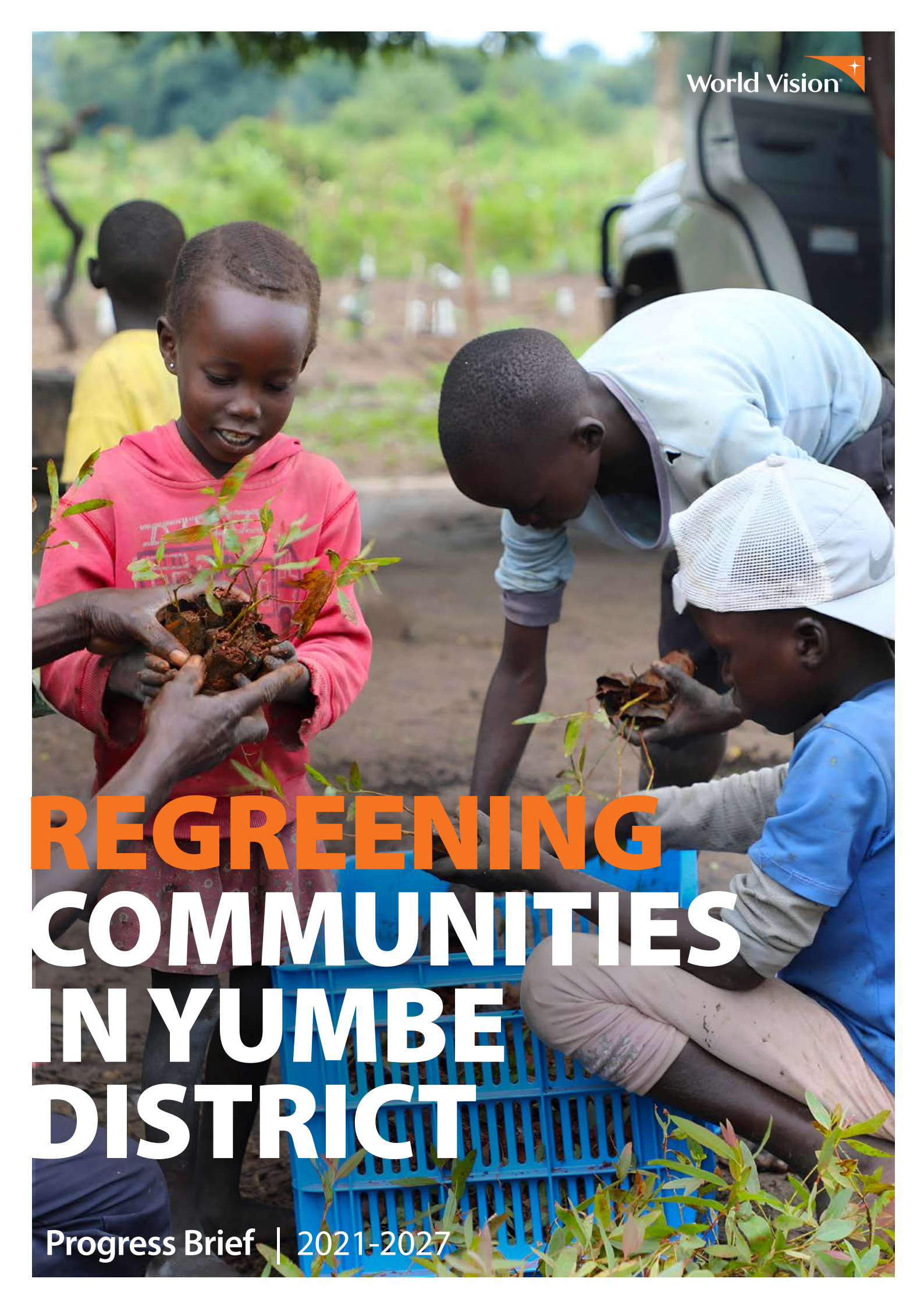


A photograph showing three children in a rural setting. A young girl in a pink hoodie is holding a small green seedling with soil. Two other children, a boy in a light blue shirt and a girl in a blue shirt and white cap, are also working with seedlings. They are surrounded by blue plastic crates filled with more seedlings. The background shows a dirt path and some greenery.

