Southern and Eastern Africa Trade, Information and Negotiations Institute (SEATINI) Uganda in partnership with Oxfam in Uganda, launched the Gulu City Local Revenue Enhancement Plan (LREP), a tool aimed at guiding local revenue collection and mobilization for the city for the next five years (2021/2022 – 2025/2026).

This was in a bid to transform revenue collection in the city from physical to digital to address existing challenges such as duplication of receipts, bribery, and low revenue collections. Mr. Godfrey Oyoo, the senior Finance Officer of Gulu city, said that the physical revenue collection method they were using in the past was marred with bribery and duplication of receipts by some town agents. He highlighted that in the 2020/2021 financial year for example, Gulu City only collected Shillings 1.8billion out of the projected Shillings 4.7billion.

The LREP encompasses annual reviews meant to identify constraints/challenges encountered, lessons, and best possible practices to effect the program.

In his remarks, Mr. Okwonga Alfred, the Gulu City Council Mayor noted that the LREP was developed through a highly consultative process to transform how the city generates local revenue, and uses the revenue to grow the city sustainably.

During her remarks, Ms. Jane Nalunga, the Executive Director, SEATINI Uganda congratulated Gulu City for reaching this milestone and emphasized the need for monitoring and ensuring that the revenue targets set within the plan are achieved at the end of the five years.

Mr. Francis Shanty Odokorach, the Country Director at Oxfam in Uganda emphasized that Oxfam is deliberate about reducing extreme inequalities among the population.

He added that following the community and policy dialogues held in Gulu City, Civil Society Organizations discovered a need to support political leaders, technocrats, and the new city administration to develop a Local Revenue Enhancement Plan. This would enable the city authorities to collect taxes responsibly and ably from the community to fund their mandate to extend public services for the betterment of the residents and public at large.

The LREP was jointly developed by Oxfam in Uganda, SEATINI Uganda, Advocacy for Research in Development (ARiD), and Gulu City Technical Planning Committee (TPC) and was adopted by the City Executive Committee (CEC) and the Gulu City Council.
Before COVID-19, Uganda was already grappling with structural inequality in access to healthcare, livelihood opportunities and education. The impacts of COVID-19 have therefore affected the country unequally. Those that were already vulnerable are in a downward poverty spiral, according to statistics. Education which should be an equalizer, has significantly been impacted for both the mainstream and the refugee learners.

Education Advocacy With A Difference (EAWAD) in partnership with Oxfam in Uganda and the European Union organized a televised national dialogue on education in emergencies under the theme, “Education in emergency amidst COVID-19: The role of host communities in fostering resilience, diversity & co-existence for better learning outcomes.” The dialogue aimed to create a platform for an annual engagement on education for refugees and host communities.

During the dialogue, Hon. Dr. Moriku Joyce, the State Minister for Primary Education, said that the government has come up with innovative ways to continue providing quality education to learners in refugee and host communities in an equitable manner.

Hon. Chris Baryomunsi, Minister for Information, Communications Technology, and National Guidance also added that the government is promoting specific interventions to make sure refugees and host communities have access to the internet for learning.

While representing the Country Director, Mr. Edward Mwebaze, Oxfam’s Head of Programs said that it is critical for all education actors to ensure that the education response does not further exclude children of the poor and marginalized in the wake of the pandemic. He called upon the government to fulfil its obligation towards providing education to all in ways that are non-discriminatory, even in times of the COVID-19 crisis.

The dialogue was closed by Mr. Benedict Lokiru, the Building Resilience In Crises through Education (BRICE) project manager who noted that the education response should cater for the continuity of learning for refugees and host communities.
The world is dangerously close to catastrophic tipping points in global temperature rises that will wreck even more lives around the world.

We have a huge opportunity to do what it takes – right now in 2021 – to keep the vital goal of 1.5°C within reach. Therefore, to coincide with the COP26 UN Climate Summit happening in Glasgow this year, Oxfam and partner organizations run a virtual action around climate justice, the World Climate March.

Due to the ongoing Covid-19 situation, mass public gatherings in Glasgow and beyond are not expected to take place as they normally would – resulting in a large gap for large scale public mobilization.

To ensure that people’s voices worldwide are heard, the World Climate March gave them the opportunity to show that they want world leaders to take climate action during COP26.

Oxfam recognizes the negative effects of climate change such as unfavourable weather especially on vulnerable youth, women, children, and men whose livelihoods are entirely dependent on food production through farming.

Food production and availability, access, quality, utilization, and stability of food systems have been severely affected by climate change catastrophes such as prolonged droughts, earthquakes and longer and hotter dry seasons.

Oxfam in Uganda and partners also convened a national dialogue with the youth on climate change and called upon world leaders to reverse the effects of climate change.

