



Final evaluation of Mpanga Super Farmers Plus Program in Uganda

Final report

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Acronyms and abbreviations

CoW	Coalition of the Willing
CSO	Civil society organisation
DGD	Directorate-General for Development and Humanitarian Aid (Belgium)
FGD	Focus group discussion
FI	Farmer innovator
IdP	Iles de Paix
IFP	Integrated farm plan / planning
JESE	Joint Effort for Sustainable Environment
KRC	Kabarole Research & Resource Centre
MAEE Lux	Luxembourg Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs
MAAIF	Ministry of Agriculture, Animal Industries and Fisheries
MSF+	Mpanga Super Farmers Plus program
NCC	Nutrition Coordination Committee
NGO	Non-government organization
PELUM	Participatory Ecological Land Use Management
RAAP	Regional Agroecology Actors Platform
RCA	The Association of Rwenzori Community
SACCO	Savings and Credit Cooperative Organisation
S/C	Subcounty
SFS	Sustainable food systems
UGX	Ugandan Shillings
VHT	Village Health Team
VSLA	Village Savings and Loan Association

Executive summary

Context, objectives and methodology

In the Rwenzori region, Western Uganda, the city of Fort Portal, despite its fertile location, struggles with high malnutrition rates. The Mpanga watershed, spanning Kabarole and Kamwenge districts, is predominantly rural and agricultural, but faces issues like high population density, inadequate farming practices, and limited market opportunities, leading to natural resource degradation and low agricultural productivity.

Co-funded by the Luxembourg Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs (“MAEE Lux”) and implemented by Iles de Paix (IdP) together with two local partners (JESE and KRC), the Mpanga Super Farmers Plus (MSF+) program aimed to build a sustainable food system (SFS) and healthy environment in and around Fort Portal. The program focused on agroecological production (Result 1), post-harvest management (Result 2), coordination among food system actors (Result 3), and promoting sustainable consumption patterns (Result 4). It targeted 750 farming families and various stakeholders, including young people, women, and schoolchildren. The program, which ran from January 2022 to March 2025, underwent a final evaluation to assess its achievements, identify challenges, and propose recommendations for its next phase and future interventions.

The evaluation was jointly conducted with the mid-term evaluation of a program funded by the Belgian Directorate-General for Development Cooperation and Humanitarian Aid (DGD). It covered 3 main evaluation areas, with a view to drawing lessons for the new MAEE Lux-funded program which began in January 2025: i) the overall approaches and strategies of the project; ii) the promotion of social and citizen initiatives favourable to SFS; iii) the support to local food governance dynamics. Data was collected at different levels (beneficiary households, farmer groups, implementing and collaborating partners, IdP staff, etc.) and through different methods (focus group discussions, semi-structured interviews, direct observation and document review).

Evaluation findings

Strategies for agroecological transition and sustainable food systems

The program successfully engaged farmers in agroecological transitions through comprehensive approaches such as Integrated Farm Planning, intensive extension work, and collective marketing. However, challenges remained, including fluctuations in the production methods for organic inputs and limited availability of certain ingredients. The development of kitchen gardens significantly improved household access to diverse vegetables year-round, although the promotion of indigenous food crops still faces consumer perception and seed availability challenges. The integration of small livestock proved highly relevant, addressing farmers’ immediate needs and facilitating the adoption of agroecological practices.

Urban farming in Fort Portal attracted young people to agroecology and yielded rapid results, but initially faced high drop-out rates and some implementation difficulties. School activities in Fort Portal demonstrated significant potential to influence future consumers and producers, although the replication of agroecological practices at home is difficult to measure.

The Village Savings and Loan Associations (VSLA) approach rapidly developed a savings and loan culture, with a significant proportion of loans used for productive purposes. Marketing associations increased farmers’ bargaining power and access to diverse buyers, even if they faced challenges related to transportation, price fluctuations, and competition from middlemen. Value addition saw notable progress, particularly in maize processing in Kabambiro.

Program sustainability and impacts

The regular involvement of local government officers in extension work and joint monitoring is a significant strength of the program. In the project area, there appears to be a growing appreciation among government stakeholders for the potential and benefits of agroecology.

Government engagement however varied across districts, with Kabarole showing lower involvement compared to Kamwenge.

The VSLA+ approach encouraged collective investments, but these were often unrelated to crops or livestock. Sustainability of financial inclusion initiatives at community level will also depend on the linkages established between VSLAs and larger-scale, more structured Savings and Credit Cooperative Organisations (SACCOs), which are being developed through the DGD-funded project.

The exit strategy in Kabambiro subcounty included capacity building and equipment for the local marketing association, and support for 8 farmer innovators (FIs) to become agroecology learning centres. The maize marketing association will play a vital role in sustaining the project impact, with robust governance and year-round mill operations; it has secured several buyers, but its limited capital remains a challenge. While FIs have the necessary production means and knowledge, their long-term capacity to train and support other producers may be limited by time and financial resources.

The program contribution to transforming Fort Portal food system was notable in nutrition, food safety, and hygiene awareness. Events such as the Regional Indigenous Seed and Food Fair have raised awareness of agroecological practices in Fort Portal. However, the project should continue to build a more focused strategy, so that activities are better connected to each other between the different implementing partners. Women participation was high, with improved collaboration and decision-making at the household level, but economic empowerment requires further strengthening.

Promotion of social & citizen initiatives favourable to sustainable food systems

The MSF+ program employed various strategies to raise awareness and mobilize consumers towards responsible consumption, including radio campaigns, cooking demonstrations, and training for journalists and street food vendors. While these efforts increased awareness, their impact on changing consumer behaviours has not been measured; it appears to be limited due to challenges like competing with commercial communication, weak regulation, the lack of organic food alternatives (which the program however started to address), and a gap between knowledge and actual practices. There is also a need to clarify and narrow down target groups and develop more specific messaging.

The program's strategy to strengthen responsible consumption, focusing on healthy, certified agroecological products from local family farming, has shown some initial steps but still needs more efforts to achieve substantial impact on farming families supported under Result 1. Attempts to connect local producers with chefs and markets were initially promising, but ran into some obstacles, including consumer misconceptions and the high cost of agroecological products. School-based activities also have potential; measuring their impact in greater depth would be useful.

The sustainability of supported strategies varied, with school gardens and care groups showing strong potential, while initiatives relying on external support, like Nutrition Coordination Committees (NCCs) and the Coalition of the Willing, face funding challenges. Regarding school activities specifically, there are positive signs in terms of the program's institutional ownership, but the question of scaling up and costs will need to be addressed.

Support to territorial food governance dynamics

The project supported several coordination and consultation forums, primarily at the Fort Portal city level, but their relevance to broader project objectives varied. NCCs play a crucial role in coordinating nutrition stakeholders and planning nutrition actions; their direct engagement with agroecological transition, SFS, and sustainable environment management remains limited. The Coalition of the Willing aims to influence consumer practices and policy decisions on food-related issues in Fort Portal city. The program also supports the Regional Agroecology Actors Platform (RAAP), which was launched in October 2024. It is still too early to know whether this platform will really work.

The level of involvement of target groups in food system discussions was uneven, with farmers and consumers requiring more structured and inclusive participation opportunities.

Measures to integrate actions into broader food system transformation efforts included support for the RAAP and local government structures such as NCCs, but challenges related to resource limitations and policy enforcement persisted. The program also emphasized the need for robust research on food systems. A study on vegetable production and consumption in Fort Portal was published and informed new programming. Food laboratory analyses on milk contamination and tainted meat contributed to educate the public and led to government investigations.

Lessons learned and good practices

Small livestock integration. Integrating small animals into farms effectively initiates agroecological transitions by reducing external inputs, increasing crop yields, fostering sustainable practices, improving financial security, enhancing nutrition, and requiring minimal additional labour. Challenges include animal theft, health concerns in zero-grazing systems, and high poultry mortality rates due to diseases and poor feeding practices.

School gardening activities. Supporting thematic clubs in primary schools, including creating small vegetable gardens, has increased pupils' knowledge of healthy and nutritious food. However, limited space for gardens is a challenge. Enhanced coordination between implementing partners is also needed.

Conclusions and recommendations

The MSF+ program adopted a holistic approach to sustainable food systems, aiming to create a favourable environment for small-scale producers. While some strategies were more effective than others, the program showed promising results and flexibility. The new program, Kulya Kurungi, starting in January 2025, will build on these achievements.

The evaluation highlighted areas for improvement, including better integration of project components, a more targeted approach, and enhanced awareness-raising efforts. The program should focus more strategically on high-potential value chains and consolidate a territorial approach, involving farmers more centrally in food governance and ensuring that activities under different results are interconnected and strengthen each other (e.g. focus on food system dynamics where a direct link to farmer benefits can be created).

The concept of "food systems" needs to be more focused to avoid diluting impact. Communication about agroecological products must compete more effectively with the conventional food industry. The territorial approach in Fort Portal and the Rwenzori region should emphasize localized value chains, and this has been incorporated into the design of the new program.

Future efforts should engage farmers and farmer groups more actively in decision-making processes. Mapping territorial markets can help producer organizations monitor markets and advocate for supportive public policies, ultimately improving smallholder farmer livelihoods and diversified food systems.

The evaluation leads to the following 7 recommendations:

1. Enhance the effectiveness and adoption of agroecological inputs, such as bio-pesticides and bio-fertilizers, through a comprehensive approach that includes collaborative research, standardization and capacity building
2. Strengthen market linkages between smallholder farmers supported by the project and Fort Portal buyers (street food vendors, restaurants, etc.)
3. Build on the potential of urban farming in Fort Portal context in order to extend it to more beneficiaries, particularly young people
4. Strengthen financial support for agroecological practices by aligning efforts and enhancing awareness among key stakeholders

5. Put greater emphasis on the development of localised, high-potential value chains
6. Enhance awareness and adoption of SFS and responsible consumption through a targeted and collaborative approach (target specific messages for specific stakeholders, look for more synergies with other projects/NGOs, evaluate and refine the current intensive support model for individual schools)
7. Strengthen the participation of farmers and farmer organisations in shaping sustainable food systems.

