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Austrian  
Development  
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## The Role and Impact of Community-Based Trainers

### Insights and lessons from the Women and Youth Resilience Project (WAYREP)

*In Africa it takes a village to raise a child. In our service we gave back to the communities wholeheartedly*  
Santos Ogik Kilibaki, CBT from Gulu

#### Executive Summary

The Women and Youth Resilience Project (WAYREP) aimed to enhance the resilience of refugee and Ugandan women, girls, and youth, while reducing gender-based violence (GBV) in Northern Uganda. Key to the project's success were the 438 community members engaged across seven different community structures, with a significant focus on Community-Based Trainers (CBTs).

CBTs played a central role in WAYREP's implementation and success, and contributing to project continuity, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic. They were responsible for training and supporting Village Savings and Loan Associations (VSLAs), mentoring youth placed in skills development programs, and collaborated closely with the GBV team. Their efforts resulted in the successful formation and graduation of 287 VSLA groups, significant support for GBV prevention and response, and the successful job placement of 432 youth, 65% of whom established their own businesses.

Despite challenges such as the resignation of some CBTs due to their pursuit of further education or employment opportunities, the project learned valuable lessons. These included the importance of selecting culturally aware, highly motivated and respected individuals as CBTs, providing thorough orientation and continuous training on the project's approaches and overall goals, including psychosocial and GBV training for CBTs, supporting their personal growth, and developing sustainable financing mechanisms to support ongoing community-based initiatives.

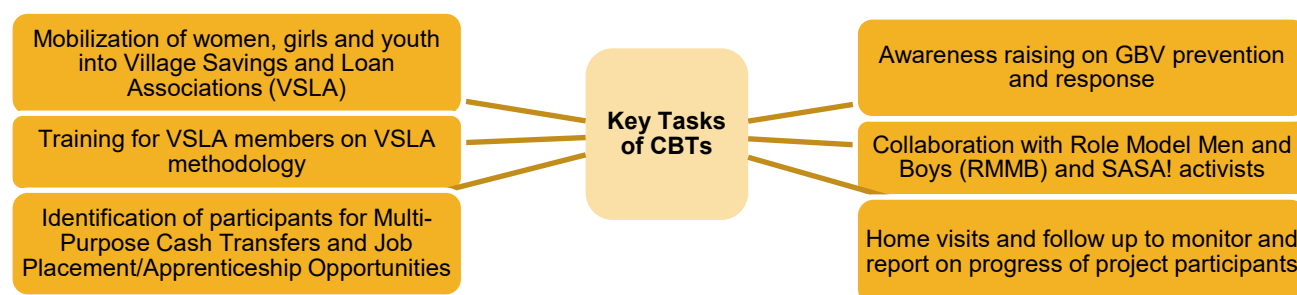
This learning briefs highlights how the engagement and commitment of community structures, in particular the Community-Based Trainers, contributed significantly to strengthening resilience and empowerment of women, girls, and youth in the targeted communities and to ensuring community participation and the sustainability of project outcomes and impact.

## INTRODUCTION TO THE PROJECT

CARE International in Uganda in partnership with Care Austria implemented the Women and Youth Resilience Project (WAYREP) from April 2019 to March 2024, with funding from the Austrian Development Agency. WAYREP aimed at strengthening the resilience of refugee and Ugandan women, girls and youth and at reducing gender-based violence (GBV) in Gulu and Arua Cities and Omugo Sub County and Settlement in Terego district. It worked with 438 community members in seven different community structures, including GBV SASA! activists, Role Model Men and Boys (RMMB), community leaders and institutional allies.

### Community Based Trainers (CBT)

CBTs were the first and core community structure trained to support WAYREP's implementation in the communities. The majority of them stayed throughout the project. They were responsible for a multitude of tasks:



### Selection, preparation and continuous support of CBTs

The selection of CBTs was conducted through a recruitment process based on the Human Resource policies of the two partner organisations, CEFORD and ThriveGulu. Each candidate presented an introduction letter from their residents' local council leadership as a sign of good conduct. The selected CBTs were introduced to the project, its Theory of Change, goals and objectives. They were trained in the VSLA methodology, Financial Literacy, Business Selection Planning and Management and awareness and prevention of gender-based violence (GBV). Periodic refresher trainings were conducted. These facilitated additional **knowledge and skills acquisition** in specific aspects of WAYREP's approaches, for example on conflict management for VSLA groups. During their monthly meetings, WAYREP's women economic empowerment officers offered further mentorship to the CBTs.



### Contribution of CBTs to project success

Through their dedicated work and their comprehensive understanding of the project and its approaches, CBTs significantly contributed to WAYREP's impacts. The main achievements are described in this chapter.

**COVID-19 response and project continuity:** During the period of COVID-19 lockdowns and restrictions on movements, there was an increase in cases of GBV and domestic violence. Being the only active community structure at the time, CBTs were trained on GBV prevention and referral pathways. They created awareness on COVID-19 and GBV, identified and referred GBV survivors to access to health services and justice, maintained home visits to project participants and offered Psychological First Aid (PFA). Furthermore, they provided support to VSLA groups to remotely save and to use digital means like mobile money transfer for savings and payment of loans.