REGREENING COMMUNITIES IN YUMBE DISTRICT

Progress Brief | 2021-2027



About this report

This brief summarises the main findings from the mid-term review for World Vision's Regreening Communities in Yumbe District, or 'Regreening', project (2021-2027) in Uganda. The review and learning exercise was conducted by independent consultants WorkEdge Uganda and Dr. Sumera Jabeen between November 2023 and March 2024. For more information, please contact Steven Dunham, WVA Country Impact Manager (steven.dunham@worldvision.com.au) or Dr. Nami Kurimoto, WVA Evidence Building Advisor (nami.kurimoto@worldvision.com.au).

Regreening is supported by the Australian Government through the Australian NGO Cooperation Program (ANCP). The views expressed in this publication are the author's alone and are not necessarily the views of the Australian Government.

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Front cover photo: Children in Yumbe are helping to plant seedlings. Through Regreening, their families are being equipped with training in climate-smart agriculture to sustainably improve crop yields and overall wellbeing.





The remote Yumbe District is a very challenging operating context. Accelerating deforestation means that both refugee and host communities face food insecurity and limited livelihood opportunities.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Goal	To improve food security, livelihoods and community resilience to climate-related shocks and stresses in Yumbe, especially for the most vulnerable refugee and host community households, through inclusive individual and collective action
Timeframe	2021–2027
Location	Odravu and Ariwa sub-counties in Yumbe district, Uganda

PROJECT OVERVIEW

Yumbe district in Uganda’s West Nile Region faces significant challenges related to soil depletion, biodiversity loss, changing rainfall patterns and food insecurity. Approximately 240,000 South Sudanese refugees, constituting 25 percent of Yumbe’s population, have settled in the district since 2014. This rapid influx has heightened demand for natural resources, leading to deforestation and contributing to Uganda’s declining forest cover.

Together with partners CARE International Uganda and Catholic Relief Services, World Vision is responding to this situation through its Regreening Communities in Yumbe District project, known as ‘Regreening’. Using a new project model called Regreening Communities, this initiative

promotes landscape restoration for the purpose of improving refugee and host communities’ food security, livelihoods and resilience to environmental shocks and disasters. Regreening is supported by the Australian Government through the Australian NGO Cooperation Program (ANCP).

MID-TERM REVIEW RESULTS

To assess progress and learn more about the implementation of the new Regreening Communities model, an independent mid-term review was completed in 2024. The findings and recommendations will inform and shape remaining project years and related future programming towards greater impact.

Key findings include:

- Families practicing natural resource management reported better soil fertility.
- Raising awareness and working with local disability organisations and women’s groups promoted inclusion.
- Project priorities aligned well with government plans, enhancing collaboration.

Recommendations include:

- Scale-up Citizen Voice and Action activities to bring community members and government actors together to promote environmental restoration.
- Further enhance gender inclusion by increasing the number of trained women mentors and male role models.
- Deliver training for staff and participants on the Regreening Communities project model so they can improve and strengthen their Regreening Plans.

CONTEXT

Soil depletion, biodiversity loss, changing rainfall patterns and erosion lead to increased food insecurity and malnutrition, threatening long-term community development.¹ These challenges continue to deeply affect people in Yumbe district in Uganda's West Nile Region. The district is home to approximately 200,000 South Sudanese refugees who have sought refuge in Uganda since 2014. South Sudanese refugees represent 20 percent of Yumbe's total population.²

The large and very rapid influx of refugees has increased demand for natural resources and accelerated deforestation, contributing to a national trend that has seen Uganda's forest cover decline from over 17 percent in 1990 to 11 percent in 2020.³ Additionally, while annual emergency response funding requirements across Uganda remained steady at approximately US\$850 million each year from 2020 to 2023, the available funding declined from US\$461 million to US\$294 million during the same period.