The evaluation of the MSF+ program shows that these recommendations are well on the way to being implemented by IdP and its partners, as most of them have been incorporated into the design of the new Kulya Kurungi program.

1. Introduction

1.1. Intervention context

A land-locked country in East Africa, Uganda has a fast-growing population of 45.9 million people. The country is undergoing rapid urban expansion. This put enormous pressure on agriculture and the availability of natural resources. Agriculture contributes approximately 25% to the country's GDP, while around two thirds of the population are still directly engaged in agricultural production. Despite its agricultural potential and significant exports, Uganda's food insecurity levels remain high.

Fort Portal is a city located in Kabarole district in the Rwenzori region (western part of Uganda). It has a growing population of more than 60,000 people¹ and has significant tourist potential. Despite its geographical position in a highly fertile area, the city has some of the worst malnutrition figures in the country.

Located across the districts of Kabarole and Kamwenge, the Mpanga watershed is a predominantly rural area, with agriculture as a main livelihood. Core development issues in this region include high population density (especially on the slopes of the Rwenzori mountains), poor agricultural practices and a lack of market opportunities and alternative livelihoods. This leads to a rapid degradation of natural resources, loss of agricultural productivity and limited income from farming.

In Kabarole district, access to land is becoming scarce as the population grows rapidly. The subcounty of Kicwamba is located in the lower areas of the district, with a hilly landscape dotted with crater lakes. Kicwamba is characterised by its proximity to the city of Fort Portal, the good fertility of its soils and its strong links with the city's food system. Farming systems are heavily oriented towards cash crops, to the detriment of food crops and the nutritional security of populations. Major crops are plantain banana ("matooke"), beans, yams, sugar cane, cabbage, potato and a variety of other vegetables. Despite the significant potential for agricultural development, collective marketing and value addition are weak, notably for matooke farmers. There is a pastoral tradition in the area, so livestock farming is also present.

Located about 1.5-2 hours' drive from Fort Portal, further downstream on the Mpanga River, Kamwenge district is hilly and less densely populated. The subcounty of Kabambiro, which is part of the Kamwenge district, is representative of the problems encountered in the lower altitudes of the Mpanga river catchment, in particular the degradation of wetlands, prolonged periods of drought and loss of soil fertility (with the corollary of increased use of chemical inputs). Maize is the predominant crop, often combined with beans. Due to limited access to markets, maize and other crops fetch very low price. The area is also characterised by significant migration patterns.

1.2. Overview of Mpanga Super Farmers Plus Program

Iles de Paix (IdP) is an international development organization that supports sustainable family farming in the South and raises awareness about the need to foster an alternative global paradigm through the development of sustainable food systems (SFS). IdP started its activities in Uganda in July 2017, with a first project funded by the Belgian Directorate-General for Development Cooperation and Humanitarian Aid (DGD), the Mpanga Super Farmers program, which targeted 600 family farmers in the Mpanga watershed.

Together with two local partners, Joint Efforts to Save the Environment (JESE) and Kabarole Research & Resource Centre (KRC), IdP implemented the 3-year Mpanga Super Farmers Plus (MSF+) program, co-funded by the Luxembourg Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs

¹ Wikipedia contributors, "Fort Portal", *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*, https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Fort_Portal&oldid=1288400632 (accessed May 7, 2025)

(“MAEE Lux”). The project started in January 2022 for 3 years, and was extended for 3 months in January 2025. The objective of this project was to build a sustainable food system and healthy environment in and around Fort Portal, with activities that are complementary to the ones implemented under the new DGD-funded program (2022-2026). MSF+ program supported i) agroecological production, ii) post-harvest management and marketing, iii) coordination between local food system actors and iv) awareness raising of more sustainable consumption patterns.

Table 1. Overview of MSF+ program’s expected results and activities

Result	Activity
Result 1: The family farmers and other actors supported by the program are engaged in a transition towards agroecological production methods and sustainable management of the environment.	A1.1 Promotion of agroecology and integrated farming practices and planning at household level. A1.2 Promote urban farming among youth in Fort Portal City. A1.3 Support sustainable financing among farming families. A1.4 Support the adoption of agroecology by Sub County and District Agricultural Extension Workers. A1.5 Initiate and promote local indigenous seed banks. A1.6 Set up Participatory Action Research to address field-based challenges in order to formulate acceptable and science-based solutions.
Result 2: Targeted family farmers have set up and/or consolidated improved sustainable collection, storage, processing and marketing systems.	A2.1 Support farming families to adopt approved post-harvest handling and quality management. A2.2 Set up demonstrations and trials on improved storage methods for key crops that are cultivated in the target zones. A2.3 Facilitate formation and/or support new/existing Marketing Associations for marketing systems. A2.4 Facilitate a hub for youth agro-entrepreneurs for mentorship, business skills development, networking etc.
Result 3: The local food system is made more sustainable through local research and improved interaction and coordination among its stakeholders including local farming families.	A3.1 Facilitate multi-stakeholder processes, including local policy reforms to encourage the development of sustainable food systems. A3.2 Conduct holistic food system assessments. A3.3 Promote the availability, demand, access and consumption of indigenous/traditional food varieties.
Result 4: The citizens affected by the program are sensitized, engaged and effectively change their consumption pattern supporting the development of a more sustainable food system and improved management of the environment.	A4.1 Facilitate the local media and organise local events to have coverage on food and natural resource issues. A4.2 Promote nutritional education among selected primary schools. A4.3 Identify and empower food system champions.

The project targets the Kicwamba and Kabambiro subcounties as well as Fort Portal city (cf. map in Annex 1). Kicwamba is a new area of intervention, but it is close to Karangura subcounty, where IdP has been active since 2017, and shares some similar characteristics. IdP and its partner JESE have also been active in Kabambiro since 2017. The MSF+ program envisaged a gradual exit from this subcounty by the end of 2024.

Smallholder farmers, with a particular focus on young people and women, are the main targets of the program, which planned to support 750 farming families in the two subcounties, as well as 45 young people involved in urban agriculture. Direct beneficiaries also include agriculture extension workers in both subcounties, around one hundred young people supported in their business start-up skills, members of Nutrition Coordination Committees (NCCs) at district, city and subcounty levels, Fort Portal city authorities, more than 750 schoolchildren and their teachers, Village Health Teams (VHTs), as well as other key stakeholders in the local food system (journalists, restaurant chefs and street food vendors).

More indirectly, the project also sought to reach the citizens and consumers of the Fort Portal food system, who benefited from the project awareness-raising campaigns on local, healthy and responsible food. This represents around 160,000 people (a third of the population of the Kabarole and Kamwenge districts).

1.3. Objectives and scope of the evaluation

For efficiency and optimization of stakeholders' time, the assignment was designed as a joint evaluation for the mid-term evaluation of the DGD-funded program (implemented by IdP, Humundi and their respective partners) and the final review of MSF+ program (implemented by IdP, JESE and KRC).

As the project came to an end in December 2024, a final external evaluation was planned to account for the results achieved and draw lessons for the new 3-year program starting in January 2025, as well as other current and future interventions in the Rwenzori region. This evaluation had the following specific objectives:

- Assess the level of achievement and quality of project activities carried out and their contribution to the expected results and specific objective of MSF+ program;
- Evaluate the synergies found with the DGD-funded program (2022-2026);
- Identify the main difficulties encountered during implementation, possible improvements as well as good practices;
- Propose recommendations for the promotion of sustainable food systems in and around Fort Portal, with a view to refine and implement activities planned under the new program funded by MAEE Lux.

This evaluation covers the entire project implementation period from the beginning of 2022 until its closure and start of the new program early 2025. In terms of geographical scope, the evaluation has been conducted in both project intervention areas in Mpanga watershed, in the two districts of Kabarole and Kamwenge, as well as Fort Portal city.

The main users of this evaluation are IdP management (headquarters and country office), MSF+ program staff, implementing partners (JESE and KRC) and the donor (MAEE Lux).

2. Methodology

2.1. Evaluation criteria and key questions

The terms of reference did not explicitly refer to the standard OECD/DAC criteria of relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability and impact. There has been a deliberate choice on the part of the evaluation steering committee to focus on certain issues specific to the MSF+ program in order to learn lessons for the new phase and other projects implemented by IdP and its partners.

As this evaluation was carried out in parallel with the mid-term evaluation of the DGD-funded program, it covered some of the same themes and evaluation questions, which can be summarised as follows:

Table 2. Evaluation areas and questions

Evaluation areas	Evaluation questions
1. Overall project approaches and strategies	<p>- In what way is the support provided by IdP to various actors located in the Fort Portal region relevant to the realization of the expected results and objectives of the program?</p> <p>- How does the collaboration between IdP and its partners contribute to the transformation of Fort Portal's food system?</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How does the collaboration between IdP and their partners contribute to improving the gender mainstreaming approach and results of the program? - Regarding the new program funded by MAEE Lux and started in 2025: to what extent are the planned strategy and activities relevant? Which points of attention should be considered based on the experience from MSF+ program?
2. Focus on social and citizen dynamics favourable to SFS (Result 4)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Are the partners' strategies for raising awareness and mobilising consumers in favour of responsible consumption (radio campaigns, documentaries, cooking demonstrations, posters, etc.) relevant and effective? To what extent do the partners manage to reach the consumers? What are the different strategies that are developed and what are the results obtained? - To what extent does the strategy of the program contribute to strengthening responsible consumption (consumption of healthy products - certified agro-ecological - from local family farming)? - Does this have an impact on agroecological production, and in particular on the farming families supported under the program's Result 1? - What is the potential sustainability of the strategies/dynamics supported beyond program implementation? Are these strategies supported by organisations whose objectives and strategies include informing and defending consumers, and who will continue to do so after the program?
3. Focus on territorial governance dynamics (Result 3)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Are the stakeholders supported via the program (producers, consumers, vendors, producers' organizations, etc.) involved in discussions and decisions related to food systems in the region of intervention? - If so, what is the involvement of the target actors in the local spaces or dynamics related to the SFS? What level of participation, what diagnostic tools are used and what perspective would they like to take on the SFS issue (environment, local production, public awareness, development of local markets, etc.)? What territorial level are we talking about? - If not, how do IdP and its partners ensure that their actions related to the evaluation themes are part of a broader process of reflection on the transformation of food systems, involving all stakeholders?

