

WOMEN, YOUTH & RESILIENT LIVELIHOODS

From Skills and Production to Enterprise, Markets and Economic Opportunity

DRI-Uganda's thinking on the next generation of locally led empowerment in Uganda



**Development and Relief
Initiative Uganda**



The Question



The question is not only how we help people earn a living: **“It is how we help women and young people move from economic vulnerability into productive economic participation.”**

Uganda has a large and growing population of women and young people with skills, aspirations, and productive potential, yet many remain excluded from meaningful economic opportunities. The latest UBOS data show youth **unemployment at 17.9%** among people aged 15–24, rising to **21.0%** among young women. Even more strikingly, **42.6%** of young people aged 15–24 and **50.9%** of those aged 18–30 are neither in employment, education nor training. Among 18–30-year olds, the NEET rate is **57.5%** for young women, compared with **42.7%** for young men.

Women also face persistent economic disadvantage:

Unemployment among women aged 15 and above is **13.9%**, compared with **10.8%** among men, while median monthly cash earnings are estimated at **UGX 120,000** for women compared with **UGX 272,000** for men.

These numbers point to a challenge that goes beyond unemployment alone. Many young people need practical pathways connecting education and skills to networks, enterprise, finance, markets and employment. For women, including single mothers, teenage mothers, and women heading vulnerable households, economic barriers can intersect with wider social and household vulnerabilities.

What we are seeing



Women facing interconnected economic and social vulnerabilities; for many women, economic vulnerability cannot be separated from the wider realities of family and community life. Single mothers, teenage mothers, women heading vulnerable households, and women working in informal livelihoods may face limited access to productive assets, finance, skills, markets, and opportunities to grow their incomes.

At the same time, challenges such as domestic violence, SRHR concerns, inadequate menstrual hygiene and WASH, and interrupted education can reinforce vulnerability and limit women's and girls' ability to participate fully in social and economic life.

We therefore see women's empowerment as more than income generation. "It is about agency, dignity, economic opportunity, voice, and the ability to make choices about one's future".

Young people facing a difficult transition from learning to opportunity;

Uganda has invested significantly in universities, colleges, and other training institutions. Yet education and qualifications do not automatically translate into employment or productive enterprise.

Many young people enter the labour market without:

- Practical, market-relevant skills;
- Experience and mentorship;
- Business and enterprise capabilities;
- Access to finance;
- Networks and professional connections;
- Collective platforms through which they can collaborate;
- Reliable pathways into markets and employment.

For us, the challenge is therefore not simply youth unemployment.

It is the missing bridge between:

Skills → Opportunity → Productive Economic Participation

We are interested in exploring how that bridge can be built.





The Changing Context

Rapid growth and migration are changing communities

Wakiso and the wider Kampala metropolitan area are experiencing rapid population growth and significant in-migration as people move in search of employment, education, and better economic opportunities.

This creates opportunities, but also puts pressure on livelihoods, housing, water and sanitation, education, health services, and community

systems.

For vulnerable women, young people and households arriving without strong social or economic networks, the transition can increase exposure to unemployment, insecure livelihoods, social exclusion and other vulnerabilities.

This reinforces our interest in approaches that build not only individual incomes but stronger, more inclusive, and resilient local economies and communities.



Some of the challenges faced by the women and youth



SRHR & WASH



Our Lens: Empowerment Along the Whole Value Chain

We believe that supporting people to produce something or acquire a skill is only the beginning. The greater opportunity lies in helping people move along the value chain.



From Potential to Economic Opportunity

Income, agency & resilience

This is the level at which we want to think about empowerment.

A woman farmer should not necessarily remain only a producer. She can potentially become a processor, product developer, brand owner, market participant, and employer.

A young graduate should not necessarily be left alone to “start a business”. They can potentially be connected to peers, practical skills, mentors, enterprise networks, value chains, markets and opportunities for employment or business growth.





Collective Strength Matters

We believe people are more likely to progress when they are connected to strong and purposeful collective structures.