Yumbe District is a very complex and challenging operating context. Refugee and host community populations have unique needs and development opportunities. Many refugee households do not have access to arable farmland – owned primarily by host communities – for food production and income generation. Unfortunately, food availability among refugee households has worsened in recent years because of their reliance on declining World Food Programme food rations.⁴

Many people in the district, including refugees, resort to environmentally destructive economic activities like making charcoal to survive. Moreover, while the Government of Uganda has been very accommodating (allocating small plots of land to refugees), the large refugee population in Yumbe continues to put pressure on local government services, compromising access and quality for refugees and host community members alike. Because of Yumbe's remote location, it can be hard for non-government organisations to attract and retain qualified staff to work in the district long term.



Zaitun, who is hearing impaired, is setting up her vegetables for sale at a market. The Regreening project engaged sign interpreters to ensure she and others could provide input and participate in project activities.

¹ Nuwagaba and Namateefu, 2013, [Vol 3_2_5.pdf \(scienpress.com\)](https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2214716613000555)

² UNHCR Refugee Response Portal. 2024. <https://data.unhcr.org/en/country/uga>

³ Food and Agriculture Organization of the United States. *Global Forest Resources Assessment*. 2020. <https://fra-data.fao.org/assessments/fra/2020>

⁴ Facing a funding shortfall of over 60 percent for its global needs, the World Food Programme was forced to reduce its food rations in Uganda from 70 to 30 percent in July 2023 and prioritise the most vulnerable (<https://www.wfp.org/news/wfp-prioritises-food-assistance-most-vulnerable-refugees-uganda-needs-outstrip-resources>).

