- Monitor and report to the District Local Government (DLG), donors, and community to ensure accountability and raise funds.

Local CSO implementing partners keep 5% of the organizations' expenditures as a fee for institutional building. The CSO partners handle all ICAN resources, equipment, and representation in the field; the few Abt Associates staff simply provide support.

2. Establish partnerships to judiciously use resources and maximize impact

No one program has the mandate and resources to build all the resilience capacities communities and households need to absorb, adapt, or bring transformation. ICAN uses a partnership model that engages the many groups mentioned above to a) build capacities of local structures so that together they can reach more households than could a single structure, b) align ICAN activities with the Government of Uganda, and c) provide incentives for the private sector.

Collaboration with implementing partners. ICAN coordinates with other development partners like the Regional Health Integration to Enhance Services (RHITES) and Malaria Consortium to layer relevant interventions and maximize impact. The partners build the capacity of village health teams (VHTs) to mobilize community groups for essential health services, disseminate health messages, and distribute health supplies. ICAN also works with its partner CSOs to respond to the heightened incidence of malaria in Acholi region.

Coordination with the national-level government. Our primary government counterpart is the Ministry of Gender, Labor and Social Development (MGLSD), which focuses on integrated interventions at the community level. ICAN staff participate in national-level technical working groups on disaster management, nutrition, gender and social development, social mobilization, and social and behavior change. ICAN shares lessons from the field, learns from others, influences guidelines and policies, and is a voice for its target communities in discussions of issues like managing disasters, food insecurity, and nutrition.

Partnership and coordination with DLGs. The district Community Development Department links ICAN structures to the district technical teams and the District Council's policy wing. In particular, ICAN supports disaster management committees at the district and sub-district levels. DLG departments sometimes begin disaster preparedness or response interventions without serious analysis of the communities' situation and engagement. ICAN helps District Disaster Management Committees conduct vulnerability and disaster analysis, develop disaster plans, and monitor plan implementation. ICAN also works with sub-district and village structures to identify disaster risks and the resources needed to respond to them. ICAN works on school-level resilience with the local education department, partnering with school management committees (SMCs) to engage communities in school disaster management, parent-led school feeding, and other matters. In Kisoro, ICAN collaborates with the office of the District Woman Member of Parliament to advocate for policy and livelihood development for adolescent girls and young women.

Partnership with private sector. ICAN works with local business to identify promising value chain enterprises, bring stakeholders together to do value chain analysis, and find root causes of gaps in productivity, markets, and scaling. In partnership with the private sector, ICAN supports them in building the capacity of village agents (or Business Service Providers, BSPs) to aggregate agricultural inputs and produce and train farmers on agronomic practices or use of new technologies. BSPs also link groups in remote areas with financial services and connect youth to opportunities with vocational institutions, financial service providers, and off-takers. Where necessary, ICAN uses grants to subsidize the private sector's capacity building of savings or farmer groups through BSPs.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, ICAN mobilized its community partners—CSOs and cultural and village leaders—to participate in the COVID-19 task forces at district, sub-county, and village levels. The ICAN partners chaired committees on social mobilization and social and behavioral change communication. The district COVID-19 task forces used village-level structures like cultural leaders, VHTs, and Governance Champions to disseminate messages and enforce government guidelines. CSOs working with ICAN demonstrated the importance of resilience planning and preparing communities to respond to shocks.

3. Build cultural and local leadership capacity to strengthen resilience

ICAN enters communities through Governance Champions, selected apolitical retired senior government and business personnel who wish to mentor their community leaders (elders, cultural, or formal like Local Council (LC) I). ICAN-trained Governance Champions train and support the leaders and the groups they lead to carry out resilience-building interventions. They encourage inclusivity; for example, younger people are included in the "elder's forum" and given leadership roles both to gain knowledge that they will carry forward and to share with the forum their experiences from exposure to the world beyond the village, which they have gained through media, travel, and schooling.



A cultural leader planting trees with the community in Lamwo district.

