



***Step UP!*-Project Change Stories**





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Introduction to the *Step Up!* Project

'Step Up! Improved Agricultural Production, Food practices, Increased Income and Civic participation for Southern Sudanese refugee communities and Ugandan host communities' was a three-year project (1st December 2018 to 31st March 2022) implemented by *PALM Corps* and *Community Empowerment for Rural Development* (CEFORD) in partnership with *Welthungerhilfe*. Places of implementation were *Rhino Camp Refugee Settlement* and *Omugo Extension* respectively. *Step Up!* was funded by the *Federal Ministry of Economic Cooperation* (BMZ) of Germany. The project aimed at improving the resilience of a total of 2200 Southern Sudanese refugees and Ugandan host community members through improved agricultural production, food practices, increased income, and civic participation.

Step Up! was implemented by a team of technical sector experts and field staff specialized in agriculture, market linkages and youth skilling. Community-based support was provided by Community-Based Coaches (CBCs), agriculture/nutrition leaders, community-based animal health workers, and animal handlers.

The project beneficiaries were supported using the *Farmer Field School* (FFS)-methodology. The focus lay on knowledge transfer in good agronomic and nutrition practices, as well as on supporting and organizing farmers to sell collectively. New areas of youth skilling were explored, including commercial vegetable growing (agribusiness) and the use of local artisans and educational institutions to train youth in a variety of technical skills.

The following stories give account of some of the successes registered under the project in the three years.



“PALM Corps, in my perspective, contributed significantly to the overall goal of improving the resilience of Southern Sudanese refugee populations and Ugandan host communities through enhanced agricultural production, food practices, increased income, and civic participation.”

Adinga Valentine, Project Coordinator *Step UP!* at PALM Corps

I. Agriculture and Marketing

*“If farmers work and market together (collectively), **the market will follow them to their homes** and expensive middlemen can be cut out”*

Jackson Awajobo, PALM Corps Market Expert



*“Above all, **the STEP UP! Project exposed me to vast learning experiences in documentation, interpersonal relations management, work ethics, policy adherence and time management.**”*

Nelson Eguma, PALM Corps Agriculture Expert

Animal traction pulls Angutoko Wilson towards a better future

Mr. Angutoko Wilson is a Ugandan national living in Ofua VI Zone in *Rhino Camp* Refugee Settlement. Wilson and his large family used to live with very little as they lacked sophisticated tools for their agricultural work:

“I used to only plant 1 acre of sesame with the support of my wife. Because my children were still young, they could not support so much in land preparation. Sometimes we could hire labour which was not easy for us. We could fetch very little income mainly for food and home use”.

Then in 2019 he was selected by the *Step Up!* team – applying the Training of Trainers (ToT)-approach – as one of the members of Moro Ku Tele Mera *Farmer Field School* (FFS) to be trained on animal traction. He completed a one-month course in animal traction at *Abi Zard Agricultural Research Centre* in August 2019. Through this, he gained knowledge and skills which he applied to train the group members and the family members.

The adoption of the new technology was not easy for the group members. Although Wilson wanted all the FFS-members to embrace the training, there was some resistance. So, he decided to first demonstrate the technology in his own home. He went on to train his wife and children on handling the animal to plough. He recalls:



*“When very few farmers in my group adopted the technology, I saw this as an opportunity to empower my family members (my wife and the children) on how to use the animals for ploughing. This has enhanced increase in the land acreage under cultivation from 1 acre to 3 acres. **Using this technology, my costs of land opening have reduced and I am able to open my land much faster”.***

Because he was able to open more land using animal traction, Angutoko Wilson has registered an increase in average income per harvest from 450,000 to about 950,000 [from around 115 to 245 Euros] on the sales of his produce. His profits allowed him to acquire some assets like goats as well as constructing a semi-permanent house. Gradually, following his example, other group members are embracing animal traction.

Abai Joseph and his family find success in collective sesame marketing

Abai Joseph is a South Sudanese refugee who moved to Uganda in 2016 due to the civil war. He lives in Ofua village of *Rhino Camp* refugee settlement. As the head of a family, Joseph's need for money was naturally high. Apart from the basics for his large family, he needs to pay hefty school fees. From the sesame that he grew and sold he could not earn enough for such large expenditures.