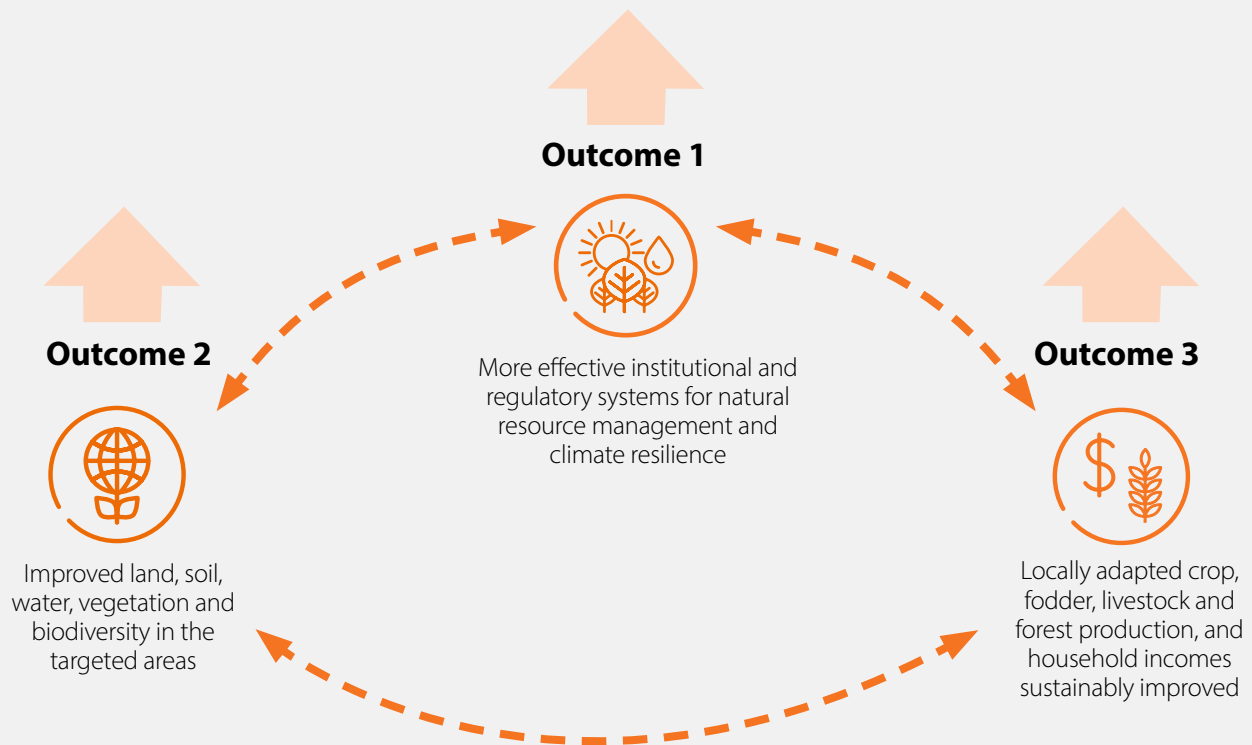
PROJECT OVERVIEW

World Vision is responding to this situation through its Regreening Communities⁵ in Yumbe District project, or 'Regreening'. Designed in 2021 and 2022 with partners CARE International Uganda and Catholic Relief Services, the project promotes landscape protection and restoration for the purpose of improving household food security,

livelihoods and community resilience to shocks and disasters. Regreening works among 40,000 South Sudanese refugees and host community members in Yumbe's Odravu and Ariwa sub-counties and is supported by the Australian Government through the Australian NGO Cooperation Program (ANCP).

THEORY OF CHANGE

Goal: To improve food security, livelihoods and community resilience to climate-related shocks and stresses in Yumbe, especially for the most vulnerable refugee and host community households, through inclusive individual and collective action.



Regreening's theory of change is simple: achieving the project goal requires three changes, each of them expressed as project outcomes. First, local authorities need to have the capacity, ability and motivation to support local natural resource management activities, enforce environmental by-laws and provide farmers with the supports they need to practice environmentally friendly farming. This, in turn, creates a more enabling environment to promote and achieve regreening and natural resource management.

However, recognising that participating households need sufficient incomes and food to thrive, it is important to, thirdly, provide them with alternative livelihood opportunities that do not put further pressure on the local environment. Once achieved, all three of these changes will result in a healthier natural environment in Yumbe, leading to improved food security for children and their families and enhanced livelihoods and community resilience to climate-related stresses.

⁵ Regreening Communities Project Model. World Vision International. 2023. <https://www.wvi.org/publications/report/climate-change/regreening-communities-project-model>

CORE PROJECT MODELS AND APPROACHES

The project relies on several carefully selected, inclusive and locally led development models and approaches to achieve its goal and outcomes. These include:

SAVINGS FOR TRANSFORMATION

The Savings for Transformation project model builds resilience for vulnerable families through the formation of self-managed savings groups of 10 to 15 people. Group members collectively save small amounts of money which accumulate and can be used for income-generating activities or to lend to one another when needs arise, such as responding to family illness, children's education or decreased income during a drought. In Regreening, this model will build financial inclusion to help increase productivity and incomes and reduce food insecurity.

CLIMATE-SMART AGRICULTURE

Climate-Smart Agriculture is an approach that helps guide the transformation of agrifood systems towards green and climate-resilient practices, contributing to children's overall wellbeing. This approach also strengthens food and nutrition security through collaborative, systems-based solutions that are best suited to the local context.

CITIZEN VOICE AND ACTION

Citizen Voice and Action is a social accountability approach that aims to improve essential services by bringing together government authorities, service providers and community

members to identify and collectively address gaps in the quality of basic social services. The utilisation of Citizen Voice and Action in Regreening aims to strengthen collaboration between the host community, refugees, local government and other representative groups to manage healthy natural environments.

