

January Newsletter



Editorial Note

The January newsletter brings together a set of powerful stories that show how change takes root when programmes respond to real experiences, fears, and aspirations. We see how trust, learning, and community-led action can transform lives in different ways.

In maternal and nutrition programming, we see how fear shaped by past trauma can keep life-saving services out of reach. The story of a pregnant mother identified during food assistance reminds us that technical counselling alone is not enough. By engaging trusted community leadership through the Refugee Welfare Committee, we can rebuild confidence and address misconceptions. This approach helped a pregnant mother access the care she needed, a critical turning point in her pregnancy.

Livelihood transformation emerges vividly in Barungi's journey from low-yield subsistence farming to market-oriented production. Through practical training and demonstration under the URRI project, he turned knowledge into results, improving yields, expanding land ownership, and planning for long-term household prosperity. His story highlights the power of skills and opportunity in driving economic resilience.

We also see how accessible, family-centred approaches can support the mental well-being of adolescents. EASE provides practical tools for young people and their caregivers to manage emotions, strengthen relationships, and build healthier homes.

Ikudibayo's experience demonstrates how integrated livelihood support can restore dignity, stability, and hope. From goat rearing and saving groups to mindset change and improved housing, her journey shows how economic empowerment can have a ripple effect on entire households and communities.

Finally, we hear from an emerging M&E professional about the behind-the-scenes look at how evidence is important in shaping impact. By looking beyond numbers, we can amplify community voices, inform better decisions, and strengthen programmes.

Together, these stories affirm that sustainable impact is built step by step through trust earned, skills shared, and learning embraced.

By
KATO UML
Communications officer

Community Trust as a Bridge to Care: The Vital Role of RWCs in Integrating, GFA, Nutrition and ANC Services

Compiled by
Tumuhereze Joshua
Nutrition Officer - KRC Uganda



During routine verification for General Food Assistance (GFA) at Sweswe, a pregnant woman was identified as malnourished, triggering immediate concern and follow-up by the nutrition and protection teams. Initial assessments revealed that the mother was five months pregnant and had never attended Antenatal Care (ANC) services during her present pregnancy.

When engaged, the mother explained her unwillingness to attend ANC, citing past traumatic experiences. She reported that during her previous pregnancies, she would bleed whenever she visited health facilities for ANC services, an experience that instilled fear and mistrust toward formal healthcare. Despite repeated efforts by KRC Uganda staff (Nutrition Officer) to counsel her on the importance of ANC and nutrition services for her own health and that of her unborn child, the mother initially refused referral and support.

Recognising the limitations of primary counselling in this case, the Nutrition Officer adopted a community-centred approach by engaging the Refugee Welfare Committee (RWC II). The RWC II, a trusted community leader, intervened and provided culturally sensitive counselling rooted in shared experiences, trust, and familiarity. Through patient dialogue and reassurance, the RWC II addressed the mother's fears, clarified misconceptions around ANC services, and emphasised the lifesaving importance of early and consistent maternal care.

This intervention demonstrated decisiveness. The engagement with the RWC II, the mother committed to accessing both ANC and nutrition services, marking a critical turning point in her pregnancy care journey.

This case clearly demonstrates that while technical counselling by humanitarian staff is essential, community trust structures such as RWCs play an indispensable role, especially when refugees initially refuse services due to fear, trauma, or past negative experiences. RWCs act as a bridge between service providers and the community, translating health messages into relatable terms and reinforcing confidence in available services.

The successful engagement of the malnourished pregnant mother highlights the strategic importance of RWCs in integrating nutrition and maternal health interventions. Their involvement should be systematically strengthened and prioritised, particularly in cases where refugees decline services after initial counselling. Community trust remains a powerful tool in progressing maternal and child health outcomes in humanitarian settings.

‘From Classroom to Commercial Farming: Barungi Robert John Mary’s Path to Agricultural Transformation’

Compiled by
Kiah Caroline Owak
Agronomist-URRI project



Barungi Robert John Mary, a retired headteacher from Nagingola Cell in Mubende District, found renewed purpose in farming after retirement. Although he resides in Kasambya County, he spends most of his time in Bicumu Village, Rucwamigo Parish, Hapuuyo Sub-county, where he serves as the secretary of a savings group and manages various farming activities. As a father of nine school-going children, Barungi relies on agriculture to sustain his household.