Photo Credit:
Sarah Gabeya

Governance Champions support local leaders to hold village forums to identify village vulnerabilities to shocks and up to five actions the community commits to take to mitigate their vulnerabilities. The leaders also discuss what will help and hinder the achievement of these We Can Do 5. Communities use visual tools such as an annual shock calendar to anticipate what and when shocks are likely to strike, and draw on indigenous knowledge to understand specific vulnerabilities and the best activities for preparing for and mitigating the anticipated shocks. Leaders engage community groups and local advisers in developing resilience plans that cultivate a culture of joint community action. Joint actions often include sustainable NRM of soil, forests, watersheds and minimizing conflict with wild animals. They identify how existing community structures can provide information about behaviors and practices that reduce vulnerability to shocks in the first place, such as terracing eroding hillsides and building drainage trenches to reduce flooding and prohibiting open defecation and improper waste disposal to reduce spread of diarrheal diseases. Governance Champions then work with the structures to enact locally relevant by-laws on water use, tree planting, charcoal burning, and GBV. The structures are also mobilized to provide leadership if a shock occurs. In support, ICAN and the CSOs send SMS

In Acholi sub-region, ICAN works with 48 cultural leaders, called *Rwots*, as key change agents. *Rwots* are trained on gender, behavior change, and community mobilization for joint action toward resilience. During their community resilience planning exercise, *Rwots* led community dialogues that made NRM one of their We Can Do 5. NRM was identified as a way to mitigate the long-term effects of climate change. Children of the World Foundation (COW-F), the ICAN partner CSO, then organized a meeting for the district forestry department to orient the *Rwots* to the effects of climate change and mitigation strategies. The *Rwots* agreed to mobilize their communities to plant over 10,000 trees in 2020 and develop cultural clan by-laws to deter charcoal and bush burning during dry seasons. COW-F also linked the *Rwots* with NGOs that work on environmental conservation. The *Rwots* and communities in Lamwo district have planted over 1,300 teak seedlings on communal land set aside by clan leaders and are mobilizing individual farmers to plant another 5,000 during the second rain of 2020.

messages advising communities of actions to take. For example, when COVID-19 hit, ICAN sent community leaders like LCs messages on engaging with cultural systems to enforce social distancing guidelines.

4. Strengthen community-based service providers linked with government and private sector

ICAN supports its CSO and private partners to build the capacity of trusted community-based service providers. Government sub-county health assistants identify and train VHTs on Ministry of Health (MOH) guidelines. CSOs supervise, mentor, and reimburse³ the VHTs to build the skills of their members (or households) according to the maternal, infant, and young child and adolescent nutrition (MIYCAN) curricula. Also working to instill resilience behaviors are capacity mentors of adolescent girls and young women (AGYW), matrons/patrons of Child Rights Clubs (CRC) in primary schools, Functional Adult Literacy (FAL) facilitators, and Governance Champions. ICAN facilitates the training of BSPs by master trainers and private sector partners; the BSPs then train and support farmer groups and village savings and loan associations (VSLA).

5. Build community groups and gatherings for social capital

The resilience capacity of households and individual beneficiaries is built by groups like those mentioned in the previous section. Working through groups builds social capital, allows peers to learn together and from each other, and creates positive pressure to act—people are more likely to understand and act on the information provided by sources they know and trust. It is also cost-effective. The community groups are described below.

VSLA/Farmer groups. BSPs support VSLA and farmer groups to a) meet the conditions for district-level registration, b) build networking between members and in the process build social capital, c) open savings accounts and access loans, which teaches them how to relate to financial institutions, d) learn how to aggregate demand/supply and link to input, output, and financial markets, and e) connect with agricultural extension services. BSPs also support groups in making annual resilience plans with actions at the group and household level. This model is grounded in saving with a purpose (SWAP); the methodology encourages saving to mitigate and respond to shocks. ICAN-supported BSPs facilitate group member assessment of the likely



A bodaboda driver delivering farm input orders to a BSP in Kacheri, Kotido district, Karamoja.

Photo Credit:
Moses Okori

shocks and how the shocks might affect their enterprises, savings, and access to markets. They also innovate approaches that improve linkages to markets and then train group members to adapt and respond. BSPs also

³ The reimbursement per VHT or mentor is capped at about \$20 per month. They may receive additional payments if they travel outside their village during training. BSPs' charge for service provided.

disseminate messages and mobilize their groups for action on non-business-related interventions, such as encouraging school attendance during the back-to-school period, family planning, water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH), and NRM. Peer pressure and accountability are key behavior enhancers in the groups.

