

SKILLS DEVELOPMENT

ENTERPRISE UGANDA TIPS REFUGEE WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS

BY ALOYSIOUS KASOMA

Enterprise Uganda is equipping refugee women with entrepreneurial skills to unlock sustainable livelihoods under the World Bank-funded GROW project.

Speaking at a training session held last month in Bushenyi, Charles Ocici, the executive director of Enterprise Uganda, said the project deliberately targets women because they have for decades been confined to informal and micro-level enterprises, limiting their participation in the mainstream private sector.

“By doing so, we have significantly underutilised half of our population, the GROW project is about bringing women back into the productivity equation of the country. Once a woman can access capital across these levels – micro, medium and development finance – that is a woman you can rely on to run and grow an enterprise in any sector,” he added.

These skills include planning, resource mobilisation at the lowest possible cost, forming partnerships with suppliers and progressively accessing finance—from microfinance institutions to commercial and development banks.

ADDRESSING GAPS IN REFUGEE SETTLEMENTS

At Nakivale Refugee Settlement, the GROW project was welcomed as a timely intervention amid declining funding across humanitarian sectors.

Monica Mugisha, the settlement commandant of Nakivale under the Office of the Prime Minister (OPM), said the programme is helping to close long-standing gaps in women’s economic empowerment.

“We are grateful that GROW has come on board to support our women, Nakivale has very active women engaged in business, but

funding constraints created a major gap, especially when it came to scaling up existing initiatives. The GROW project has filled this gap by expanding training to a much broader group of women,” she said.

Beyond business skills, Mugisha noted that the programme empowers women to better manage their households and explore economic opportunities beyond the settlement.

“Uganda’s Refugee Act guarantees freedom of movement, which means women are not confined to the settlement,” she said. “They can go to towns like Mbarara, do business there, and compete with other entrepreneurs. This support is transformative.”

FROM HUMANITARIAN AID TO ECONOMIC RESILIENCE

At Oruchinga Refugee Settlement, the focus on economic empowerment has become increasingly urgent, following the gradual withdrawal of food and cash assistance.

Charlie Tofias, Settlement Commandant at Oruchinga under

OPM, said most refugees are now off assistance from the World Food Programme, shifting attention to long-term self-reliance.

He said initiatives such as the GROW project are creating pathways for refugees, especially women, to build resilient livelihoods through enterprise growth. “With GROW coming on board, small businesses will grow bigger, and those already at a certain level will expand further,” Tofias said. Tofias emphasised that women are the project’s entry point because empowering them stabilises households.

Although Oruchinga no longer receives new arrivals, he noted that many refugees still struggle to educate their children, access healthcare, and meet basic needs.

“A developed refugee means a calm Uganda,” Tofias said, adding that projects like GROW are critical to improving welfare, nutrition, education, health and enterprise growth within refugee communities.

PRACTICAL SKILLS FOR SUSTAINABLE



Ocici presents a certificate to Ainembabazi after the training

BUSINESSES

According to Andrew Niwagira, the monitoring, evaluation and learning specialist at Enterprise Uganda, the programme is intentionally practical, focusing on helping entrepreneurs identify viable business opportunities and make informed growth decisions.

“We conduct business opportunity identification sessions where entrepreneurs engage in group exercises that they later apply individually in their own businesses,” Niwagira said.

He noted that many entrepreneurs start businesses without adequate research, which often undermines sustainability.

“We guide participants on simple but critical issues such as business location, identifying customers, sourcing supplies, pricing, and learning from others already running similar businesses,” he said.

Niwagira added that by the end of the training, participants are better positioned to expand existing enterprises or confidently start new ones based on planning and evidence.

GROW IMPACTS COMMUNITIES

Recently, over 450 women received training in refugee camps and surrounding area in Kiryandongo, Kyangwali and Hoima Under the GROW project.

Charles Ocici, the executive director of Enterprise Uganda, noted that mixed training groups, bringing together refugees and Ugandan women, creates mutual motivation.

“When refugees and locals are in the same room, each group reinforces the alertness of the other,” he said, adding that host-community women often rediscover their own advantages in land ownership, networks and local knowledge.

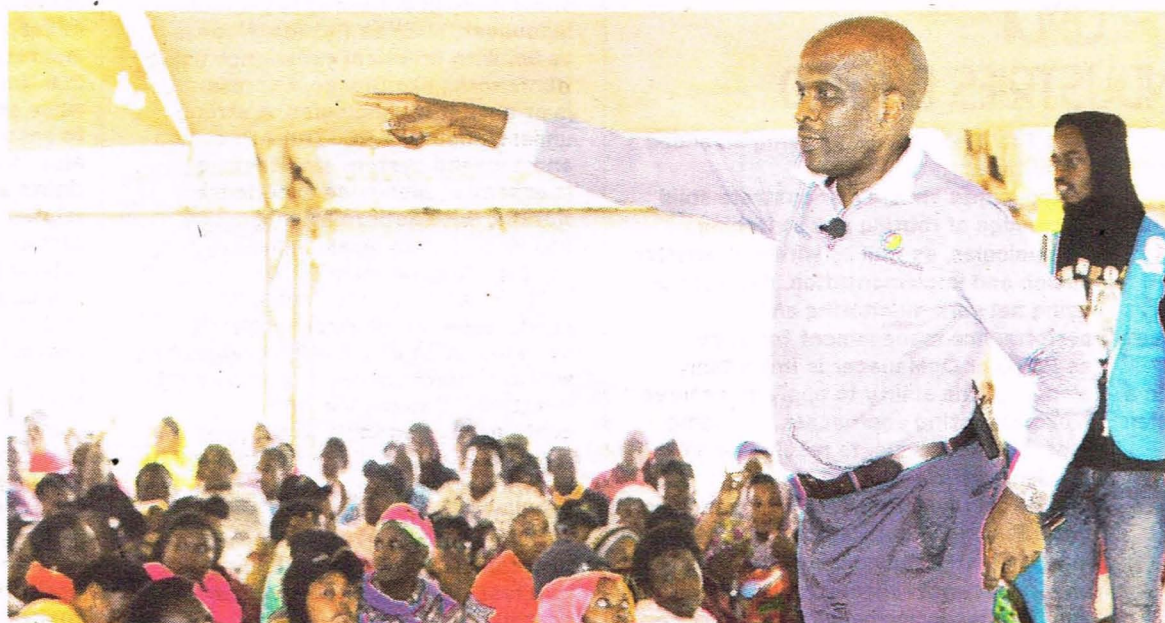
Solomon Osaka, from the Office of the Prime Minister’s refugee desk in Hoima described GROW as one of the most active entrepreneurship programmes in the region.

He said participants are gaining skills in record-keeping, financial discipline, planning and market analysis.

He added that new electricity connections in settlements are driving interest in value addition, with women applying for shared facilities such as grinding machines to improve product quality.

However, access to GROW loans among refugees remains limited due to policy constraints around collateral.

Fridah Mboni, a GROW Refugee specialist, said the programme is redesigning loan access to better accommodate refugee women, including those with low literacy.



Ocici training refugee women in Bushenyi district