

A community-led approach to sustainable cross-border solutions between South Sudan and Uganda

Uganda and South Sudan | Duration: July 2022 - January 2025 | Implementing partners: The Lutheran World Federation, Community Development Support Services

The Challenge

In Uganda, which hosted 41% of the 2.3 million people displaced by the civil war in South Sudan in 2021, cross-border communities face chronic conflict and limited opportunities for sustainable peace and development. The unsettled agreement about the international border between Uganda and South Sudan causes tension and mistrust between authorities and security units. There is significant potential for relapse into intercommunal and cross-border violence, with concerns about rights abuses for people in transit. Additionally, displacement-affected communities face challenges in livelihood development, with agricultural efforts hampered by adverse climate conditions.

The Solution

The COMPASS project established a cross-border dialogue between Uganda and South Sudan, involving diverse stakeholders from community representatives (with focus on women and youth), officials, and agencies. This bottom-up, whole-of-society approach sought homegrown, contextually relevant solutions to chronic cross-border conflicts. The initiative supported refugees in Uganda while promoting safe, voluntary return to South Sudan through a comprehensive strategy that included equipping refugees with protection skills and networks, expanding livelihood opportunities, and enhancing peacebuilding efforts in both countries.

What Made This a Promising Practice?

The project demonstrated excellence through its strong commitment to local ownership, with authorities, government technical departments, local leaders, and community members intensely involved throughout implementation. The establishment of a Local Project Advisory Committee (LPAC) proved particularly successful, facilitating high-level local engagement and providing built-in stakeholder management and communications arrangements. This recognized structure, comprising representatives from relevant authorities, the EU Delegation, UN agencies, civil society organizations, and community-based organizations, played a key role in advising and coordinating efforts, managing community expectations, and resolving conflicts. Additionally, the project effectively leveraged university expertise for training, research, and documentation of learning.

The Response

This initiative addressed three key challenges through targeted interventions: limited women's participation in peacebuilding was tackled by deliberately confronting restrictive norms and halting dialogues until women and youth were meaningfully included, working with local authorities and organizations to prioritize their involvement in cross-border peace efforts; cross-border violence and security issues were mitigated by training 222 community leaders and border authorities in protection and human rights while facilitating ongoing cross-border engagements and developing real-time response models for violence triggers; and agricultural challenges threatening food security were resolved by shifting to drought-resistant crops like groundnuts and soybeans, with farmers in Ngmoromo and Palabek Refugee settlement achieving impressive yields of 536kg per group from just 55kg of foundational groundnut seeds, alongside promoting household-level horticultural production to maintain nutritional benefits.

Lessons Learned

The project demonstrated that meaningful inclusion of women and youth at all levels is essential for achieving quality and durable peace. Peacebuilding interventions must intentionally address norms and stereotypes that block women's full participation. The LPAC model proved highly effective for coordinating cross-border initiatives and ensuring local ownership, with partners now advocating for its adoption by other projects within and outside implementing organizations. For livelihood programming in displacement contexts, adaptation to climate realities is crucial, with focus on drought-resistant crops showing better results than more delicate horticultural approaches.

The project's cross-border approach successfully supported over 40,000 displacement-affected people, enhancing their capacity and that of local authorities to assess needs, identify root causes, and devise sustainable peace and development responses. The initiative demonstrated that locally-driven cross-border agreements can effectively unite communities, foster trade, and build sustainable peace in complex displacement settings.

Key Results

Peace & Protection:

- Facilitated consultative meetings with community representatives and cross-border authorities, culminating in a jointly drafted working agreement ratified by local governments
- Conducted awareness-raising campaigns to disseminate the agreement to communities on both sides of the border
- Trained 198 border officials, policy and community leaders in facilitating safe cross-border movement
- Mobilized 816 peace ambassadors to promote social cohesion across refugee, returnee, and host communities through 76 peace initiatives

Livelihoods & Economic Development:

- Supported 1,082 community members with training that led to sustainable income through diverse enterprises from hairdressing to agriculture
- Facilitated cross-border farming initiatives and supported Village Savings and Loan Associations (VSLAs)
- Encouraged farmers to grow drought-resistant crops like groundnut foundational seed and soybeans in response to challenges with horticultural production

Integrated Service Delivery:

- Provided psychosocial support to 2,251 vulnerable people through inter-personal therapy groups
- Improved delivery of integrated basic services in South Sudan to prepare more sustainable conditions for return



LiD Lives in Dignity GRANT FACILITY

The Lives in Dignity (LiD) Grant Facility was an EU-funded initiative managed by UNOPS that promoted development-oriented approaches in forced displacement settings. With €24 million allocated between 2021–2025, the Facility supported 14 innovative, multi-stakeholder projects across Africa, Asia, and Latin America. Its flexible funding model empowered local actors, strengthened partnerships, and fostered integrated programming across five key areas: livelihoods, service delivery, housing and spatial planning, protection, and disaster- and climate-related mobility. The Facility prioritized community-led solutions, localization, and social cohesion, advancing sustainable development for both displaced populations and host communities. **Find out more at** https://international-partnerships.ec.europa.eu/policies/programming/programmes/lives-dignity-grant-facility_en