2.2. Data collection methods and limitations

As much as possible, this evaluation was conducted in a participatory manner for learning purposes. The start-up meeting in Fort Portal was an opportunity to present and discuss the methodological framework and field schedule with MSF+ implementation team. During data collection, the evaluators sought the largest possible participation of all project stakeholders, for example by taking account of the different types of beneficiaries and by minimising discrimination based on gender or other socio-economic or cultural factors. This was achieved through participatory facilitation of focus groups but also through a combination of different survey methods (individual or group discussion; formal interview or through field visits). The debriefing session in Fort Portal was an opportunity to share the evaluator's initial analyses with MSF+ team, thereby providing additional information and enhancing ownership of the evaluation results.

During the field mission in the project areas, data was mainly collected through focus group discussions (FGDs) and semi-structured interviews with different categories of project beneficiaries and partners. For crosschecking purpose, this was completed by a direct observation of production, processing, marketing or food selling sites (e.g. kitchen gardens, animal housing, collective equipment for processing, street food stalls, etc.).

The choice of sites to be visited and the activities to be specifically assessed was discussed during the start-up meeting in Fort Portal. The evaluator let implementing teams arrange field

visits and meetings with beneficiaries. The main guidance provided by the evaluator in relation to the selection of the sample of sites to be visited and beneficiaries to be met was to ensure that (i) a large array of project activities can be covered within the limited time spent in each target area, and (ii) different degrees of performance can be assessed (e.g. from poor performing farmers or groups to best performing ones).

The list of persons and entities met/interviewed is provided in Annex 2. In total, the evaluator interviewed 11 project staff and 23 project partners or beneficiaries through individual or small group interviews. In addition, 5 FGDs were conducted with MSF+ partners/beneficiaries, gathering 30 participants (18 women and 12 men) from different types of groups (marketing associations, VSLAs and care groups). These figures do not include meetings and interviews with partners and beneficiaries of the DGD-funded project.

The triangulation of information was done by cross-checking the information collected at different levels (beneficiary households, farmer groups, implementing and collaborating partners, IdP staff, other development partners, etc.) and through different methods (focus group discussions, semi-structured interviews, direct observation and document review).

The method of data analysis consisted of taking the different sub-questions of each evaluation area, and for each, comparing information from different sources (field surveys and observations, interviews with the project team and other key persons, documentation).

The evaluation went very well overall. MSF+ team made every effort to enable the evaluator to maximise the time spent in the project areas. The whole staff approached the evaluation in an open and constructive manner. The main difficulty of the evaluation was to distinguish the activities relating to the project evaluated from those implemented as part of the program financed by the DGD. The field mission was also relatively short compared to the large number of sites, partners and activities involved in the project.

2.3. Work schedule

The evaluation mission started during the last week of November 2024 and involved 3 phases: an inception phase, a field mission in Uganda and a reporting phase.

The inception phase started with a desk review of the first documents made available to the evaluator, followed by the development of data collection methods. The mission in Western Uganda took place from 16 to 23 January 2025. It started with an inception briefing with MSF+ implementation team (IdP, JESE and KRC) which was an opportunity for them to present the main project activities and achievements, and for the evaluator to present the evaluation objectives and methods, identify key informants, and discuss the field visit planning.

The field mission consisted in 4.5 days of field visits (1 day in Kicwamba, 0,5 day in Kabambiro, 1 day in Fort Portal, as well as 2 days in Karangura for DGD program activities), including meetings with family farmers, marketing associations, VSLAs, urban youth and other food system stakeholders. The mission in the Rwenzori region was completed by 2 days of interviews with the project team and key partners. It ended with a debriefing session in Fort Portal with the project team. The detailed mission schedule is provided in Annex 3.

Data analysis and reporting took place in February-April 2025, and the final version of the report was shared in May 2025.

3. Evaluation findings

3.1. Overall project approaches and strategies

3.1.1. Relevance & effectiveness of strategies for agroecological transition and sustainable food systems

The project demonstrated significant success in engaging farmers and farmer groups in agroecological transitions through a comprehensive package of approaches and activities, including Integrated Farm Planning (IFP), intensive extension work, farmer innovators, Village Savings and Loan Associations (VSLA), and collective marketing. This success was built upon the partners' extensive experience gained from the previous MSF program (2017-2021). A key aspect of the program, which IdP and JESE have focused on following the lessons learnt from this first phase, is access to locally produced organic inputs, including biopesticides and manure. Among the weaknesses that remain, we note that the production methods for these inputs still fluctuate: their composition changes, the preparation process differs, and their effectiveness in the field probably does too. Some of the ingredients needed to prepare bio-concoctions are not widely available locally, limiting the preparation and use of these formulations on a larger scale. According to the producers interviewed in Kicwamba, this is the case for Mexican marigold, which is used for its insect-repellent properties.

The development of kitchen gardens (small vegetable and fruit gardens around the house) is one of the cornerstones of the project to introduce agroecological practices and encourage producers to adopt this type of farming. Although it is difficult to clearly demonstrate the impacts of the adoption of these practices on household food and nutritional security, the qualitative interviews conducted during this evaluation indicate that there are clear effects on the availability of a variety of vegetables throughout the year for beneficiary households. The promotion of indigenous food crops, such as iron-rich beans, faced consumer perception challenges, with some viewing them as "backward". Farmers also struggled with the unavailability or high cost of seeds for this kind of crop. In Kabambiro and Kicwamba, JESE supported 6 local indigenous seed banks in seed selection, production and post-harvest handling at farm level. According to JESE's latest monitoring report, this innovation has positively changed farmers' mindset about selecting and storing local seeds, particularly those that are on the verge of extinction.

The integration of small livestock into farming systems, particularly at the project's early stages, along with a co-investment approach, proved highly relevant to achieving the program's expected results. This strategy effectively addresses farmers' immediate needs and long-term plans, provides quick and tangible benefits, and facilitates the adoption of agroecological practices, primarily through the availability of on-farm manure. The livestock activities were primarily focused on enhancing food security and integrating livestock into agroecological systems, rather than generating a large marketable surplus, with products like poultry eggs being sold at the village or sub-county level. Section 4.1 highlights some of the lessons learned and the main challenges encountered in the course of this activity.

The urban farming approach demonstrated significant relevance within the context of Fort Portal city. It effectively attracted young people to agroecology, yielded rapid and tangible results, such as the accumulation of livestock and the development of sales outlets for agroecological produce, and served as an inspiring model for neighbouring households. Furthermore, KRC provided essential capacity building on business management to the youth supported by JESE, equipping them with the necessary skills to manage their urban farming ventures effectively. It should be stressed that these observations are based on a limited sample of young people met during the evaluation, who may turn out to be the most successful. More exhaustive internal monitoring, carried out in 2023, showed less conclusive results and certain difficulties in implementing the activity: a high drop-out rate among the youth supported by the project, support that did not always match their (variable) needs, doubts about the ability

of some of these young people to reinvest the earnings generated by the livestock farming activities (e.g. to restock or buy animal feed), etc.

Box 1. The rapid development of livestock farming by two young brothers from Fort Portal

In Fort Portal City, two young brothers, aged 18 and 19 in 2022, had dropped out of school and were living with their parents, who were involved in small-scale farming near the city. The brothers had a small plot of maize and raised two goats, but they did not have permanent jobs. Occasionally, they worked as casual labourers in the construction sector.

In 2022, their lives took a significant turn when they were enrolled in the Urban Youth Farming activities supported by JESE. The project provided them with training and four goats – three local breed females and one improved breed male. Through the project, the brothers participated in a Youth Field Day in Fort Portal and some learning visits organized by JESE. They learned valuable skills, such as preparing feed for pigs by mixing maize bran and water. They also became members of the Youth Urban Farmers Association, a group of 45 youths supported by JESE. This group established a Youth Savings and Loan Association, where members meet twice a month to discuss common issues like securing loans, opening bank accounts, and planning a common plot for commercial vegetable growing.

With the knowledge and resources gained from the project, the brothers expanded their goat-rearing activities. They now have about 40 goats, including 10 adult females. They feed their goats banana peels during the dry season, which they purchase with the income from selling crops like maize and cocoyam. During the rainy season, they provide cut grasses, which they get freely, though transportation remains a challenge. The brothers sell goat manure to JESE, other organizations, and farmers, and they also sell their goats for breeding and slaughter, earning a good income.

Inspired by their success with goats, the brothers ventured into pig rearing. They bought two sows and built a shelter for them. They now have about 10 adult pigs. They feed the pigs maize bran, sweet potato leaves and kitchen wastes. Additionally, they started bull fattening in 2023. They buy bulls at five months old, fatten them for a year, and then sell them at a profit. The brothers have already completed one round of bull fattening and are in their second round, having sold five bulls so far, representing sales of almost 10 million UGX (about 2,600 €). Their success has inspired others, including their own father who started raising pigs too. The brothers regularly receive visits from other youth and neighbours who come to learn about animal husbandry.