For more than ten years, he practiced mixed cropping on seven acres together with his children, relying on indigenous knowledge. However, in 2024, despite cultivating fertile land, his yields remained low. Using the broadcasting method on two acres, along with low-quality seeds and poor farming practices, he harvested only ten sacks of maize (1,400 kg) and 300 kg of beans, results that did not reflect the true potential of the land.

A turning point came in February 2025 when he joined the Uganda Refugee Resilience Initiative (URRI) project. By offering two acres as a demonstration site, Barungi gained practical skills in improved seed variety use, site selection, land preparation, correct spacing, weed management, crop rotation, and post-harvest handling. He immediately applied these practices while intercropping maize and beans with the spacing of 120cm by 60cm maize plants and beans.

The transformation was evident. His crops grew vigorously, weed control became easier, and harvesting of beans was smoother all because of the knowledge attained from URRI and proper implementation. He harvested 959 kg of beans, sold a kilo at 4500/= (4,315,500/=) and expects about 20 bags (3,000 kg) of maize once harvested. Income from bean sales enabled him to supplement the two million shillings he had saved through his group, allowing him to purchase two additional acres of land. Inspired by the results, Barungi plans to expand maize production to 4 acres this season and, within four years, diversify into 4 acres of coffee, 2 acres for fish farming, and 4 acres of bananas to secure sustainable household income and long-term prosperity.

Bridging the Mental Health Gap: How EASE Supports Emotional Well-Being



Adolescents and care givers participating in EASE sessions in Rhino camp.

Compiled
by Keneema Trashillah
EASE Officer Rhino Camp.

Mental health challenges among adolescents are increasingly recognized as a critical public health concern, especially in low-resource and humanitarian settings where access to professional mental health services is limited. Early adolescence is a sensitive developmental stage marked by emotional, social, and physical changes. Without appropriate support, many young people struggle to manage stress, sadness, anger, and everyday problems. The Early Adolescent Skills for Emotions (EASE) intervention was developed to bridge this mental health gap by providing practical, evidence-based emotional support to adolescents and their caregivers.

The Mental Health Gap in Early Adolescence

In many communities, adolescents face multiple stressors including family conflict, poverty, displacement, peer pressure, and academic challenges. Despite these realities, mental health services remain scarce, stigmatized, or inaccessible. Adolescents often lack the skills to understand and manage their emotions, while caregivers may feel ill-equipped to provide emotional support. This gap leaves many young people vulnerable to ongoing emotional distress and behavioral difficulties.

What Is EASE?

EASE is a brief, structured, group-based intervention designed by the World Health Organization to support early adolescents experiencing emotional distress. It focuses on building core emotional and problem-solving skills using simple, age-appropriate techniques. A key strength of EASE is its dual approach: it works directly with adolescents while also engaging caregivers through parallel sessions, ensuring support continues at home.

Caregiver sessions complement adolescent learning by strengthening positive parenting practices. Caregivers are supported to improve communication, practice self-care, and respond to adolescents with empathy rather than punishment. This shared learning environment reduces family conflict and creates a more supportive emotional surrounding at home.

Positive Outcomes for Adolescents and Families

One of the most impactful aspects of EASE is its accessibility. The intervention can be delivered by trained non-specialists, making it suitable for communities with limited mental health professionals. This task-sharing approach allows EASE to reach more adolescents who would otherwise receive no support, effectively narrowing the mental health service gap.

Evidence from EASE implementation shows improvements in adolescents' emotional regulation, problem-solving abilities, and overall well-being. Caregivers report better understanding of adolescent behaviour, improved relationships, and reduced stress within the household. Together, these outcomes contribute to healthier families and more resilient communities.

Bridging the mental health gap requires interventions that are practical, culturally adaptable, and family-centered. EASE responds to this need by empowering adolescents with essential emotional skills and equipping caregivers to provide consistent support. By strengthening both individual and family capacities, EASE plays a vital role in promoting emotional well-being and ensuring that adolescents are not left behind in the mental health response.