The BSP model is adapted from the Ministry of Agriculture, Animal industry and Fisheries (MAAIF) and is widely used in Uganda. ICAN is currently working with 486 BSPs in all eight of its target districts. The onset of the first cropping season in April 2020 coincided with the arrival of COVID-19 in Uganda. Prior to COVID-19, ICAN supported business planning meetings between agribusiness firms, financial institutions, and BSPs to agree on how farmers would be supported to access inputs for the planting season. By mid-April, several COVID-19 restrictions had been imposed including a ban on public and private transport and imposing social distancing. BSPs, who were expected to aggregate demand and deliver inputs to farmers through their groups, were stranded. However, BSPs negotiated with agro-dealers to use motorcycle riders, who were allowed to transport goods but not people. BSPs would aggregate input demands from farmers through phone calls or door-to-door visits, make an order with the agro-dealer, who then hired motorcycle riders to deliver the inputs to the BSPs' selling point. BSPs would then deliver the inputs directly to the farmers in their homes or gardens. BSPs practiced the COVID-19 guidelines of social distancing, wearing face masks, and washing hands as they moved from one household to another. Of the 486 BSPs ICAN works with, 195 used this approach to enable more than 6,000 farmers to access inputs. ICAN continues to build the trust of farmers in structures that will help them mitigate the effects of other shocks or stresses.

MIYCAN groups. For health-related interventions, ICAN built the capacity of partner CSOs to work through government-approved and -trained VHTs. Using the MOH curriculum, the VHTs recruit 15-30 MIYCAN members (mainly pregnant or lactating mothers, caregivers, and spouses) in their villages and hold bi-weekly training in the villages. VHTs demonstrate the skills needed to cope with health-related shocks; give resilience-sensitive messages; and provide screening and refer members for services like antenatal care, family planning, well-baby clinics, and child/gender probation offices. VHTs also demonstrate permaculture designs for vegetable and fruit production, small animal production (chicken and goats), food/water safety, post-harvesting handling, and production of early-maturing and nutrient-dense crops for food security. They harmonize their training with the season, the anticipated shocks, and the context and needs of communities. For instance, during rains, many children suffer from malaria or diarrhea, which may diminish their appetite. In advance, VHTs train MIYCAN groups to prevent the anticipated illnesses, provide messages on feeding a sick child, and make home visits to demonstrate food preparation. VHTs report to government health assistants and provide ICAN field officers with MEL data. SMS or IVR messages are sent to VHTs to remind them of key messages or mobilize them for campaigns in their villages.

AGYW mentorship camps. Out-of-school girls and young women aged 10-24 years are often excluded from resilience activities. Many AGYW lack strong social networks and avenues for building social capital. One intervention aimed at AGYW is Holiday Mentorship Camps. The CSO works with MIYCAN members to identify mentors—young teachers, health workers, business entrepreneurs, or young leaders—who volunteer to support the girls. Every four months, the AGYW and their mentors participate in a six-day camp. They analyze the risks they face and how they can mitigate and respond, including having their voices heard, making the best choices in life and business, and connecting with opportunities in their village. The girls also are taught to engage with political leaders, trainers, and business owners. On the sixth day, the mentors organize the local health units to provide the AGYW with services like family planning, and screening for HPV, TB, and HIV. The AGYW graduate at the end of the third camp, by which time they are members of savings groups and are linked to business/employment opportunities or literacy programs in their areas.

FAL programs. Many out-of-school girls in Karamoja wish to learn how to read and write. CSO partners in Karamoja work with FAL facilitators to organize safe spaces for AGYW to learn basic literacy skills and discuss issues that affect their ability to earn a decent living even as they respond to shocks.



ICAN-supported adolescent girls and young women having their weekly savings group meeting in Bugimbiri, Kisoro district, Kigezi.

Photo Credit:
Patience Akumu

6. Strengthen the education sector for resilience

Public primary schools are key partners in resilience strengthening—education is a human resource and an input to resilience. ICAN’s partners work with schools through community cultural/leadership and SMCs, which organize support for school teachers and learners in implementing resilience activities. Schools have wide coverage and school children, who disseminate information to parents and other children, are an effective way to reach scale. But children are also at risk of the shocks and stresses that affect school attendance and performance. Community leadership is working on interventions to ensure that school-aged children are enrolled in school, undertake actions like parent-led school feeding and parent-led sanitation programs, and make schools accountable for keeping children safe and using funding/donated resources responsibly.