The income from their farming activities has enabled the brothers to buy several small pieces of land outside the town. Their next plan is to sell all these pieces of land to purchase a bigger plot in the countryside. There, they aim to establish an integrated farm with all their animals, grow crops, and build their own house.

The project activities in schools within Fort Portal proved to be relevant, demonstrating significant potential to influence the mindsets and habits of future consumers and, potentially, producers, thus addressing several of the project expected results at the same time. JESE targeted approximately 2,000 pupils, delivering nutrition awareness programs through farming clubs, cooking demonstrations, and debates. These efforts yielded several notable achievements, including the integration of gardening into the school curriculum and the introduction of some agroecological practices at home by children, who planted seeds and seedlings provided by the project. The level of replication of agroecological practices in the homes of schoolchildren is nevertheless difficult to measure, and would benefit from further documentation by the project.

As far as access to finance is concerned, the VSLA approach has confirmed its ability to rapidly develop a savings and loan culture within the targeted rural communities. The amounts borrowed are capped by the savings capacity of each member (which is one of the basic rules of a VSLA to limit repayment defaults). Typically, the size of a loan is around 300,000 UGX (almost 80 €), which is a respectable sum compared with average incomes in the country. Despite the incapacity of VSLAs to provide loans to all loan applicants, a significant proportion of the loans taken out by VSLA members are for productive purposes, such as the purchase of seed or livestock, the construction of animal housing, renting farmland and farm labour wages. Although the project coordination team considers that this practice is uncommon in the

context of this program, the information gathered during this evaluation indicates that there is a tendency to reinvest part of the savings accumulated by VSLAs in the previous cycle into the new cycle, rather than distributing all the savings between members and starting from scratch.

It is worth noting that KRC's support for Savings and Credit Cooperative Organisations (SACCOs) – through the DGD-funded program – has added value, especially in areas where VSLAs were previously established. SACCOs offer VSLA members advantages like increased security and bigger loans. However, sustainability concerns remain due to weak SACCO capacities and limited loan portfolios. KRC's plan for an agroecological fund could address long-term sustainability.

Box 2. Community savings initiatives that support integrated farm plans in Kirangara village

The project supported the Kirangara Joint Farmers Association, a group initiated in 2022 in Kicwamba subcounty, in developing a VSLA. The group currently has 35 members (20 women, 15 men) meeting weekly to contribute savings. The weekly savings structure has incrementally increased from 2,000 UGX to 5,000 UGX per stamp. The total savings of over 15 million UGX (around 3,900 €) in the last cycle is a testament to the group's collective effort and the project success in promoting financial discipline. Members can access loans ranging from 50,000 to 1,000,000 UGX (13 to 263 €), used for small businesses, school fees, healthcare, and agricultural investments. Most members utilize their savings according to their integrated farm plans.

The loan amounts, capped at three times an individual's savings, are sometimes insufficient to meet member needs. This limitation is exacerbated by the VSLA's inability to provide loans to all requesters, highlighting a need for increased funding or alternative financial mechanisms. Many members struggle to save regularly due to a lack of income-generating activities, and delays in loan repayment, though managed by a guarantee system, remain an issue.

Despite these challenges, the VSLA has plans to enhance its operations. Members aim to develop group-level income generating activities, such as renting chairs and tents, and aspire to transition into a Savings and Credit Cooperative Organisation (SACCO) to access more funding and offer daily savings options. According to the VSLA representatives, the project's continuous monitoring and advice have been instrumental, but it should consider providing additional grants, training, and assistance in increasing membership.

Four marketing associations were supported (3 for "matooke" / plantain banana in Kicwamba and 1 for maize in Kabambiro), focusing on collective raw material (crop) procurement, bulk sales, processing (specifically "posho" / maize flour in Kabambiro), and capacity building in post-harvest management. These efforts resulted in increased bargaining power for farmers and expanded access to diverse buyers. Some of the matooke growers we met claim that selling prices can be up to 60% higher if they sell through the association rather than to brokers at farm gate. Agroecological selling points were established by JESE in Fort Portal, with two already operational and one in progress, primarily focusing on the sale of vegetables and other fresh products.

Value addition saw notable progress compared to the previous program, with strengthened farmer capacities in maize processing in Kabambiro. The Kabambiro Farmers Marketing Association, comprising 57 members, has significantly transformed maize flour production and marketing in Kabambiro subcounty with support from IdP and JESE. Initially, local farmers faced challenges such as selling maize immediately post-harvest at low prices and later purchasing posho at high prices during food shortages. The project investment of about 30 million UGX in a maize mill has addressed these issues by enabling farmers to locally process their maize into flour, ensuring better prices. The quality of the maize flour has improved significantly, thanks to training in post-harvest management and measures to prevent aflatoxin contamination.

Marketing associations encountered challenges related to the transportation of produce from fields to main roads, price fluctuations, and competition from middlemen or brokers who purchase at farm gates. They also lack facilities to store the produce and protect it from the rain.

Whether at collective or individual farmer level, product development, including packaging and branding, as well as linkages with buyers and markets, pose challenges, particularly in obtaining marketing authorizations and certifications for products like honey and natural pesticides or fertilizers. Packaging and branding is actually an area that the new program will work on.

Box 3. Significant progress in the organisation of producers and the marketing of matooke in Kicwamba subcounty

The Kihondo Farmers Marketing Association, established in July 2024, united 150 matooke farmers to enhance market access and pricing. The association, born from the merger of several VSLAs, aims not only to aggregate production but also to foster savings among members. Project support included capacity building in matooke production and market information, as well as member mobilization and the organization of exchange visits on product processing.

Observed results include the association's ability to attract larger buyers, improved market price information, the completion of 12 bulk sales (with volumes ranging from 57 to 87 bunches), the establishment of a banana grading system, and the achievement of higher sales prices. The grading of bananas by size enabled them to fetch higher prices, averaging 14,000 UGX per bunch compared to the previous 12,000 UGX. Matooke farmers have also improved their conservation practices, reducing product losses. The association is involved in advocacy with local authorities (at subcounty level) and participated in project-organized events such as Farmer Field Days and the Indigenous Seed and Food Fair.

The main challenges faced by the association are the difficulty in mobilizing members for meetings, competition from matooke brokers (who threatens to divert members), a lack of storage and banana protection infrastructure prior to sale (leading to damage from rain or sun), and difficulties in transporting produce from fields to the main road (with farmers often carrying produce on their heads, using wheelbarrows or hiring bicycles). Future needs identified by the association include the construction of a shelter/warehouse, the acquisition of larger transportation means, district-level registration, and the establishment of a sustainable funding system. These goals require additional support and resources.

3.1.2. Involvement of government stakeholders and other sustainability aspects

Level of government engagement and ownership of project activities

While the program's Theory of Change initially positioned government stakeholders as potential obstacles to progress, it is critical to evaluate the validity of this assumption and examine the mitigation strategies employed by project partners. KRC works closely with the Nutrition Coordination Committees (NCCs), as described in the following sections. JESE highlighted the regular involvement of local government officers in extension work, encompassing both agricultural production and marketing, as a significant strength of the program. This participation, coupled with targeted training and frequent joint monitoring visits, demonstrably contributed to shifts in government extension workers' mindsets regarding agroecology. More broadly, there appears to be a growing appreciation among government stakeholders for the potential and benefits of agroecological practices, particularly following their participation in events like the Indigenous Seed and Food Fair in Fort Portal.

However, the level of engagement varies across districts. At the district level, Kabarole exhibited comparatively lower involvement from public authorities. Conversely, Kamwenge demonstrated more tangible ownership of project activities, with the District production officer actively supporting the development of a new funding for a follow-up program. This disparity underscores the need for targeted strategies to enhance government stakeholder engagement at all levels, ensuring consistent and sustained support for the program's objectives.

Sustainability of financial inclusion initiatives

The project encouraged VSLA groups to explore and implement sustainable investment strategies through the VSLA+ approach, the idea being that the members of the group try to

invest together in means of production such as goats or farmland. In practice, however, the evaluators observe that these collective investments are often directed towards potential income-generating activities unrelated to crops or livestock. The solutions proposed by VSLAs to generate income as a group - typically, the purchase of plastic chairs, tents and/or kitchen utensils to hire for ceremonies or special events - are relatively standard, not very innovative, and could involve a certain financial risk.

Sustainability of financial inclusion initiatives at community level will also depend on the development of linkages between VSLAs and larger-scale, more structured Savings and Credit Cooperative Organisations (SACCOs), which KRC supports through the DGD funding (cf. section 4.1).

Exit strategy in Kabambiro subcounty

JESE has implemented a number of measures to ensure the sustainability of its actions following the closure of the project in Kabambiro subcounty, after more than 7 years of presence in the area. The exit strategy included an audit of the local marketing association established during the first phase of the program and some additional capacity building (including on financial management) and equipment for the maize mill that the association runs.

Box 4. The Kabambiro Farmers Marketing Association, a cornerstone for the sustainability of the project's actions in the area

The association's governance seems robust, with monthly meetings that discuss critical topics like maize bulking, mill operations, and membership renewals. Decisions are made democratically through voting, and the executive board is renewed annually. The association is registered at the subcounty and district levels and aims for national registration as a cooperative, seeking external support to overcome language barriers and regulatory complexities.

The mill operates year-round, managed by a dedicated team who receive a relatively low salary for the time being, but which the association plans to supplement with a variable portion in proportion to the profits from the mill. The association has set aside funds for mill maintenance and has contacts with suppliers for repairs, ensuring technical sustainability.