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- **These may include:**
 - Women's groups;
 - Savings and lending groups;
 - Producer organizations;
 - Cooperatives;
 - Youth networks;
 - Enterprise clusters;
 - Community structures;
 - Professional and Business Networks





Professional and business networks. The purpose is not simply to form groups.

It is to ask: **What can collective organization make possible that individuals cannot achieve alone?**

- Shared knowledge.
- Shared assets.
- Peer support.
- Negotiating power.
- Access to finance.
- Market linkages.
- Enterprise development.
- Employment opportunities.

Where Agriculture Fits

Agriculture remains an important pathway, particularly for women and rural households, but we see its potential beyond production. Our emerging thinking is to connect climate-resilient and regenerative production with value addition → product development → branding → marketing → markets → enterprise growth → employment. This is the thinking behind one emerging direction: Women-Led Climate-Resilient

Agricultural Enterprises for Sustainable Rural Livelihoods

We see this not simply as an agriculture intervention, but as a potential pathway for women to capture greater economic value from their productive activity while strengthening household and community resilience.







WHERE AGRICULTURE FITS:

Agriculture remains an important pathway, particularly for women and rural households, but we see its potential *beyond production*.



CLIMATE-RESILIENT AND REGENERATIVE PRODUCTION

- Soil health & fertility
- Water conservation
- Agro-biodiversity
- Reduced chemicals
- Resilient to climate shocks
- Higher & more stable yields

OUR EMERGING THINKING IS TO CONNECT



CLIMATE-RESILIENT AND REGENERATIVE PRODUCTION



VALUE ADDITION



PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT



BRANDING



MARKETING



MARKETS



ENTERPRISE GROWTH



EMPLOYMENT



VALUE ADDITION

Processing raw produce into higher-value products.



PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT

Developing new products that meet customer needs.



BRANDING

Building a strong identity and trust for our products.



MARKETING

Telling our story and reaching more customers through digital and other channels.



MARKETS

Connecting to reliable buyers and expanding market access.



ENTERPRISE GROWTH

Growing businesses, investing, and becoming more competitive.



EMPLOYMENT

Creating decent jobs and opportunities for more women and youth.

THIS IS THE THINKING BEHIND ONE EMERGING DIRECTION:



Women-Led Climate-Resilient Agricultural Enterprises for Sustainable Rural Livelihoods

We see this not simply as an agriculture intervention, but as a potential pathway for *women to capture greater economic value from their productive activity while strengthening household and community resilience.*

THE IMPACT WE AIM FOR



Higher incomes for women and households



Greater economic agency and decision-making power for women



More jobs and opportunities for youth



Stronger households and improved wellbeing



Resilient communities and sustainable local economies



Better able to withstand and recover from shocks



From the farm to the market, from production to prosperity – *women leading the way* to a resilient future.

Social Inclusion is part of Economic Empowerment

We do not see social inclusion as a separate programme component.

A woman cannot fully benefit from economic opportunity if she is excluded from decision-making, unsafe in her home, unable to access health and SRHR information and services, or constrained by social norms and lack of support.

Likewise, a young person cannot easily become economically productive if they lack the networks, confidence, social connections, and platforms through which opportunities become accessible.

Our thinking therefore connects:

Economic empowerment → Social inclusion → dignity → agency and → resilience.





SOCIAL INCLUSION IS PART OF ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT

People thrive when economic opportunity and social inclusion go hand in hand.

WHY SOCIAL INCLUSION MATTERS FOR WOMEN



A woman cannot fully benefit from economic opportunity if she is excluded from decision-making, unsafe in her home, unable to access health and SRHR information and services, or constrained by social norms and lack of support.



Decision-making & voice



Safety & freedom from violence



Health & SRHR services



Education & life skills



Supportive social norms & networks

When women are included, families are stronger and communities prosper.



WHY SOCIAL INCLUSION MATTERS FOR YOUNG PEOPLE



Likewise, a young person cannot easily become economically productive if they lack the networks, confidence, social connections, and platforms through which opportunities become accessible.