In 2019 the *Step Up!*-project started organizing groups of sesame growers for collective marketing. This attracted off-takers based in Arua town to buy directly from the farmers at a better price because they were promised the volume they needed within a short time. Joseph tells us of his subsequent success:

“When PALM linked us to a buyer to negotiate, our group’s marketing committees negotiated a good price of 3,600 Shillings [around 0.9 Euros] per Kilo, when the average prevailing price was only 3,100. So, I sold all my harvest of 406 kgs and earned 1,218,000 Shillings [about 308 Euros]! I have been able to use the proceeds to buy a cow and paid the school fees for four of my children in secondary school. I did not see this coming. I now see sesame as gold and have been able to increase my production each year”.

In the future, Abai Joseph wishes to continue increasing his harvest and sales as well as to become himself an agent to negotiate good prices for his community with the market off-takers.



Abai Joseph with the cow he purchased from his Sesame sales.

Dawa Betty plans for the future



Dawa Betty is a 43 years old refugee living in *Rhino Camp* refugee settlement. A single mother of eight children, she fled to Uganda from South Sudan in 2016. Like many other refugees, she started growing sesame for her own consumption and to create some income. However, this has never been a profitable venture for Dawa because of very low price paid by agents who always aim at maximizing profit at the expense of the farmers. Another difficulty that she faced was the long distance to the markets:

“I used to walk at least 2 km up to Siripi trading center with simsim [sesame] on my head because motorcycle ‘boda boda’ riders were over-charging us.”

In 2019 Betty joined *Step Up!*'s Morokutelemera *Farmer Field School* (FFS). As a member of the FFS she benefited in several ways, including through access to better farming inputs and newly established market linkages. PALM Corps' field staff organized the groups to market their sesame through collective marketing. At the same time, Betty and other FFS members developed individual business plans to help them reach future goals. In January 2021, she fulfilled her planned ambition by buying one female goat and paying the school fees for her three children in secondary school. She now hopes that her goat will produce well and increase her household income.

She intends to increase her production to 3 acres [$\sim 12000\text{m}^2$] in the 2022 season. This is possible because she now has a secure market linkage to sell her sesame. Betty is proud to be able to continue paying school fees and provide food for her children. She also hopes that as a group the farmers will continue to cooperate even when the *Step Up!* project ends.

Yuda Dratre – from school dropout to successful tomato farmer

Unable to continue with his education towards a technical certificate in 2018, 23-year-old Dratre Yuda, a host (Ugandan) youth from Ofua village, opted for farming to earn his livelihood.

In 2021, he enrolled for agribusiness training under the *Step up!* project after hearing about it from a friend. PALM Corps supported the youths, including Yuda, with a high-yielding tomato variety (ANSAL F1). This resulted in a larger volume of tomatoes that the youths could bring to market. The project provided tricycles for the youth in order to access far off markets:

“When PALM Corps provided tricycles for our group, marketing became much easier. Today I decide where and when to sell based on which market offers better prices. Before we could only sell few crates in the nearby markets, but now we are able to access distant markets like Palorinya and Odramacaku which offer slightly better price”.

Yuda estimates that his seasonal income is likely to double from 1,400,000Shillings to more than 3,000,000Shillings [around 760 Euros] due to having established a reliable and profitable market with vendors and the reduced transport cost.

He now intends to buy a solar powered irrigation system, which he believes will help him produce throughout the year and therefore meet his customers’ demands. He intends to involve his two brothers who have also had to drop out of school because of financial shortfalls. He feels that once they have become financially stable, they will be able to rejoin school and finish their education while at the same time continuing the farming. One of his goals is to have one of the brothers enrolled for a course in Agriculture.



Sesame collective marketing rejuvenated Kennedy Kangu's business

Through collective marketing, the farmers did not only earn additional income but participated in the negotiating price for their commodity, something that was unprecedented for most of them. A total of 1,125 farmers (696 refugees and 429 hosts) benefitted from this intervention. Among them was Kennedy Kangu, a 32-year-old refugee in *Rhino Camp* refugee settlement who managed to sell an impressive 523kgs of sesame. What is more, luckily for him, he didn't incur any marketing or transport expenses as the bulking centre was near his home. The proceeds helped him restock and rejuvenate his shop which had previously stagnated due to lack of capital for expansion. For Kennedy, the success in sesame sales has therefore translated both into increased investments and savings:

"Today I am so happy because my business has expanded from stock worth 1,650,000 Shillings to 3,300,000 Shillings [~835 Euros]. Out of the income from the sale of sesame, I was also able to buy clothes for my children during the Christmas period and saved money for school fees for my child to go back to school when it reopens."