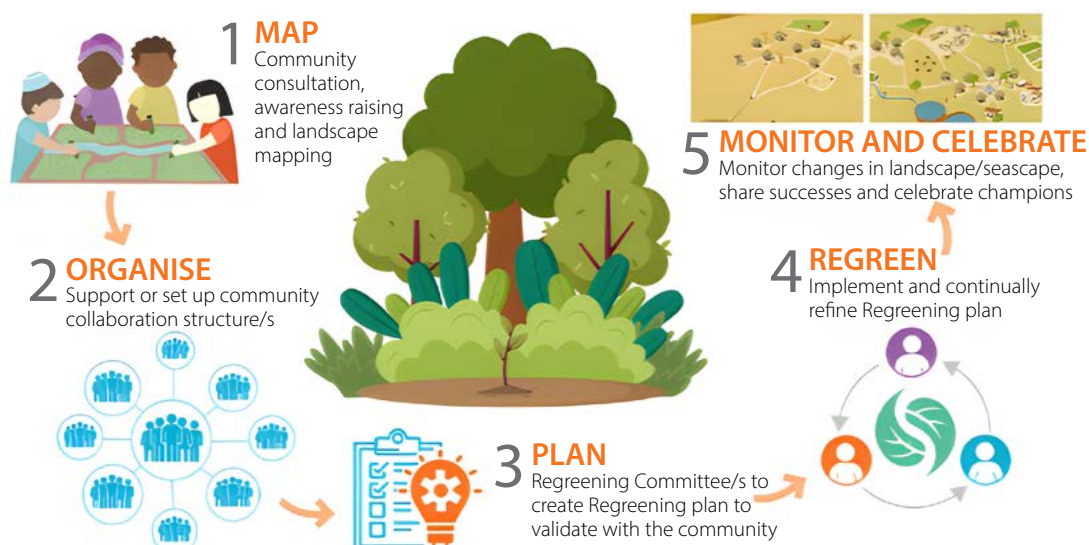
REGREENING COMMUNITIES

Regreening Communities is a relatively new inclusive and community-led environmental restoration project model which supports vulnerable communities to:

- Improve community cohesion and reduce natural resource-based conflict
- Generate a more climate-resilient landscape
- Increase agricultural productivity to improve children and families' wellbeing and income

Through Regreening Communities, target communities are guided through a participatory environmental restoration process with five critical steps, shown below. These steps are implemented sequentially by local duty bearers, shown in Figure 1. The 'Regreen' stage includes a toolbox of approaches or practices, such as Farmer Managed Natural Regeneration (FMNR), which farmers and other project stakeholders can apply in their own context.⁶ The Regreening Communities model is carefully integrated throughout this project's design and across all three outcomes. **Importantly, this project represents the first time World Vision has implemented the Regreening Communities model.**

FIGURE 1: THE FIVE PHASES OF REGREENING COMMUNITIES



⁶ Alice Muller et al, Regreening Communities Handbook. World Vision International. 2023. <https://www.wvi.org/sites/default/files/2023-05/Regreening%20Communities%20Handbook-compressed.pdf>

MID-TERM REVIEW OVERVIEW

OBJECTIVES

The review objectives included:

- Assess Regreening's progress against its overarching goal and supporting outcomes
- Document how and to what extent the project has implemented and adapted the Regreening Communities model
- Review the effectiveness of project efforts to promote gender and disability inclusion

METHODOLOGY

An independent mid-term review of Regreening was undertaken between November 2023 and March 2024 by a local consulting firm, WorkEdge, and by an independent consultant Dr. Sumera Jabeen, primarily as a learning exercise. The review was a cross-sectional study that used a mixed-methods approach for collecting data. First, quantitative data on a set of selected indicators was collected in November 2023 through household surveys, using the same tools as in the baseline assessment, before being carefully analysed. This included data from 558 participating households, with

approximately half being refugees. Qualitative data was collected next in February 2024 through 32 focus group discussions with male and female participants and 31 key informant interviews with project staff, government officials and other stakeholders. A total of 320 people (162 women and 158 men) took part in the qualitative interviews.