The mill sources maize from surrounding communities and association members, who bulk their produce. Despite falling short of targets in 2023 and 2024 due to capital constraints and marketing challenges, the association has set an ambitious target of 20 tons for 2025. This optimism is fuelled by increased community awareness, a larger mill capacity, and potential new markets like primary schools. Marketing efforts have secured several large buyers at the district trade centre and nearby areas. Maize bran, a by-product of milling, is sold to local poultry and pig farmers, supporting animal-crop integration. The association commitment to promoting agroecological practices, such as establishing demo plots and hiring an extension worker, aligns with sustainable agricultural goals. The success of these initiatives will depend on continuous training and community engagement.

One of the primary challenges is the association's limited capital, which hampers its ability to purchase sufficient maize to meet production targets and invest in additional equipment, such as a dryer, and then obtain the Uganda National Bureau of Standards (UNBS) certification required for larger commercial markets. To overcome these challenges, the association is implementing several strategies. About 15 of the association members have joined the newly established SACCO by KRC, aiming to secure low-interest loans from financial institutions. The association's plans to expand the mill capacity and increase profitability are central to its long-term sustainability. Board members aim to raise funds through increased profits and partnerships with other development organizations. The District agriculture officer has already enrolled them in a program on climate-smart agriculture, which could provide additional support and resources.

However, several questions remain regarding the association's sustainability. For instance, how will the association manage the transition from project support to self-sufficiency, especially in terms of financial resources? Additionally, what strategies will they employ to promote their maize flour as an organic or agroecological product to capture higher market prices?

JESE also organised a 2-day training course on agroecological practices and the IFP approach for 31 extension agents from Kamwenge district. Possible strategies for the sustainability of actions after the end of the project were also discussed during this training. According to JESE, government stakeholders in Kabambiro subcounty and Kamwenge district agreed to continue monitoring program interventions for sustainability after the end of the program.

At community level, 8 farmers innovators (FIs) have been strengthened and supported with materials/inputs to become agroecology learning centres, and thus encourage farmer-to-farmer learning. At the time of this evaluation, it was too early to assess the capacity of the FIs to continue the work of training, transferring knowledge and supporting other local producers. A visit to one of these FIs (a woman) shows that the agroecological production infrastructure is in place (e.g. a goat shed with a manure recovery system, tree hedges around the plot, a compost pit, fodder crops, etc.), that these FIs have considerable knowledge of agroecology and, above all, are putting it into practice, all within the farming communities themselves. What they may lack in the future to fulfil their role as a learning centre are the time and financial resources to host groups of farmers.

3.1.3. Contribution of actions to the transformation of Fort Portal's food system

The collaboration between IdP, JESE and KRC, while contributing to certain aspects of Fort Portal's food system transformation, lacks a cohesive common strategy, hindering the realization of greater synergies. The high volume and diversity of activities, particularly under Result 3 and Result 4, often appear disconnected from each other and from the two other project results. The connection between JESE's work in rural Kabarole communities and the Fort Portal food system remains unclear.

Nevertheless, the project activities have yielded gains in nutrition, food safety, and hygiene awareness among various stakeholders in both urban and rural settings in and around Fort Portal. Improved hygienic practices in public markets, street food vending places, and public eating places have been observed. As part of a co-financing agreement with the city, the MSFP+ program supported the renovation of an abattoir. Stakeholders along the food handling chain have enhanced their knowledge of food safety and quality improvement measures. Food vendors and chefs are increasingly aware of nutritious food, potentially creating new market opportunities for farmers around Fort Portal. For example, street food vendors are starting to incorporate more local and nutritious foods, such as cabbage, into their offerings.

Events such as the Regional Indigenous Seed and Food Fair, led by JESE, and youth open days have raised awareness of agroecological practices in Fort Portal. These events covered a wide range of learning topics, including agroecological product development, bio-pesticide standardization, and social media marketing.

However, challenges persist. Acquiring knowledge does not automatically translate into changed practices, and there is limited evidence of the program influencing consumer demand. While sensitization on nutrition and food safety can stimulate demand for diverse, organic, and agroecological products, the above results on hygiene and food safety do not always directly align with the core objective of MSF+ program, which aimed to create an enabling environment for agroecological farming systems.

The "transformation" focus in Fort Portal, under Result 3, is primarily centred on nutritious and safe food, targeting food vendors, consumers (e.g. pupils and parents), and youth producers. However, there is not enough emphasis on environment-friendly and fair-price consumption, and there are only limited linkages with Result 1 and Result 2 activities. The street vendors supported by KRC could certainly source more ingredients from producers benefiting from activities under Results 1&2, which is what the new program will endeavour to do.

3.1.4. Contribution of actions to the strengthening of women participation in the management of sustainable food systems

Gender considerations are integrated transversally across program actions, impacting all four expected results. Notably, women participation in various program activities has so far been high to very high. Interviews indicate that women perceive their voices as being better heard due to their involvement in project activities, leading to improved collaboration and shared decision-making with husbands at the household level, and stronger participation in community-level group activities. However, despite project efforts, gaps persist in the economic empowerment of women, particularly in income-generating activities like poultry development. These activities require further strengthening to ensure women economic advancement.

There have been positive outcomes in women inclusion, self-esteem, and leadership skills through VSLA and various Result 1 activities and approaches, such as IFP and farmer innovators: at the family level, the IFP approach promotes the participation of different household members - including women and youth - in the planning process, which enables to take into account the wishes, assets and capacities of each household member, and to assign tasks accordingly; at the community level, the project gave women a platform to take leadership positions within their VSLAs as chairpersons, treasurers and responsibility holders in different capacities (approximately 70% of VSLA are led by women, according to JESE).

KRC's "orugali" initiative, which facilitates discussions among women about food preparation and sourcing through cooking demonstrations, effectively highlights women's knowledge and know-how. Care groups have emerged as another avenue for improving women's skills and empowerment: in Kicwamba, some fifteen women leaders were trained by KRC using a training of trainers approach, on subjects such as breastfeeding, Mid-Upper Arm Circumference (MUAC) measurement, nutritious kitchen gardening, etc. However, clearer linkages with existing activities from JESE, including common geographical targeting, are needed to maximize their impact.

3.2. Promotion of social & citizen initiatives favourable to sustainable food systems

3.2.1. Relevance & effectiveness of strategies for raising awareness and mobilizing consumers

The partners have employed a range of strategies to raise awareness on healthy/nutritious food and mobilize consumers in favour of responsible consumption, including radio campaigns, documentaries, cooking demonstrations, and posters. However, the efficacy of these strategies in competing with commercial communication for conventional food remains a significant challenge. KRC's Food systems team has developed both direct and indirect strategies, encompassing capacity building for the Nutrition Coordination Committees (NCCs), regular training for 30 journalists on nutrition and food safety, nutritional education initiatives in selected primary schools, as well as awareness-raising and training for street food vendors, care groups, and Village Health Teams (VHTs). Additional strategies include radio talk shows, online TV shows, community barazas², as well as policy briefs and press conferences to disseminate results.

Journalists equipped with knowledge on nutrition and food safety are intended to continually relay information through various media channels. Radio talk shows, particularly those on KRC radio, have been cited as effective by stakeholders, although more regular programming is desired. Sensitization of local and cultural leaders, respected figures in their communities, is also employed to disseminate messages to consumers, leveraging their influential role in

² Community dialogue platforms that engage the local population and their leaders on matters of service delivery.

shaping attitudes and behaviours. The indigenous seed and food fair in Fort Portal has contributed to increased consumer awareness of nutritious food and diet diversity.

However, there is a need to clarify and narrow down target groups and develop more specific messaging, such as focusing on organic vegetables or highlighting pesticide contamination of food, leveraging KRC's food analysis laboratory. The extent to which these strategies have resulted in significant changes in consumer behaviours and practices is not yet measured. Observations from project staff suggest a gap between knowledge and practices, potentially due to the lack of available alternatives³, such as organic food, or inadequate policies, including weak regulation of the food industry and low enforcement of agrochemical regulations.

Interviews with street food vendors indicate that they try to put into practice most of the hygiene measures recommended by the project, but are limited in some cases by constraints that are beyond their control, such as the lack of public bins for peelings and leftovers or the absence of a water point for washing hands. Although they use more vegetables than before, they are not fully aware of where they come from or whether or not they have been treated with agrochemicals.

In rural areas where IdP and its partners operate, producers are also primary consumers, underscoring the importance of raising their awareness about nutritious food, hygiene, and food utilization. Similarly, city dwellers involved in small-scale agricultural production require targeted messaging on responsible consumption. A more thorough assessment is needed to determine the effectiveness of these messages in reaching these specific consumer groups.

3.2.2. Impact of awareness strategy on agroecology production and responsible consumption

First of all, it should be borne in mind that the impact of awareness-raising initiatives on changes in food production and consumption systems is generally difficult to measure, and that these are long-term processes (beyond the duration of a 3-year project), hence the importance of a second phase through the Kulya Kurungi program. The program's strategy to strengthen responsible consumption, focusing on healthy, certified agroecological products from local family farming, has shown some initial steps but faces significant challenges in achieving substantial impact on agroecological production and farming families supported under Result 1, especially the ones in rural areas around Fort Portal. KRC and JESE have attempted to connect chefs from the Chef alliance with local producers for direct supply of organic products, such as vegetables and chicken. However, more concerted efforts are necessary to translate these connections into tangible gains, such as youth-supplied restaurants or local farmers supplying Fort Portal markets.