Mentors (a focal teacher in charge of resilience) are identified and trained by the SMC. The mentors organize activities and talks in schools on the shocks that might affect the community, such as cholera, Ebola, COVID-19, land/mudslides, insecurity, floods, sexual harassment/rape, and refugee influx. Learners and mentors identify the hot spots (centers of vulnerability) and work with teachers and school communities to mitigate or respond to the shocks. The mentors are trained to use a modified version of the Ministry of Education and Sports-approved Journeys curriculum through the CRC (or, in Karamoja, with the whole school). Mentors are also trained in interventions on menstrual hygiene and how to make washable menstrual pads for girls. Mentors train both girls and boys to make pads to reduce stigma around menstruation. Mentors link with the nearest health facility to

provide deworming of learners and give talks on anemia prevention and control. Schools are also linked with a local tree seedling production/multiplication agent to train children on producing and plant tree seedlings; children grow seedlings in school and bring them home for planting.

Monitoring Resilience-building and Establishing a Culture of Learning

Communities that undertake resilience activities need methods for monitoring their commitments. Using participatory approaches, ICAN CSOs help communities devise different approaches for monitoring achievements, and CSO staff collect communities' stories on how they responded to a shock: A MIYCAN group in Karamoja came up with a symbolic accountability mechanism for the We Can Do 5 commitments. Group members throw a unique local rock into a small hut for each group member who achieves a WASH commitment (e.g., owning a clean toilet). In Kisoro, community leaders built a tower and planted a tree to mark when the village achieved the milestone of having every school-age clan member finally in school. A community in Kanungu organized itself and continued food security activities even during the COVID-19 lockdown. Sharing experience is being seen as an effective way of learning and benchmarking.

ICAN supports the partner CSOs to collect the monitoring data, analyze the data, and use them for management. The frontline service providers use simple, mainly pictorial tools to collect data. ICAN has helped partner CSOs to build their MEL systems with a mix of paper (registers and summary forms) and digital data collection tools. They provide their weekly staff meetings with up-to-date data for management and operational planning. Staff are trained to conduct internal data quality assessment and data quality improvement. Annual beneficiary surveys are used to assess the effectiveness of the use of resilience capacities being impacted. For instance, through the beneficiary survey, teams can investigate:

- If beneficiaries continued to save during the shock and how they used the savings to cope with the effects of the shocks.
- If mitigation and response interventions (like growing chili by farmers living along the parks) effectively reduce risk—and improve response to the shocks. Did terracing and planting of trees/ bamboo on hills in Kisoro reduce mudslides? Did disease outbreak lessen among households working with ICAN?
- If layering interventions with other implementing partners adds value to the resilience of households and communities.

During recent shocks—from mudslides in Kigezi to COVID-19 throughout the three sub-regions—ICAN and partners encouraged increasing the use of electronic means to collect and send information to beneficiaries. As such ICAN will start using SMS and voice systems to collect data from our “last mile” community links.

Conclusion

This paper documents the community-based approaches that ICAN uses to integrate livelihoods, nutrition, education, and governance interventions to strengthen resilience capacities in remote and vulnerable communities in Uganda. Our experience is that any approach must be facilitative—building local resources and systems to anticipate the different shocks and stresses that may keep community members from achieving wellness and other aspirations. This approach to building the capacities of existing public, private, and civil society structures strengthens both the cohesion of groups in which the most vulnerable participate and members' skills in livelihoods, nutrition, education, NRM, and governance in order to mitigate shocks.

In its first two years of implementation, ICAN has identified several lessons for building resilience capacities using community-based approaches.

1. There is a tension between scale/coverage versus impact. Scale or coverage must be large enough to see the impact of the resilience interventions when a shock occurs.
2. Since shocks happen continually but the effect of most resilience interventions manifest only over time, we need to accelerate community-based interventions so that communities are ready and more resilient by the next shock. However, we have to find ways of doing this while aligning with the Journey to Self-Reliance and coordinating with partners from different levels and sectors who may be moving at different speeds.
3. Close contact and updating frontline volunteers and community-based responders are key during or just before a shock, especially if approaches or standards have to change during the shock—for example, during COVID-19, ICAN used SMS/text messages to guide the volunteers and community leaders on how they could enforce the guidance on social distancing, and where they could get masks and approved COVID-19 social and behavior change communications materials. This messaging was also used to provide VHTs with MOH guidance on limiting physical contact when screening children for malnutrition.
4. The best time to evaluate the effectiveness of capacities is during or just after a shock. This enables us to see how communities have used their capacity to respond to shocks.
5. As a strategy to institutionalize the resilience agenda at the community level, we have to identify and use community-based participatory methods, incorporating communities' perceptions and analysis of the situation and of the impact of the shock, and having communities share their experiences and lessons learned in mitigating and responding to the shocks.

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