Networks & peer connections



Confidence & self-esteem



Mentorship & guidance



Access to information & skills



Platforms & opportunities for participation

When young people are included, their potential becomes productivity.

OUR THINKING THEREFORE CONNECTS:



ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT

Skills, assets, enterprise, income and opportunities to prosper.



SOCIAL INCLUSION

Participation, networks, support and equitable access.



DIGNITY

Recognized worth, respect and freedom from discrimination and violence.



AGENCY

The ability to make choices, influence decisions and shape one's own future.

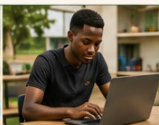


RESILIENCE

Stronger individuals, families and communities able to withstand shocks and seize opportunities.



When no one is left behind,
everyone moves forward.



Inclusive today.
Resilient tomorrow.
Prosperous together.

What DRI-Ug brings

A locally rooted, whole-value-chain perspective DRI-Ug brings experience working with women, young people, vulnerable households, and communities across different contexts in Uganda. Our strength lies in bringing together areas that are often treated separately:

- Women's empowerment
- Youth empowerment
- Livelihoods
- Agriculture & food security
- Health & SRHR
- Education & WASH
- Community resilience

But our ambition is to go beyond delivering activities in these areas.

We want to connect them: We want to understand how skills become livelihoods, how livelihoods become enterprises, how enterprises connect to markets, how markets create income, how growing enterprises create employment, and how economic opportunity contributes to more resilient households and inclusive communities.





What we are Exploring

We are interested in exploring locally grounded models of empowerment that help women and young people progress from vulnerability and underemployment towards productive economic participation.

This could involve different pathways depending on context:

We are deliberately not prescribing a single model or geography at this stage.

The opportunity is to understand the context, listen to communities and partners, and develop approaches that are both locally appropriate and economically meaningful.

We are interested in exploring locally grounded models of empowerment that help women and young people progress from vulnerability and underemployment towards productive economic participation.

THIS COULD INVOLVE DIFFERENT PATHWAYS DEPENDING ON CONTEXT:



WE ARE DELIBERATELY

**NOT PRESCRIBING
A SINGLE MODEL
OR GEOGRAPHY
AT THIS STAGE.**



We start with understanding context.



We listen to communities and partners.



We co-create solutions that are locally appropriate.



We build approaches that are economically meaningful and sustainable.



THE OPPORTUNITY IS TO UNDERSTAND, LISTEN AND CO-CREATE SOLUTIONS that unlock potential and drive lasting economic participation and resilience.



Understand context



Listen to communities and partners



Co-create locally appropriate solutions



Build economically meaningful approaches



Achieve lasting impact and resilience



**EMPOWERED PEOPLE.
STRONGER COMMUNITIES.
SUSTAINABLE FUTURES.**

The Conversation we want to have



What could the next generation of locally led women and youth empowerment look like? We are interested in partnerships that move beyond short-term participation towards capability, enterprise, market opportunity, employment and resilience. For DRI-Uganda, the question is not simply: How many people can we reach? It is: What can we help people become capable of doing, and what economic opportunities can that capability unlock? We would welcome conversations with partners

who share an interest in locally led, inclusive, and sustainable pathways to economic opportunity and resilient livelihoods. One emerging direction Women-Led Climate-Resilient Agricultural (Agri-business) Enterprises for Sustainable Rural Livelihoods An emerging area of exploration—not a predetermined project proposal.



WOMEN, YOUTH & RURAL LIVELIHOODS

From Skills and Financial Literacy to Enterprise, Markets and Economic Opportunity
DRI-Uganda's thinking and action for the generation of locally led empowerment in Uganda



Development and Relief
Initiative Uganda





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Initiative Uganda**



Kampala, Uganda
P.O. Box 35725, Kampala
Email: info@driuganda.org | dasiimwe@dri-uganda.org
Tel: +256 772 513-034 | +256 702 676-148
Web: www.dri-uganda.org

WOMEN, YOUTH & RESILIENT LIVELIHOODS



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