



# Block Farming Model For Refugees In Bidibidi Settlement<sup>1</sup>

## Food insecurity and limited access to land

Uganda hosts the largest refugee population in Africa, with over 1.6 million refugees.<sup>2</sup> Bidibidi Settlement was established in September 2016 in Yumbe district, West Nile region of Uganda, to host the rapid influx of South Sudanese refugees. As of 30 April 2024, Bidibidi hosted a population of 198,549 refugees, primarily from South Sudan<sup>3</sup> with most households having between 4-6 members. Due to a combination of factors like extreme poverty and poor harvests and livestock production, compounded by significant increases in food prices and other commodities, food insecurity amongst the refugee population has sharply increased in the West Nile region.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, the World Food Programme (WFP) had a heavy prioritization exercise in 2023, which resulted in severe cuts in food assistance for over 80% of refugees across all settlements and new arrivals.<sup>5</sup> This loss of the refugees' main source of food from WFP calls the need for them to prioritize producing their own food more than ever.

According to the Office of the Prime Minister (OPM), 75% of refugees across the settlements have no access to sufficient land for cultivation.<sup>6</sup> Each refugee household in Bidibidi is allocated a plot of 30mx30m for living purposes; this is used to construct accommodation and WASH facilities, leaving very little land for cultivation. This land is temporarily granted as refugees are not allowed to own land in Uganda. Some refugees have been able to rent additional land from the host community to cultivate and graze livestock, but there are disputes between host communities and refugees over land and natural resources. Many refugees report paying for and cultivating land, but then are asked for more money as harvest time approaches or find that someone else claims ownership of the land they have been using. Tenancy agreements are largely verbal and subject to arbitrary conditions regarding use, duration and cost, including restrictions on what crops can be grown. Female-headed households have additional challenges

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<sup>2</sup><https://data.unhcr.org/en/country/uga>

<sup>3</sup>Country - Uganda (unhcr.org)

<sup>4</sup>OPM and UNHCR, Inter-Agency Uganda Country Refugee Response Plan 2022 – 2025, p.17

<sup>5</sup>NRC (2023) "Failing the Uganda Model: Why Donors Must Urgently Bridge Uganda's Funding Gap."

<sup>6</sup>OPM and UNHCR, Inter-Agency Uganda Country Refugee Response Plan 2022 – 2025, p.16



and vulnerabilities linked to customary traditions and norms which limit their access to land.<sup>7</sup> Climate change has also resulted in less predictability and poorer harvests limiting the capacity of refugees to cover their land rental cost.

### **Block farming: an effective approach to improve livelihoods**

In collaboration with OPM and other partners, NRC Uganda is supporting block farming for refugees and host communities in the West Nile region to increase food production and build self-reliance and resilience. Block farming is a collective agricultural approach where smallholder farmers from refugee and host communities come together and pool labour to cultivate crops collectively on designated blocks of land. The intention is to support both collective and individual production by optimizing land use to enhance food security and livelihoods for host and refugee participants and is intended to serve as a case study to understand how block farming for refugees can be implemented and replicated in other areas. Block farms and block gardens increase the capacity of resources available for production, access to inputs, land area, encourages hard work and technical advice.

### **Securing access to land and setting up groups of programme participants**

NRC and OPM have agreed to support block farming in Bidibidi settlement where OPM provides access to the land and NRC works with the farmers regarding the subdivision and use of land. Land in the West Nile region is owned by private individuals primarily under a customary land tenure system.<sup>8</sup> In Bidibidi, OPM and the local landowners have allocated 800 acres of land to the refugees for block farming across three zones of the settlement. The NRC Information Counselling and Legal Assistance (ICLA) Programme ensures the right to use the land and the required documentation are in place.



<sup>7</sup>NRC (2024) "Towards Inclusive Protection: Understanding Refugee Experiences and Gender Dynamics in Uganda."

<sup>8</sup>This system of land ownership is recognized and governed by the 1995 Constitution of the Republic of Uganda, as well as The Land Act of 2010. Under customary land tenure, land is owned by individuals within the host community according to traditional practices and norms, and the Constitution and The Land Act support and validate these traditional practices, ensuring that the land ownership rights of the host community members are acknowledged and protected.





NRC assessed refugees in the settlement to identify and select the block farming participants, using selection criteria including reliance on food assistance, savings capacity, assets possessed, food diversity score, poverty index score and access to land. NRC is currently working with 3180 individuals (713 male and 1654 female refugees and 226 male and 587 female host community members) across the three zones of the settlement as per details included in the chart below:

Zone and location	Total acreage	Duration	Start date	# of individuals				
				Male		Female		Total
				Host	Refugees	Host	Refugees	
Zone 3, Aliba Village	200	5 years	July/August 2023	92	429	249	1163	1933
Zone 4, Bidama Village	200	3 years	July/August 2023	27	109	63	198	397
Zone 5, Kiranga Village	400	5 years	July/August 2023	107	175	275	293	850
<b>Total</b>				<b>226</b>	<b>713</b>	<b>587</b>	<b>1654</b>	<b>3180</b>

Zone 5 is the location with the largest acreage allocated to block farming: 400 acres of land, with the plan of having 200 acres being used for collective farming and 200 acres for individual farming. NRC supported the refugee and host population to set up 28 groups with around 30 members in each group. Fifteen groups are comprised of refugees, and 13 groups are comprised of host community members, though only the refugees receive land. The host community already has their own land but is provided support in terms of clearing the land and agricultural input. The farmers were provided cash assistance to facilitate the cultivation: a maximum of 256.000 UGX is allocated for everyone, while 1.400.000 UGX is allocated for each group. As of May 2024, each refugee group has cleared and planted five acres, but the goal is to scale up incrementally with the next season such that each group will eventually cultivate



30 acres or more. 100 acres have been ploughed and planted with cassava and sorghum: 75 acres by 15 refugee groups, and 25 acres by five refugee commercial farmers (with each group and each commercial farmer receiving five acres apiece).

### Addressing food needs

NRC Livelihood and Food Security (LFS) has supported the farmers with technical assistance in farming, including demarcation of land, the provision of cash and other inputs, and advice regarding what kinds of crops are appropriate for the environmental conditions. The aim is to increase production capacity of the refugees to become food secure and generate income. Block farms benefit from economies of scale and the contiguous nature of the land. They make it possible for farmers to access services that would be otherwise infeasible or unaffordable and allow them to deal with larger companies. NRC's ICLA competency has helped the groups to understand the purpose of a group constitution and the roles and responsibilities of executive members (e.g., Chairperson, Secretary, Treasurer, etc.). Through its ICLA interventions, NRC also provides guidance and support with the business registration process for those individuals who would like to start a business. In addition, NRC also provides mediation and negotiation services should disputes arise with the landowners and/or between the programme participants.

NRC will continue working with OPM and host community and refugee farmers, as both groups and individuals, to support self-reliance, food security, tenure security and maximize agricultural productivity and household income. This programme is being monitored and replicated in other settlements.



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