LIMITATIONS

Although the mid-term review's sample size remained similar to the baseline's, the way that households were approached to participate differed. The baseline study used a two-stage sampling process where villages were selected randomly from clusters before a systematic random sampling technique was used to select households for the surveys. The mid-term review, however, intentionally selected households who were participating in project activities. A possible selection bias should therefore be noted, and factors that could potentially influence the goal and outcome conditions at the time of the mid-term were considered. Additionally, the timing of the surveys for the baseline (April) and mid-term review (November) varied. It is acknowledged that seasonality and weather patterns can determine planting and can impact household food availability.



Beans are growing on a demonstration plot, established through Regreening. These plots allow farmers from both refugee and host communities in Yumbe to try out climate-smart farming techniques.

FINDINGS

The challenging context in which Regreening operates was made clear throughout the review's findings. But positive shifts were identified, signalling the valuable role that the Regreening Communities project model has played in laying the foundations for change for vulnerable families and children in Yumbe.

Food insecurity remains a significant issue for families in Yumbe

Food insecurity is a serious concern among target households in Yumbe. The extent of this issue was made apparent in the mid-term results, with 96 percent of refugee communities and 84 percent of host communities struggling with moderate or severe food insecurity at home. Declining food assistance for refugees through the World Food Programme since July 2023 was a commonly cited reason for struggles with food. For both refugee and host communities, food insecurity negatively impacted their ability to provide well for family needs. Only 16 percent of refugee communities and 39 percent of host communities reported being able to provide well for their children (aged five to 18 years). This result highlighted the heightened needs of the refugee communities compared to host communities.

The reduction in food assistance was not the sole contributor to these issues. For refugee communities, their constrained access to farmland was also mentioned as a barrier to providing well for their children. Harsh climatic conditions, which resulted in low production, were another reason for food insecurity and poverty cited by almost all categories of respondents. Changing weather patterns and rainy seasons starting early or late have negatively impacted production and reiterated the ongoing need for environmental and climate-focused interventions like Regreening.

Shared farming blocks enable refugee communities to access land for food production

In Yumbe's context of serious and persistent food insecurity, Regreening has made progress in creating an enabling environment for change. **Four out of five Regreening Committees established by the project and assessed at mid-term had commenced implementing their 'Regreening Plans'** (stage four in the Regreening Communities project model). The project has trained 960 farmers to adopt climate-smart agricultural practices, and this training was complemented by the provision of natural resource management knowledge to 853 farmers and planting materials to 2,686 farmers. Resulting tree density, vegetation and improved biodiversity are expected to enhance soil quality and farm productivity for sustained results.

Shared farming lands, or 'block farms', have been offered to farmer groups for food and income production.

Each farmer group includes two host community members and 25 refugees who work together to cultivate the otherwise unused land. Each block farm includes a central demonstration plot surrounded by individual plots for farmers to practice the new technologies they are learning. This innovative approach ensures agriculture activities benefit refugees and host community members by enabling the former to access farmland while helping both maximise and benefit from productivity.

Families practicing natural resource management report better soil fertility

During focus group discussions, participants reported that their improved knowledge and skills in climate-smart agriculture practices resulted in better soil fertility. The types of practices mentioned included avoiding bush burning, early preparation, using improved seed varieties and organic manure, mulching, crop rotation, agroforestry techniques and plant spacing. Some participants gauged soil fertility on improved production. This positive association was more apparent for those applying at least three sustainable agriculture practices. **Close to two thirds (62 percent) of respondents who used at least three sustainable agriculture practices observed better soil fertility** compared to just under one third (29 percent) of respondents who practiced less than three.

While not minimising the widely felt experience of food insecurity among respondents, the review found that **households with better soil fertility tended to be less vulnerable to food shortages**. For those participants who noticed improved soil fertility, 82 percent reported experiencing food insecurity during the previous year. However, this proportion was higher (90 percent) among participants who observed decreased soil fertility.