“THIS DECADE IS CRITICAL TO PREVENT A CATASTROPHIC GLOBAL TEMPERATURE RISE”
On 12th September, Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) working on fiscal and monetary policy-related issues (Southern and Eastern Africa Trade Information and Negotiations Institute- SEATINI Uganda, Oxfam in Uganda, Uganda Debt Network- UDN, Civil Society Budget Advocacy Group- CSBAG, and Water Governance Institute Uganda) presented proposals for the management, utilization and allocation of the new Shs 1.7 trillion ($490 million ) Special Drawing Rights (SDRs) for financing the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic and boosting economic recovery in Uganda.

In a press briefing held at the SEATINI offices in Kampala, CSOs noted that the COVID-19 pandemic had claimed the lives of many Ugandans. By 12th September 2021 for example, the country had registered over 120,9902 infections and 3,074 deaths from the pandemic. COVID-19 has had significant and far-reaching impacts pushing over 3.1 million households into poverty with the total number of the poor in the country now standing at over 11 million people according to the World Bank.

The SDR is an international reserve asset, created by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in 1969 to supplement its member countries’ official reserves. International reserves, sometimes referred to as foreign reserves may be defined as funds or other assets that countries exchange with each other on an international level. A new SDR issuance offers additional resources for recipient countries especially the Low-Income countries as they can now use such resources to meet their public spending needs without acquiring any new loans.

CSOs observed that as an IMF member country, Uganda received about $490 million equivalent of 1.7 trillion Ugandan shillings. They advised the government to either keep these resources as reserves at the Central Bank and rely on them for Monetary Policy purposes and feed into the country’s balance of payments stability by stabilizing exchange rates for smooth flow of imports and exports or to exchange the resources for hard currencies such as the dollar, pound, or Euro and then channel them to the finance ministry for budget support.

CSOs also advised that unless the above concerns are addressed, the newly allocated SDR resources to Uganda might fail to play their intended role of financing the fight against the pandemic and driving a just and fair post-COVID-19 recovery.
From 11th to 15th October 2021, Oxfam participated in the 2021 Land Awareness Week (LAW) in the districts of Mubende, Mityana, Kassanda, and Kyankwanzi. The Land Awareness week aimed at strengthening people’s and communities’ capacities to understand their land rights and obligations for sustainable development.

Residents in Kasambya sub-county in Mubende district were disgruntled by the increasing number of land grabbers in their district. During the Land Awareness week, the locals noted that most people who grab their land come under the guise of having connections from the state house.

Mr. Sekamate Hussein Salongo, the LCIII Chairperson for Kasambya sub-county, confirmed the increased cases of land grabbing in the area. He also added that he had recently received a copy of a vacation notice against 20 tenants within 30 days.

Ms. Nancy Mugimba, National Coordinator, Eastern and Southern Africa Small Scale Farmers’ Forum (ESAFF) Uganda speaking during the Land Awareness Week 2021. [ESAFF | 2021]

Mr. Muzura Aron, the Chairperson for LCIII Kigando sub-county in Mubende district also said that land wrangles and disputes are escalating each day in his sub county.

Ms. Nancy Mugimba, National Coordinator, Eastern and Southern Africa Small Scale Farmers’ Forum (ESAFF) Uganda said that Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) are major players in community development and their role in teaching land rights to communities cannot be ignored.

The Land Awareness Week was organized by CSOs including Oxfam, FRA, PELUM, ESSAFF, ActionAid, Landnet, Acfode, and many others.
NGO s CALL FOR SUPPORT OF LOCAL HUMANITARIAN ACTORS

Charter for Change working group in Uganda on 20th October 2021 convened a national dialogue with various stakeholders from Civil Society Organizations and NGOs. The meeting discussed how best to influence and empower local NGOs to advocate for localization in their humanitarian response.

Participants understood that equitable and diverse partnerships were critical in contributing to the cause of advocating for funding to local humanitarian actors. Mr. Francis Odokorach, the Country Director of Oxfam in Uganda, said, although some strides towards localization have been made, the power to its success is in working with the locally rooted people. He added that they have been through that experience and are indeed the masters of the solution.

It was noted that there was limited funding to women-led organizations and a lack of sustainability plans among refugee initiatives. Natural disasters such as COVID 19, floods, conflicts and dwindling funds also continue to affect the localization process in Uganda.

Ms. Donna Juliet, the chairperson of the Charter for Change working group Uganda, said, “we need to identify sustainability strategies in what we invest in when it comes to humanitarian work of women groups, youths, refugees and others.”

Mr. Francis Odokorach further called upon the international organizations working in the humanitarian circle to honor their commitment to localization.

Participants were encouraged to keep lobbying and working towards the localisation agenda led by the Charter for Change working group Uganda.

The meeting was attended by CAFOMI, Community Empowerment Network (CENET), ELECU, ALICAi, YSAT, ELHNA, Plan International, Amani Initiative, I CAN South Sudan, CEPAD-WN, DEPROSC-Nepal, Rhino Camp Refugees Settlement, Xavier Project, REAL, RADO KARMOJOA, Wageningen University and Research in the Netherlands, DCA Uganda, attended online. CARITUS International, PIUS – Kenya, AWET, Trocaire, Street Child, Catholic Relief Services (CRS), Community Empowerment for Peace, CAPAIDS, PALM, People Empowering People (PEP), AWYAD, Arua District NGO Network, C4C- TENADA, CODEI, Save the Children, Oxfam Uganda, Uganda Red Cross, Amplified Girls, CCE Uganda, and Refugee Led Organization Network.