According to the advocacy group Coalition of the Willing (cf. section 3.2.3), some achievements include the introduction of local food menus in select restaurants, the establishment of two organic food stalls in Fort Portal's local markets, and improved practices among school feeding caterers, such as reduced fried food offerings. Despite these advancements, it is currently unlikely that these initiatives have significantly impacted the farming households supported under Result 1.

The program's school-based activities, which mainly aim at raising awareness of healthy eating and the environment, can positively influence household consumption choices through schoolchildren. However, their impact has not been adequately measured, and there is limited evidence to support their effectiveness. While the dissemination of nutritious crop seeds and seedlings through schools is valuable, it is important to recognize that agroecology encompasses more than simply planting.

³ In the new MAEE Lux program (Kulya Kurungi), a specific focus is set on the production of organic alternatives of the most consumed vegetables.

Significant challenges hinder the program progress. Persistent misconceptions among consumers, such as the belief that chemically sprayed vegetables have a longer shelf life and that local foods like yam are associated with poverty, impede the adoption of responsible consumption practices. An interview with one of the chefs in Fort Portal revealed that he was very willing to incorporate organic and locally produced food into his menus, but that customer demand for local dishes and products had so far been limited. Marketing agroecological products remains a key obstacle, as most consumers cannot afford or often exhibit reluctance to pay a premium for organic or agroecological items.

There is, however, local potential for the development of this organic value chain: a recent survey on vegetable production and consumption in and around Fort Portal revealed that about a quarter of consumers were willing to pay more for organically produced vegetables. According to one of the youth trained by JESE in agroecological production and supported in her business of selling vegetables directly from a local stall on the city outskirts, customers can quickly change their buying habits if they see a difference in the products they buy and the agroecological production approach is explained to them. In her case, she manages to sell vegetables such as cabbage, spinach, potatoes and amaranth for 25 to 40% more than conventional vegetables. And she has considerably increased her number of customers. IdP and its partners have clearly understood this opportunity: in the new program, they will be giving priority to educating consumers about the health and environmental benefits of organic and sustainably produced vegetables.

3.2.3. Sustainability of the strategies supported beyond program implementation

The potential sustainability of the program's supported strategies and dynamics varies across different initiatives. For instance, school gardens face challenges due to extended holiday periods, which disrupt continuity and make restarting activities difficult. But it should be stressed that the Ministry of Education is increasingly instructing that schools should host thematic clubs on gardening/agriculture, which is a positive sign in terms of the program's institutional ownership and sustainability. In the same way, care groups and VHTs benefit from being a model promoted by the Ministry of Health and are well-embedded within communities, enhancing their long-term viability.

Strategies aimed at fostering adherence and adoption of better food safety and nutrition practices among economic operators and consumers rely on Nutrition coordination committees (NCCs). These permanent institutions, partly composed of local government agents, possess limited financial resources and depend on external support, such as from KRC, for routine operations. While NCCs gather diverse local government departments and expertise, their primary focus is on coordinating nutrition stakeholders and supervising awareness actions, rather than actively defending and informing consumers.

KRC has also collaborated with the Coalition of the Willing, a consumer advocacy group initiated in 2013. This group, comprising representatives from various food sector stakeholders, including food ambassadors⁴, street food vendors, market vendors, restaurants, farmers, meat and dairy value chain actors, media, and teachers/schools, actively supports the program's consumer awareness strategies. Some of its members have benefited from KRC's capacity-building activities. However, the Coalition lacks permanent funding sources, and its activity level is highly dependent on external support. Furthermore, its limited visibility among IdP and other project partners beyond KRC raises concerns about the potential for them to take over and sustain project activities.

As a conclusion, while certain strategies, such as thematic clubs in schools, care groups and VHTs, exhibit strong sustainability potential, others, like initiatives reliant on NCCs and the Coalition of the Willing, face challenges related to funding and institutional support. As far as

⁴ Leaders identified to influence behaviour change of their communities towards healthy diets.

support for schools is concerned, the question of scaling up and costs will need to be addressed in order to better define the activities of the next program, as it is certain that the project partners will not be able to cover a large number of schools with the current intensive approach and tools. Lessons could be learned from IdP programmes in other countries, including Belgium.

3.3. Support to territorial food governance dynamics

3.3.1. Existence of consultation forums and dynamics supported by the project, and their relevance to the project objectives

The project supported several consultation forums and dynamics, primarily at the Fort Portal city level, aimed at enhancing stakeholder interaction and promoting sustainable food systems. Result 3 of the program emphasizes increasing awareness and improving interaction among diverse stakeholders, including family farmers, food vendors, restaurants, civil society organizations, local government committees, and consumers.

Nutrition Coordination Committees (NCCs) are a key component of this strategy, according to KRC. Kabarole district boasts the only operational NCC in Uganda with a nutrition action plan, along with 15 sub-county level NCCs and one city-level NCC. These committees play a crucial role in coordinating nutrition stakeholders and planning nutrition actions. Membership encompasses representatives from all local government departments, the business sector, religious and cultural leaders, academia, and the media. NCCs influence budget development processes at various levels (district, city and sub-county) and focus on nutrition and public awareness, addressing issues like food handling, hygiene, and cultural barriers to breastfeeding. They also promote locally produced food through initiatives like the “orugali” program (which was initially developed by KRC to profile and broadcast local traditional foods and recipes). However, their direct engagement with agroecological transition, sustainable food systems, and sustainable environment management remains limited. While they bridge gaps between local government departments and communities, they operate with limited budgets and resources.

The Coalition of the Willing (CoW), a multi-stakeholder platform focused on Fort Portal city, aims to influence consumer practices and policy decisions on food-related issues. Members meet quarterly and develop annual plans. Members of the CoW have also been involved in the Fort Portal Food System Lab, an initiative supported by the EU-funded HealthyFoodAfrica project (currently closing), which adopts a multi-stakeholder approach to address bottlenecks in the supply of healthy and safe foods. KRC’s work with the informal food sector, especially street food vendors, involves supporting associations, liaising with local councils, developing improved stall prototypes, providing training on food handling and hygiene, and conducting joint monitoring and inspections with urban authorities.

The Regional Agroecology Actors Platform (RAAP), comprising 11 members⁵ from NGOs, CSOs, universities, and farmer unions, aims to increase awareness of agroecology and advocate for its integration into public policies. The program initiated this platform, which was officially launched in October 2024. This was done with the support of PELUM Uganda⁶, with the ambition to set up decentralised working groups. The RAAP supported the 2024 Indigenous Seed and Food Fair. One of its planned activities is to generate evidence through demonstration farms (using funding other than that of the MSF+ program). Meetings between members of the platform have so far been irregular. It is still too early to know whether this

⁵ Decentralized agricultural services are not members of RAAP but usually take part in meetings.

⁶ Participatory Ecological Land Use Management (PELUM) Association is a regional network of over 250 civil society organizations in 12 countries in East, Central and Southern Africa. PELUM works to improve the livelihoods of small-scale farmers and the sustainability of farming communities, by fostering ecological land use management. PELUM Uganda partners with IdP, JESE and KRC under the DGD-funded program.

platform will really work, which will depend above all on the determination of its members to make it a relevant platform for the transformation of food systems in the region.

While these consultation forums and dynamics contribute to stakeholder engagement and awareness, their relevance to the program's broader objectives, particularly regarding agroecological transition and sustainable environment management, varies. NCCs are very relevant to awareness raising and policy advocacy on nutrition, hygiene and food safety. Because of its history, composition and roots in Fort Portal, the CoW is well placed to influence consumers and the various entrepreneurs in the city's food sector, especially street food vendors. The RAAP would be particularly relevant for coordinating actions and efforts in the field of agroecological production, including the question of input supply.

3.3.2. Level of involvement of target groups in discussions and decisions related to food systems

The level of involvement of target groups in discussions and decisions related to food systems varies across different stakeholders. Farmers and farmer groups have likely experienced a strengthening of their position at the sub-county level, and have established more equitable linkages with certain food system stakeholders, such as traders, at higher levels. Marketing associations serve as an initial step for grassroots producers to voice their concerns and interests. However, a significant gap remains in the absence of a dedicated forum at the district or Rwenzori level for farmers to directly influence decision-making and promote their agroecological practices and products.

Consumers are represented through their involvement in the Coalition of the Willing. However, the representativeness of this body and its ability to accurately reflect the diverse interests of different consumer categories - urban/rural, young/old, women/men, rich/poor - are difficult to assess.

Food vendors are well-represented through the Street Food Vendors Association, which has been specifically targeted and supported by KRC. The Chef Alliance, comprising some 90 chefs from about 30 restaurants, also provides a platform for food vendors to engage in food system discussions.

Civil society organizations and platforms play a role through their representation in NCCs, potentially influencing local food policies through the NCCs' action plans. The Coalition of the Willing also includes representatives from ten different types of civil society actors, broadening the scope of stakeholder engagement.

While these various platforms and associations facilitate some level of target group involvement, a more structured and inclusive approach is needed to ensure that all stakeholders, particularly farmers and consumers, have meaningful opportunities to participate in discussions and decisions related to food systems. The creation of dedicated forums at higher territorial levels, coupled with efforts to enhance the representativeness of existing platforms, would contribute to a more equitable and participatory food system.

3.3.3. Measures taken by the project partners to integrate their actions into a broader reflection on the transformation of food systems

To achieve Result 3, and make local food systems more sustainable, the project partners were expected to facilitate multi-stakeholder processes, including local policy reforms, and to carry out studies to better understand these food systems.

Coordination efforts on agroecology have been pursued through the Regional Agroecology Actors Platform. However, the platform consolidation faces challenges related to resource and funding limitations for arranging meetings. JESE, in collaboration with PELUM Uganda, has supported the RAAP by developing the platform's charter and establishing linkages with the Ministry of Agriculture, Animal Industry and Fisheries (MAAIF).