"Different agricultural practices like mulching and maintaining green manure have made the soil fertility improve. Also, tree planting has reduced soil erosion, thus improving soil fertility."

– Female refugee community member

“Knowledge and skills on the best agricultural practices have led to improved soil fertility because the skills are put into practice.”

– Male host community member

“This is due to water conservation methods... also good maintenance of soil through mulching, organic manure and afforestation practices.”

– Male refugee community member

Further training in Regreening Communities is needed

As part of the Regreening Communities project model, five community-led Regreening Committees have been established to work with key stakeholders to coordinate and implement their restoration plans. Because this project model is so new, the complete guidance handbook was not available until after implementation had begun. **The review identified the resulting need for both the committees and project staff to be more comprehensively trained in the Regreening Communities model.** This would enable realignment of their activities, plans and monitoring to the guidance provided in the Regreening Communities Handbook where relevant.

FACTORS FOR SUCCESS

Overall, the review identified several key success factors for the Regreening project at mid-term:

- **Aligning project priorities with government plans enhanced collaboration.** Strong alignment was seen in the government’s District Development Plan, the Local Inclusion Agenda, and the Forest Landscape Management Plan for BidiBidi settlement.
- **Working through existing structures facilitated success.** Operating alongside and through established structures, such as the Parish environment committee and local savings groups, was considered by various stakeholders to enable project success.

- **Building community capacity was considered effective.** Respondents considered the training on natural resource management and climate-smart agriculture provided through Regreening to be informative and valuable.
- **Raising awareness and partnering with local disability organisations and women’s groups promoted inclusion.** Participants in the vast majority of focus group discussions shared their positive attitudes towards women’s economic participation, which is partly a reflection of the project’s awareness-raising efforts around inclusion. Some reported the need for further training and community sensitisation on the importance and value of women earning income.

“Yes, men have reduced restrictions and strict rules they impose on women, especially when they [women] want to start a business, women are free to start businesses.”

– Female refugee community member

“Now, due to shared responsibilities among men and women, women have time and freedom of moving to attend meetings and functions.”

– Female host community member

“Women are very free to save their own incomes. At times, they are saving with more than one group. This makes them independent.”

– Male refugee community member

GENDER EQUALITY, DISABILITY AND SOCIAL INCLUSION

In alignment with World Vision's commitment to prioritising gender equality, disability and social inclusion across all programming, Regreening emphasises the participation of vulnerable and marginalised groups including women, people with disabilities and ethnic minorities. The project was found to be on track with its progress towards promoting inclusion. **Sixty-four percent of people reached by mid-term were women and ten percent were people with disabilities.**

In terms of promoting gender equality, the project has trained 67 women mentors and 45 male role models who were nominated by the community. These individuals have been equipped to champion more equally shared responsibilities and women's economic participation as well as advocate against harmful norms like gender-based violence and child marriage. Scaling up this approach was encouraged to ensure sufficient mentors and role models are present in every target village.

"Women mentors... what they do is, identify women who are undergoing violence. They get talking to them, understanding what their issues are. A woman-to-woman chat encourages them. They even speak to their spouses about issues around positive masculinity."

– Project staff member

In terms of disability inclusion, Regreening has collaborated with local organisations to raise awareness and provide assistive devices to enhance wellbeing and accessibility for participants with disabilities. One of the key areas of achievement at mid-term was the reported positive shift in attitudes towards people with disabilities. Interview and focus group respondents commented on wider community acceptance of people with disabilities and highlighted their involvement across all project activities. This attitude shift can also be attributed to the government's simultaneous inclusion efforts and the changes reflect the combined efforts across all stakeholders working in this space.

"[Participants with disabilities] encourage others to feel important as disability is not inability. They take part in every program activity so that other people with disabilities see and copy from them."

– Male focus group respondent



To increase crop yields and improve nutrition, beehives are positioned in an integrated FMNR site where Regreening participants are practicing agroforestry techniques.