The only regret Kennedy shared with us, was that it would have been better if the *Step Up!* project started earlier. He believes that more people could have been reached, helping them to deal with the COVID-19 crisis, and that greater economic change would have been achieved.

II. Youth Skilling on- and off-farm

*“With the increase in levels of employability, income and assets acquisition by the trained youths, vocational **skills training and development is the most sustainable approach to eradicating poverty and building resilience among the youths.**”*

Hillary Adomati, PALM Corps Skills Facilitator



*“It has been satisfying to see, through the Step UP! project, a number of **youth beneficiaries lifting themselves out of abject poverty from nothingness to acquiring assets like motorcycles, cows, goats, also constructing semi-permanent houses.** I thank Allah for giving me the opportunity for making a meaningful contribution to the lives of the beneficiaries through my profession.”*

Safi Alli, PALM Corps Skills Development Expert

Disability does not equal inability for Enocka Sebit



A South Sudanese refugee residing in the Yelulu cluster of *Rhino camp* refugee settlement, 20 years old Enocka used to rely basically on the food rations offered by the *World Food Programme* (WFP) once every month. Dealing with a disability, his job prospects used to be strongly limited.

This changed when the *Step-Up!* project admitted him in vocational skills training for tailoring. Being trained in an apprenticeship arrangement with a local tailor, Enocka says he gained a lot of sewing skills and knowledge. He also got valuable experience in customer care, marketing, negotiation and business management during the training period. After completing his training, Enocka opened a tailoring shop at Yelulu trading center and is now training his wife and other friends in tailoring. The re-opening of schools in Uganda brought him an unexpected opportunity to practice his new trade:

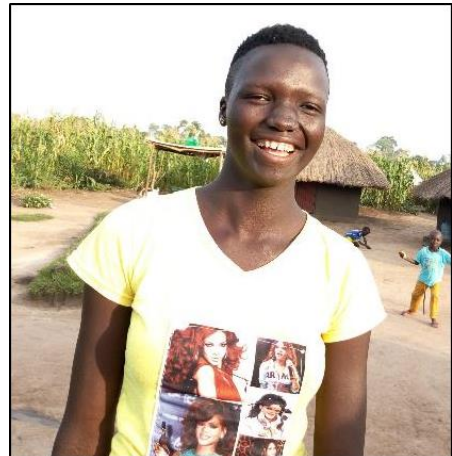
“With the opening of schools after two years lockdown from Corona, I received orders and sewed uniforms for nearby nursery schools. I was able to earn over 1,500,000 Shillings (about 388 euros) which money has been used to buy more materials & kitenge. Now, I have diversified my business by buying some pigs and chickens and practicing farming.

Enocka is today a self-reliant and happily married man with one baby boy. He plans to open a bigger shop and training centre in Koboko district.

He urges PALM Corps and Welthungerhilfe to reach out to more young people, especially persons with disability, so that they can benefit like him and reach their full potential.

Rutha Yobu - success comes with hard work and commitment

Rutha Yobu is a nineteen-year old school dropout from Ofua village's host community. According to her, life was very difficult as all she could do to earn money were casual labor jobs. Often the little monies she got came from selling silver fish (*Nkenge*) and onions with little profit.



Rutha's opportunity came when she got enrolled for training in bakery and catering under the *Step-Up!* project in the nearby *Siripi Skills Centre*. She learned a variety of skills in the training such as making mandazi [doughnuts], baking cakes and using quality ingredients for her cooking and baking. She also learned about entrepreneurship and customer care, as well as more general life skills. Immediately after receiving a "startup kit" from the project, Rutha established and started her restaurant business at *Ofua 6* trading Centre, where she is proud to say that she is able to earn at least 120,000 Shillings [roughly 30 Euros] per week.

"I have bought six plastic chairs, two dozen utensils, two jugs for the business and a mattress, two goats and three chickens for the family. I am able to pay school fees, buy clothes and food for my siblings."

Rutha was also able to save over 500,000 Shillings [125 Euros] in her *Village Savings and Loans Association (VSLA)*. With her savings, she hopes to extend her business by buying more chairs and tables and eventually relocating to a bigger house.



Geoffrey Alimodoa's good deed brings him luck

Before receiving training under the *Step Up!* project, Ugandan national Geoffrey was a subsistence farmer growing maize, sweet potatoes and sesame. He also had some domestic animals. Even so, money was an issue, there was never enough for savings or medication.