Support for local government structures and existing NCCs has been a key strategy. KRC has aimed to strengthen good governance at the NCC level by providing financial support for meetings and assisting in the preparation of quarterly nutrition status reports. Partners have participated in strategic planning on nutrition issues, leading to achievements such as improved hygiene and food safety in local markets and retail outlets. The development of a food safety ordinance in Fort Portal city and Kabarole district provides a legal framework for food safety. Some of the committees are already managing to meet the budget standard set, which is to devote at least 2% of the local council's budget to nutrition and food safety. However, challenges persist, including a lack of means to enforce local policies and regulations through regular monitoring. NCCs also rely heavily on KRC and external expertise on nutrition and face fundraising challenges.

Regarding the scientific or evidence base for action planning on sustainable food systems, the program document emphasizes the need for robust research on the food system and its dynamics, coupled with the dissemination of accessible knowledge to local stakeholders. KRC has contributed in November 2024 by publishing a study on vegetable production and consumption in Fort Portal, which has informed new programming by IdP and partners. The Kabarole district NCC has also mentioned two series of food laboratory analyses supported by KRC, focusing on milk contamination and tainted meat sold in retail outlets. According to the project annual report 2023, the results were used to educate the general public (with an important role for journalists also supported under the program) and assign responsibility to stakeholders in the value chains concerned. As a result, the central government sent a delegation to Fort Portal to investigate reported breaches of standards in dairy products and hold consultations with producers and distributors of these products.

These measures demonstrate a desire to integrate actions into broader efforts to transform the food system in Fort Portal area. Strengthening the RAAP, ensuring the financial and operational independence of NCCs, and consistently generating and disseminating relevant research are crucial steps in supporting the dynamics of food governance at this territorial level.

4. Lessons learned and good practices

4.1. Small livestock integration

The project has shown that integrating small animals into farms is a good way of initiating an agroecological transition in a new area. A study conducted by IdP to assess the lessons learned from livestock integration revealed five significant benefits. Firstly, it reduces the need for external inputs while simultaneously increasing crop yields, largely through the use of manure and urine-based concoctions for pest control. Secondly, the integration fosters crop co-benefits, encouraging the adoption of sustainable farming practices, such as using fodder crops to mitigate soil erosion, enhance soil fertility, and repel pests, while crop residues serve as valuable animal fodder. Thirdly, it improves financial resources and security, as small livestock acts as a buffer against financial hardships and enables investment cycles. Fourthly, it has the potential to enhance nutrition by providing readily available animal proteins at the household level and boosting vegetable production through manure application. Finally, it requires minimal or no additional labour, making it a practical and efficient addition to existing farming practices, particularly for women, who not only manage the livestock activity in many cases, but also have greater control over the products and income derived from it.

However, several challenges emerged during the implementation of the livestock integration component. Notably, there is an increased risk of animal theft, which has already affected project beneficiaries. Concerns are also raised about animal health in zero-grazing systems in the long term, particularly if farmers seek to expand their flocks or herds, given the limited space around their homes, which could lead to overcrowding and disease outbreaks, as highlighted in the capitalization report commissioned by IdP. In Kicwamba, high poultry

mortality rates were reported, likely due to coccidiosis and avian flu, and beneficiaries still struggle to restock. According to project staff, these mortalities are likely exacerbated by poor feeding practices, particularly due to rising maize bran prices and a lack of alternative protein sources.

4.2. School gardening activities

Support for thematic clubs in primary schools includes the creation of small school vegetable gardens, debates and poetry competitions. According to project staff, this activity has helped to increase pupils' knowledge of healthy, balanced and nutritious food. School gardens help stimulate learning.

While there was some cross-learning between implementing partners, JESE and KRC, and exchange visits to targeted schools, there is a clear need for enhanced joined-up thinking, to determine the most relevant and effective approaches for school gardening goals. A key challenge identified was the limited space available for developing school gardens. Consequently, exploring the feasibility of implementing vertical gardening systems could be a valuable strategy to overcome this obstacle and maximize the project impact within school environments.

5. Conclusions and recommendations

5.1. Overall assessment

By adopting a holistic approach, that of sustainable food systems, the program aimed to create a favourable environment for the small-scale producers supported by IdP and its partners. It should be emphasised that this is a new approach for IdP in this country, but that KRC had already been experimenting with it for several years in the Fort Portal area.

Some strategies and activities have worked better than others, and IdP and its partners have shown a good degree of flexibility in conducting activities to try to focus their efforts on those that work best. This first program based on the sustainable food systems approach is showing promising results, which will benefit from being consolidated in the new program (Kulya Kurungi) starting in January 2025.

The objective of linking the demand created by the numerous awareness-raising campaigns and actions, on the one hand, and the farming families supported by the project in the rural areas around the city, on the other, was only partially achieved and requires continued efforts. The evaluation highlights areas for improvement, particularly with regard to the integration of the various project components, the need for a more targeted approach and the challenges associated with raising awareness of sustainable food systems. It also highlights the importance of consolidating a territorial approach, involving farmers more centrally in the food governance dynamic, and ensuring that activities under different results are interconnected and strengthen each other (e.g. focus on food system dynamics where a direct link to farmer benefits can be created).

Integration of project components

Some of the project components, including farm inputs, market linkages, urban farming, and access to finance, present opportunities for enhanced collaboration and synergy among partners and with other stakeholders. Production challenges, such as bio-pesticide effectiveness, require collaborative solutions. Market linkages between farmers and Fort Portal buyers need strengthening. The high potential of urban farming can be further realized through research and evidence generation. Access to finance initiatives by KRC can be optimized by focusing on targeted support within IdP's operational areas and developing agroecology-specific financing tools.

Program effectiveness and efficiency

The evaluation identified an opportunity for greater focus and strategic prioritization within the program. While exploring diverse strategies has been beneficial, the complexity of food systems demands a more targeted approach. The program's core strengths in supporting sustainable productive and commercial dynamics (Result 1 and Result 2), coupled with its finance component, should be more effectively integrated with other project results. Moreover, building upon existing capacity-building efforts by strategically developing high-potential value chains will amplify the program's overall impact. This observation has been incorporated into the design of the new project, which will run for the next 3 years: Kulya Kurungi is focusing on vegetables that are in high demand and currently known to be produced mainly using (uncontrolled) chemical products.

Awareness on SFS and responsible consumption

The evaluation of this component of the project highlights two points for attention: i) the "food system" concept risks becoming too broad, diluting focus and impact on specific stakeholders; ii) agroecological food product communication struggles against the conventional food industry's dominant presence in shared media channels. While the program has made initial attempts to strengthen responsible consumption, a more targeted and strategic approach is needed to achieve a meaningful impact on agroecological production and the livelihoods of

farming families. For KRC Food systems team, it means having more intensive work, more focused, with a smaller number of stakeholders, target groups and beneficiaries.

Territorial approach consolidation

The territorial approach, particularly in Fort Portal and the broader Rwenzori region, presents a valuable framework for addressing food system challenges. However, its effectiveness could be significantly enhanced through a more integrated implementation strategy. This could be achieved by placing greater emphasis on the development of localised value chains, which is what Kulya Kurungi program plans to do.

The MSF+ program has fostered various food governance dynamics, each with its own relevance to the transformation of food systems and with interesting potential for the future. However, it has insufficiently engaged farmers and farmer groups, the core of the agroecological transition, so that they can be united and play a representative role in the food system dynamics and the related decision making.

Several studies carried out by KRC as part of the project or prior to it have enabled to gain a better understanding of the food systems in the Fort Portal region, particularly with regard to the vegetable value chains. A more comprehensive understanding of territorial market dynamics, crucial for smallholder farmer livelihoods and diversified food systems, could nevertheless be useful. Mapping territorial markets can assist producer organizations in better monitoring the markets where they work and advocating for public policies supporting these markets as primary outlets for small-scale farmers. It also serves to support members of producer organizations in productivity improvement, production planning and marketing strategies⁷.

5.2. Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusions of this evaluation, the key recommendations are outlined below. Most of these recommendations aim both at ensuring the sustainability of MSF+ program's achievements and improving the new program started in 2025. Their level of priority is indicated, from very high to medium. The entity responsible for each recommendation ("lead partner") is clearly identified. The "associated pathways" aim to explain the general recommendations and indicate the more concrete actions or approaches to be implemented.

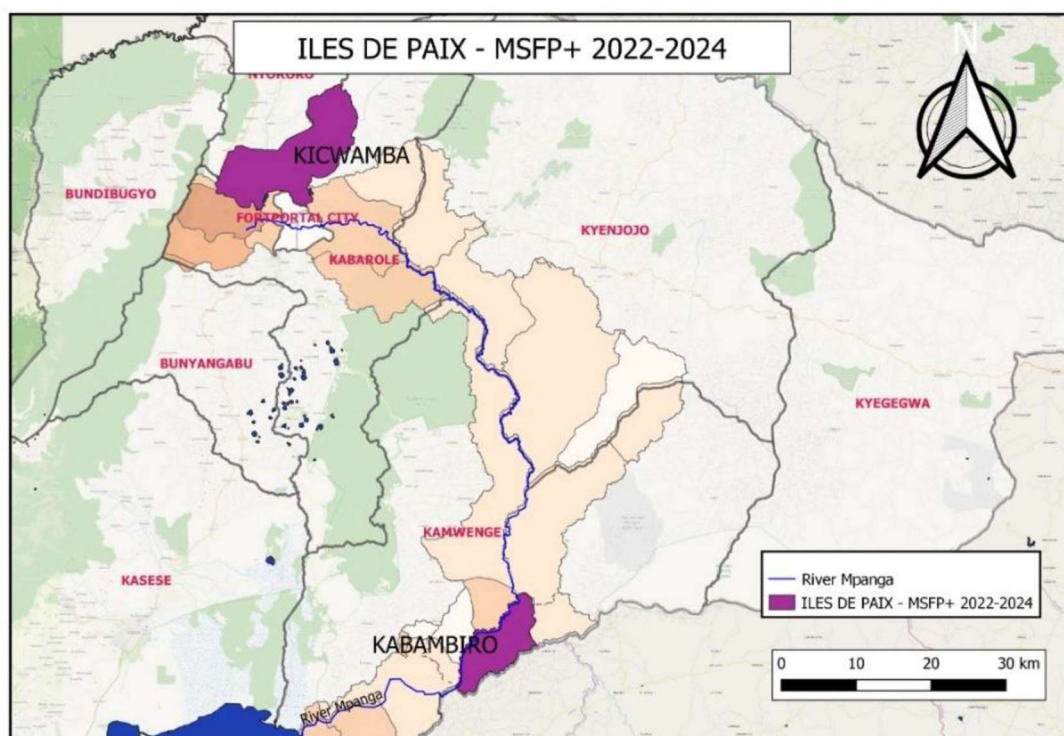
The critical thinking with which IdP and its partners analyse their actions and the progress made is to be commended. The new directions taken by Kulya Kurungi program testify to this. Most of the recommendations below have already been incorporated into the design of this new project, and are therefore well on the way to being addressed.