Participants at the national dialogue pose for a group photo during the meeting.
My vision is to become a trainer of trainees in the tailoring business in Imvepi Settlement and South Sudan when we get back to our motherland in some unknown years to come.

My name is Shida Gladys, a single mother of a one-year-old. I am 22 years old, a South Sudanese refugee residing in Imvepi Refugee settlement. We ran from South Sudan to Uganda in February 2017 following the outbreak of unending civil war. Life was not easy, as my ageing parents could not provide basic needs for our large family of 08 members.

In November 2020, I got information from our village chairperson that Oxfam, and the Office of the Prime Minister (OPM) put out adverts to train youths in vocational skills. I immediately applied for the course of tailoring and garment cutting. After two weeks, we were invited for verification interviews, out of which I emerged as one of the successful trainees.

In February 2021, we were taken to Lodonga Polytechnique institute in Yumbe for a three-month training which we completed in May 2021. On completion, Oxfam gave us start-up kits, mine was a sewing machine, as a starting capital for our business. I set up a small shade in Imvepi Point J market in June 2021 and started making some little money from the dresses I sewed. On an average day, I sometimes make 10,000 to 15,000 Uganda Shillings, but on good days I can make between 20,000 to 30,000 Uganda Shillings.

Recently, God answered my prayers when UNHCR contracted us to make 129,360 pieces of face masks at the cost of 1,000 Uganda Shillings each. Of the 129,360 face masks, each person sewed 1,176 pieces. From the UNHCR contract, I earned 1,176,000 Uganda Shillings. I want to use part of this money to acquire another new set of sewing machines. I plan to recruit and employ at least two or three youths to work with.

Since I started this tailoring business, I can provide basic needs like soap, salt, and food for my child and the entire family of 8 members, including three males and five females and my aged parents. I am part of a ‘merry go round’ (cash pooling group) with 21 members who contribute 4,000 Uganda Shillings daily. I also save 5,000 Uganda shillings weekly in my VSLA group.

I am saving this money to go back to Lodonga technical institute to perfect my skills in tailoring and garment cutting to achieve my vision! I request that Oxfam continues supporting persons of concern to continue living a positive life.
Gender-based violence became rampant due to the COVID-19 pandemic lockdowns with women and girls suffering the most.

Oxfam in partnership with AWARE UGANDA conducted a capacity building training workshop of selected Referral Pathway Actors (RPA) towards Gender-Based Violence (GBV) Prevention and Response (PAR) in selected Communities in Kaabong District.

During the training, participants increased their knowledge and skills on GBV case management, their understanding of key concepts on GBV, and best practices and strategies towards improved services to GBV survivors.

They were also encouraged to adopt the survivor-centered approach when handling GBV related cases to enable the survivors feel safe and have a conducive space for healing. The participants further reflected on their roles and mandate in handling GBV related cases as they had intense group discussions on the causes of GBV in their communities.

Participants cited poverty, polygamy, extended families, alcoholism, unequal distribution of resources, harmful traditional practices, pandemics like COVID 19, HIV/AIDS, Ebola, war and displacement, lack of awareness, power abuse or misuse, and general lawlessness as the leading causes of GBV in their communities.

They also gave submissions on what can be done to combat GBV such as resource mobilization, community awareness, planning and budgeting for GBV case management, translating and distributing legal documents.

In her remarks, Ms. Achii Christine Lodou, the Kaabong District Gender Officer, encouraged all actors to embrace coordination, linkages, and commitments in tackling GBV issues in the district.
Assessing vulnerabilities to reduce disaster risks

A participant drawing an illustration of natural resources at risk of hazards on a map of Isingiro Town Council during the vulnerability capacity assessment. [Oxfam 2021]

Through the Disaster Risk Reduction department, Oxfam in Uganda conducted a vulnerability capacity assessment from 23rd August 2021 to 1st September 2021 in Isingiro and Kyegegwa districts.

The assessment aimed to identify local priorities and appropriate actions that can be taken to reduce disaster risks and assist in the design of programs that are supportive and responsive to the needs of people in Kyegegwa and Isingiro districts.

Risk reduction activities to prevent or minimize the effects of expected hazards, risks, and vulnerability were identified by participants through discussions.

They further discussed the involvement of local authorities and key stakeholders in developing action plans to prepare and respond to the identified risks in their communities.

During the assessment, participants voiced the risks and hazards facing their communities and their limited capacity to cope with them.

In the sub-counties of Isingiro town council, Mbare, Rushasha, Kashumba and Bigaga major hazards identified included drought, pests and diseases, floods, soil infertility, famine. In Kyegegwa sub counties of Mpara, Ruyonza, and Kigambo, they identified environmental degradation, COVID-19, and windstorms as the major hazard.
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