When Geoffrey heard of the trainings from his friends he decided to apply and was eventually selected. As an important contribution to the success of the *Step Up!* project, he offered his own land to be used for the agricultural training of 17 youths. During the training, he was taught about vegetable growing, marketing as well as on nutrition and financial planning. In addition, he built good relationships with both nationals and refugee youths. Geoffrey earned a good income from his tomato and cabbage growing since he grows the vegetables even during the off-season period to have a continuous income.

Now monthly, Geoffrey makes about 500,000 Shillings [around 125 Euros] from his various businesses and his production process has greatly improved. He tells us:

“I have used the money from sales of tomato to buy a motorcycle to improve transportation of tomato to the market, bought three cows, and even completed building my small shop at Yelulu trading center in which I sell essential goods”.

In the next 3-5 years he plans to construct a house and take his children to a better school. He also intends to pass on his training to youths and his own family members. To achieve all his goals, Geoffrey will continue planting his vegetables, care for his animals and add to his savings.

Ade Allison - journey to economic empowerment

Ade Allison is a 23-year old South Sudanese refugee living in Ofua village of *Rhino Camp* refugee settlement. As a young parent with limited job skills, Ade faced a lot of pressure for providing school fees and medical care for his young daughter. His family largely depended on the money he got from riding a boda-boda [motorcycle taxi] that belonged to one of his friends, a notoriously unreliable source of income.

In 2021 he was selected as one of the youths to undertake market-oriented tomato growing under the *Step Up!* project.

“I learnt a number of things during the training, now I can easily identify pests and diseases and also choose the appropriate drugs to treat them.”

Ade’s passion and commitment during the nine months training period made him plant about a quarter of an acre with tomatoes and cabbages which allowed him to earn income worth 1,200,000 Shillings [about 300 Euros].

“I am happy with the money I got after the sale of my produce, now I am able to support my family, I even bought a motorcycle of my own and opened up a shop at Ofua!”

The success also led to diversification. Ade’s experience in the first production season 2020 motivated him to plant half an acre with tomatoes, cabbages, Okra, and eggplants in 2021. Sometime in the future, he plans to buy land in Koboko district, build a family house and support his daughter in her education. Ade appreciates the knowledge he obtained through the *Step Up!* project and advises his fellow youth to consider vegetable production for income generation, since he himself has seen the benefits.



Ecoku Fred's internship turns him into a successful agribusinessman

Fred, a Ugandan youth who lives in Lugbari village of *Imvepi Refugee Settlement*, completed a certificate in agriculture from *Bukalasa Agricultural College* in 2019. He was then admitted for a diploma course but could not attend it because he lacked the money to pay for tuition.

In August 2020, PALM Corps offered Fred an internship training opportunity for a period of 4 months at its Siripi field office. This gave him the opportunity to learn different agronomic practices in vegetable production. Trainings were facilitated by an external consultant from *East West Seed International Knowledge Transfer* hired by PALM Corps under the *Step Up!* project.

“This was the best thing that happened in my life. We were able to grow tomato, cabbages, cauliflowers, onion, sukumawiki”.

To directly pass on the knowledge from his own internship, Fred brought together his four unemployed brothers. With his little savings he moved them from their home in Lugbari to nearby Ngalikia village, located along river Inyau, so that he could work together with them at any time. He reinvested the income from the production during his internship to hire land for off-season tomato production. From here he was able to turn a healthy profit using family labour.

This positive experience motivated him to reinvest the money and keep growing. He used part of the income to acquire a motorcycle which reduced the high cost of transportation of the produce. He also acquired a grinding mill to support his mother at home. By October 2021 he had a working capital of 8.9 million Shillings [about 2309 Euros]. From this he was able to acquire a portable solar powered



irrigation system from *Tulima Solar* on loan running for 22 months. This significantly improved his off-season vegetable production. From February 2022 to date he has already sold over 80 crates of tomato adding up to 16,000,000 Shillings [4150 Euros] in sales. Given his tremendous progress he was offered a position as a *Community Based Trainer (CBT)* to support the tomato value chain project by PALM Corps, a work for which he is currently under contract until December 2022.

In November 2021 he employed 5 permanent workers alongside his 4 brothers and now pays them 80,000 Shillings [20 Euros] each per month. His plan is to acquire a permanent land along a water body to continue growing his agribusiness.



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