⁷ FAO, 2023. Mapping of territorial markets - Methodology and guidelines for participatory data collection. Third edition. Rome. <https://doi.org/10.4060/cb9484en>

Main recommendations		Associated pathways	Lead partner	Priority
1	Enhance the effectiveness and adoption of agroecological inputs , such as bio-pesticides and bio-fertilizers, through a comprehensive approach that includes collaborative research, standardization and capacity building	<p>Address the challenges of bio-pesticide effectiveness and cost through collaborative research and development</p> <p>Conduct further research on bio-pesticide and bio-fertilizer preparation, standardization and application at the farm level</p> <p>Organize more exposure visits and advanced training for project staff on agroecological innovations like bio-pesticides and bokashi composting</p>	IdP & KRC	High
2	Strengthen market linkages between smallholder farmers supported by the project and Fort Portal buyers (street food vendors, restaurants, etc.)	<p>Explore the use of participatory guarantee systems (PGS) to build consumer trust in agroecological products</p> <p>Continue to support marketing associations in product certification, transportation and storage facilities</p>	JESE	High
3	Build on the potential of urban farming in Fort Portal context in order to extend it to more beneficiaries, particularly young people	Strengthen research and evidence generation through collaborations with institutions like Mountains of the Moon University (with which IdP has already collaborated during the previous project), which plans to launch a PhD program in agroecology in 2025	IdP & JESE	Medium
4	Strengthen financial support for agroecological practices by aligning efforts and enhancing awareness among key stakeholders	<p>Focus on supporting SACCOs in areas where IdP and its partners are active, maximizing the impact of financial inclusion initiatives</p> <p>Develop and promote financing tools specifically designed to support agroecological transitions, such as KRC's proposed loan fund for the production and trade of bio-concoctions</p> <p>Educate commercial banks and financial institutions in Fort Portal on agroecological principles and financing options</p>	KRC	Medium

	Main recommendations	Associated pathways	Lead partner	Priority
5	Put greater emphasis on the development of localised, high-potential value chains	<p>Prioritize support for crops with high nutritional value and strong local market demand, such as sweet potatoes and pumpkins, to maximize impact on both producer and consumer nutrition</p> <p>Concentrate on developing value chains that are tailored to the specific strengths and market opportunities within Fort Portal area</p> <p>Identify and develop solutions with producers for preserving and processing vegetables and other fresh produce</p>	IdP & JESE	Very high
6	Enhance awareness and adoption of sustainable food systems and responsible consumption through a targeted and collaborative approach	<p>Narrow down the focus and be as precise as possible i.e. target specific messages for specific stakeholders</p> <p>Look for more synergies and exchange of practices with other projects/NGOs, e.g. on activities in schools (with Common Ground Project regarding kitchen gardening; SNV who look at promoting local milk consumption, etc.)</p> <p>Evaluate and refine the current intensive support model for individual schools by leveraging IdP's expertise in Belgium, and identify cost-effective strategies to scale up the school activities</p>	KRC & JESE	High
7	Strengthen the participation of farmers and farmer organisations in shaping sustainable food systems	Prioritize the adoption of a territorial market approach, leveraging FAO methodologies, to empower farmers and farmer groups with market intelligence and advocacy tools	IdP	Medium

Annex 1: Map of project area



Annex 2: List of persons/entities met

• Program team

Name	Organisation	Position
Lieven Peeters	Iles de Paix	Country Director
Amanya William	JESE	Program Manager
Felix Kiiza	JESE	Field Officer
Consolate Kobugabe	JESE	Field Officer
Sam Mwanguhya	JESE	Field Officer
Mohammed Ahamed Shariff	KRC	Executive Director
Violet Kanyiginya	KRC	Head of Food Security & Agribusiness Unit
Jared Mugisa	KRC	Microfinance and Agribusiness Manager
Charles Mugisa	KRC	Microfinance Officer
Eric Oteba	KRC	Food Systems & Nutrition Program Manager
Caroline Uwera	KRC	Field Officer

• Project partners and beneficiaries – interviews

Name	Organisation	Position
Clovis Kabaseke	Regional Agroecological Actors Platform (RAAP)	Chairperson / Mountains of the Moon University
Josephine Nakanwagi	ISSD / Common Ground Project	Regional Coordinator
<i>not recorded</i>	Kabarole District NCC	Chairperson / Health Dept
<i>not recorded</i>	Kabarole District NCC	Member / Health Dept
<i>not recorded</i>	Kabarole District NCC	Member / Education Dept
<i>not recorded</i>	Kabarole District NCC	Member / Communication Dept
<i>not recorded</i>	Fort Portal City NCC	Chairperson / Trade Dept
<i>not recorded</i>	Fort Portal City NCC	Member / Economic planning Dept
<i>not recorded</i>	Fort Portal City NCC	Member / Community-based service Dept
<i>not recorded</i>	Coalition of the Willing	Member / Food ambassador
<i>not recorded</i>	Coalition of the Willing	Member / Street Food Vendors
<i>not recorded</i>	Coalition of the Willing	Member / Chef Alliance
<i>not recorded</i>	Coalition of the Willing	Member / Teacher Association
<i>not recorded</i>	Fort Motel (restaurant)	Chef
<i>not recorded</i>	-	Street food vendor / Fort Portal
<i>not recorded</i>	-	Beneficiary youth / Fort Portal
<i>not recorded</i>	-	Beneficiary youth / Fort Portal

<i>not recorded</i>	-	Beneficiary youth / Fort Portal
<i>not recorded</i>	-	Beneficiary farmer / Kicwamba S/C
<i>not recorded</i>	-	Beneficiary farmer / Kicwamba S/C
<i>not recorded</i>	-	Beneficiary farmer / Kicwamba S/C
<i>not recorded</i>	-	Farmer innovator / Kicwamba S/C
<i>not recorded</i>	-	Farmer innovator / Kabambiro S/C

• **Project partners and beneficiaries – focus group discussions**

Name of group / entity	District	Subcounty	Type of Group	Participants		
				Total	Male	Female
Kihondo Farmers Marketing Association	Kabarole	Kicwamba	Marketing association (banana)	5	3	2
Kirangara Upper	Kabarole	Kicwamba	VSLA	4	1	3
Karangura Coffee Farmers SACCO	Kabarole	Karangura	SACCO	4	1	3
n/a	Kabarole	Karangura	Leaders from 9 care groups	9	1	8
Kabambiro Farmers Marketing Association	Kamwenge	Kabambiro	Marketing association (maize)	8	6	2
				30	12	18

Annex 3: Field mission schedule

Day	Date	Location	Activity	Comments
M	13/01/2025	Kampala	Arrival at Entebbe airport + travel to Kampala	
T	14/01/2025	Kampala	Meeting with partners from DGD-funded project	
W	15/01/2025	Kampala - Fort Portal	Travel	
T	16/01/2025	Fort Portal	Start-up meeting with IdP & partners (JESE & KRC) Interview with JESE staff Interviews with KRC Food systems staff & Financial inclusion staff	
F	17/01/2025	Fort Portal	Interview with RCA staff Interviews with Kabarole District NCC, Fort Portal City NCC and Coalition of the Willing	
S	18/01/2025	Kicwamba S/C	2 FGDs + 4 interviews with beneficiaries	FGDs with 1 marketing association (banana) & 1 VSLA Interviews with 4 beneficiary farmers
S	19/01/2025	Karangura S/C	2 FGDs + 2 interviews with beneficiaries	<i>DGD-funded activities</i>
M	20/01/2025	Karangura S/C	2 FGDs + interview with beneficiary + interview with Karangura Peak cooperative	FGDs with 1 SACCO & care groups' leaders Interview with 1 VSLA member
		Fort Portal	Interviews with 1 street food vendor + 1 chef	
T	21/01/2025	Fort Portal	2 interviews with beneficiaries Interviews with RAAP and ISSD / Common Ground Project	Interviews with 3 youths
W	22/01/2025	Kabambiro S/C	Interview with JESE staff 1 FGD + interview with beneficiary	FGD with 1 marketing association (maize) Interview with 1 farmer innovator
		Fort Portal	Interview with IdP Country Director Preliminary data analysis / preparation of debriefing session	
T	23/01/2025	Fort Portal	Debriefing session with IdP & partners	
		Fort Portal - Kampala	Travel	
F	24/01/2025	Kampala	Departure	



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