Swaibu (centre) and his family members are receiving seedlings through the Regreening project to plant on their five-acre plot of land.

CASE STUDY: SWAIBU'S STORY

A RENEWED HOPE THROUGH REGREENING

Throughout his village in Yumbe, 42-year-old Swaibu is known for his charisma and friendly character. As the head of a 12-person household, including his three biological children, he is often surrounded by children.

Swaibu's story is one of hope amid great challenges. When his family were younger, he faced the impossible choice to migrate alone to Kampala in search of livelihood opportunities, though without much success. But when he returned home in 2012, his wife sadly left, and he became the sole carer to his children and other dependents. Food for the children was his immediate and urgent need, but his farming efforts failed due to climatic stress.

Swaibu was quick to join the Regreening project when it started in Yumbe in 2021. He received climate-smart agriculture training and seedlings and was offered five acres of land for planting. "I really feel very good, and my knowledge has also improved in tree growing and managing the natural ones. I see this as an opportunity to provide for my children, especially school fees," he says.

He now holds hopes for a brighter future, hopes that his children will be educated and become independent. Swaibu encourages others to participate in land restoration activities to see the benefits for themselves. "I appreciate World Vision and my hope is that this does not stop with me alone."

CONCLUSION

Regreening is making progress towards achieving its overall goal, despite not all indicators moving in the desired direction. The mid-term review found positive changes in perceptions of soil fertility and attitudes towards women's economic empowerment. The difficult operating context in Yumbe was clear – particularly for refugee households who were not experiencing improvements at the same pace or in the same ways as host communities. The implementing organisations will work to address this and other areas for improvement during the remaining project years.

World Vision's new Regreening Communities project model is central to this project's design and implementation, and therefore also a key focus of the mid-term review. One key success factor for the Regreening project was identified as its alignment with government policies and plans. Through the project's collaboration and advocacy efforts, expertise and resources can be leveraged and shared for mutually beneficial results. As highlighted in the recommendations, project participants and staff would benefit from targeted training in the Regreening Communities model so they can adjust and improve their Regreening Plans for greater impact.

Importantly, the learnings from the mid-term review and the upcoming endline evaluation on Regreening Communities will help similar projects use the model more effectively, enhancing overall impact for children and their families living in degraded natural environments.



Project representatives from World Vision Uganda, CARE Uganda and Catholic Relief Services are gathering with key media stakeholders to discuss their roles in catalysing community-led environmental initiatives.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Scale-up Citizen Voice and Action activities to bring community members and district government officials** together to promote environmental restoration.
- **Connect with and refer people with disabilities to vocational training opportunities offered by other humanitarian actors in West Nile.** This will benefit people with disabilities who cannot engage in agriculture and related income-generating activities.
- **Enhance gender inclusion by increasing the number of trained women mentors and male role models.** Provide regular follow-up and refresher training for these participants.
- **Deliver training on the Regreening Communities project model** to the Regreening Committee members, enabling them to review and improve their Regreening Plans in alignment with the model.
- **Improve coordination with the local government and among project consortium members** (World Vision Uganda, CARE and Catholic Relief Services) by convening monthly coordination meetings and undertaking quarterly joint monitoring meetings.
- **Roll out the Empowered Worldview⁷ training to all project participants**, who will cascade the training to other households and community leaders. This will help create positive mindset changes, reduce conflict, encourage sustainable natural resource use and improve community cohesion.

7 Empowered Worldview is a World Vision model for behaviour change that seeks to address dependency mindsets and promote individual empowerment among people living in poverty.



Regreening's consortium of partners – World Vision Uganda, CARE Uganda and Catholic Relief Services – are hosting a natural resource management event in Yumbe to promote collaboration around improving food and income security.

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World Vision Australia acknowledges the support of the Australian Government through the Australian NGO Cooperation Program (ANCP).



THIS MEANS THE WORLD

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