From struggle to strength: Espoir's Kulea Watoto journey



Ikudibayo shows her goat farm in Bwiriza Ndololire

Compiled by
Sharon Kauda
Nutritionist Kulea watoto

Ikudibayo, a 36-year-old single mother of five from Congo, currently residing in Bwiriza, is a testament to resilience and determination. Early 2023, she learned about the Kulea Watoto project, implemented by International Refugee Committee (IRC) and Kabarole Research Centre (KRC), through her local community leader in Bwiriza Ndololire. After an interview process, Ikudibayo was selected as a beneficiary, marking the beginning of a transformative journey.

With the goal of improving livelihoods and economic well-being, Ikudibayo participated in participatory sessions and chose goat rearing as her enterprise. She received training in livestock management, including pests and diseases control, sanitation, and hygiene amongst others. With newfound skills, she cared for her goat, which gave birth to three healthy kids. This success motivated her to expand her venture, and she now has a thriving goat farm, providing milk and income for her family.

Ikudibayo also joined a Village Savings and Loan Association (VSLA) group, where she saves and has access to loans. She bought three more goats, boosting her household income. Mindset change sessions empowered her to envision a better future, leading to improvements like replacing her tarpaulin roof with iron sheets. Her children now have a safer and more comfortable home, and she's able to provide for their needs, including education and healthcare.

Gratitude fills Ikudibayo heart for the Kulea Watoto support, which has become a stepping stone toward economic empowerment. With renewed hope, she's working toward fulfilling her household vision plan, inspiring others in her community.

Growing Into the Practice: My Journey Through M&E, MEL, MEAL, and MERL



Complied by
Ayebazibwe Trevor,
Monitoring and Evaluation Assistant.

As an upcoming Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) Professional, my day-to-day work has shown me that M&E is not just a technical function; it is a mindset that shapes how projects are planned, implemented, and improved. Understanding the progression from M&E to MEL, MEAL, and MERL has helped me make sense of my role within the current project structure and the value it adds at every stage of implementation.

What am I doing? At its core, my work focuses on Monitoring and Evaluation, tracking activities, verifying outputs, and assessing whether interventions are delivering the results that were planned. This means routinely asking practical questions: Are activities on track? Are outputs being achieved? Are we seeing the intended changes? These questions guide reporting, performance reviews, and management decisions.

Why does it matter? Because data without purpose is just noise. As my role evolves, I am increasingly engaging with Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (MEL); using monitoring data to reflect, adapt, and improve implementation in real time. Rather than waiting for endline evaluations, learning is becoming part of routine work, ensuring programs remain responsive and effective.

Who is it for? Through exposure to Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability, and Learning (MEAL) principles, I am learning that M&E is not only for donors and managers. It is also about accountability to communities, households, and farmer groups directly affected by the project. Their feedback, participation, and lived experiences are critical in shaping better decisions and ethical programming.

Where does this happen? This approach is applied across implementation contexts from household-level output monitoring to district-level planning and target setting. Whether in Lamwo, Kyegegwa, or at coordination meetings, M&E provides a common language for tracking progress and aligning stakeholders around results.

When does M&E come in? Not at the end, but throughout the project cycle. From planning and goal setting to routine monitoring, reflection meetings, and reporting, M&E is embedded in everyday operations. Learning moments often emerge during implementation, not after it.

How does this shape my growth? Looking ahead, Monitoring, Evaluation, Research, and Learning (MERL) represents the next frontier. It connects routine M&E work with research, evidence generation, and policy influence. For me, this means building skills in analysis, learning design, and research methods, so that evidence generated at the project level can inform broader programming and sector-wide conversations.

In sum, my experience as an M&E is a journey from tracking performance to enabling learning, accountability, and evidence-based decision-making. Understanding these frameworks has helped me see where I am, why my work matters, and where I am headed in the profession.

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Dear Subscribers and Esteemed Donors,
As we reflect on the strides made and the challenges overcome, we extend our deepest gratitude to you—our invaluable supporters. Your unwavering commitment and generosity have been the cornerstone of our success in driving sustainable change and improving lives in the communities we serve. Thank you for being part of our journey. Together, we are transforming lives, strengthening communities, and building a brighter future for all.

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