During COVID-19 pandemic, CBTs engaged in GBV prevention and response and ensured project continuity at the height of the pandemic.

**CBTs are core connectors of other community structures:** CBTs received and mentored members of WAYREP's various community structures, that is the Role Model Men and Boys, community leaders and SASA! activists who were identified and selected in the second year of the project. CBTs' capacities were strengthened to advocate against GBV in communities and they served as a link between community structures and project officers. Working regularly with the VSLA groups, for example, they supported the identification and referrals of survivors to GBV prevention and response officers.

**VSLA group formation and graduation:** VSLA groups were WAYREP's main entry point to the communities and a platform for economic empowerment and awareness creation on GBV. CBTs formed, trained and successfully graduated 287 VSLA groups which were registered with government authorities in project locations.

CBTs supported project participants to engage in dignified livelihoods, contributed to an increase in their income and enhanced social cohesion among VSLA members.

With the CBT's support, over 50 of the graduated groups benefitted from government programs like Parish Development Model (PDM) or Emyooga. In Omugo sub county, group members were connected to other implementing partners for agriculture/farming related trainings. 176 well established groups were linked to formal financial institutions for saving and loaning purposes. Group members developed savings goals which resulted in 65 % of VSLA members starting and/or boosting Income Generating Activities (IGAs) from share-out. Some of the mature groups in Gulu city have grown to manage four saving ledgers, that is assets, development, emergency and saving, while others started group enterprises.

VSLA have also contributed to strong social networks. VSLA members shared experiences and received social support. A social fund supported them in challenging situations. Furthermore, VSLA members' agency was enhanced. Women have taken on leadership roles in the savings groups as well as in community groups and religious circles.

**Job placement for the youth:** CBTs followed up with 450 youth who were placed under artisans for skills development. They assessed attendance, availability of study materials and reported on progress. 432 youth successfully completed the training and were examined by the Directorate of Industrial Training (DIT) in motorcycle mechanics, tailoring, hairdressing, crafts making, catering, carpentry and joinery, and electrical installation, among other trades of their choice. The trained youth received start up kits. Over 65 % of the youth established businesses in the informal sector and a few in formal employment. CBTs continued to follow up and mentor the youth in record keeping and customer care to ensure business growth. Some of the skilled youths are transferring skills to fellow youth in their communities at a minimal fee, including two youth who trained the last WAYREP cohort of youth in tailoring.

**Support to Multi-Purpose Cash Transfer (MPCT) recipients:** CBTs identified particularly vulnerable persons in the communities as potential recipients of WAYREP's unconditional monthly cash transfer.

CBTs impacted the lives of the most marginalized.

Selected recipients were attached to CBTs for preparation, that is confirming their phone numbers, training on how to use mobile cash transfers and providing life skills training, such as reflections about their journey of life and goal setting. CBTs continued to follow up on participants to confirm receipt of the monthly disbursements and to report any GBV incidents resulting from the cash transfers. With the MPCT support, recipients could meet essential needs such as food, education for their children, and healthcare. Some recipients started IGAs, joined VSLA and are growing their small businesses to achieve self-reliance. For instance, in Gulu City, a woman with a disability initially had a stock worth 5,000 Ugandan Shillings of silver fish and tomatoes. Through MPCT, she was able to significantly boost her stock. As a result, she now supports five children, including her own and those of her relatives.

**Monitoring and feedback on project implementation:** CBTs were trained and equipped with phone devices for routine data collection and reporting. The CBTs also supported the data collection for MPCT Post Distribution Monitoring (PDM) and the CHOMOKA baseline for digital record keeping. In the course of duty, they received feedback from project participants and suggested solutions to the identified challenges. These were key in delivering and improving the project. The CBTs' skills in monitoring and reporting were appreciated by stakeholders at sub-county and division levels who started to involve them in activities in their communities.



## Their motivation to participate in project implementation

**Social commitment of the CBTs:** CBTs were recruited from their communities of residence and served with an understanding of the issues affecting these communities, cultures and social norms. This enabled them to address key issues emerging within the project locations. The thorough knowledge of their community enabled them to mobilize participants, secure venues and required resources for the implementation of project activities. Across locations, CBTs noted: We were picked from the community and the members knew us well and understood/accepted the message we passed.

**Appreciation by the communities and local leaders:** The CBTs earned respect from the communities who referred to them as ‘teacher’. They were called to support in many aspects other than VSLA activities. Through their work, the CBTs increased their networks of contacts and relationships. The local leadership contacted some to support community programs. For example, in Arua city, two CBTs were involved in activities at the River Oli division and in Gulu City, two were involved in youth programs. The respect and involvement motivated CBTs for their work and to take courses in different institutions of learning in anticipation of future opportunities with local governments and NGOs.

**Clarity of their role:** CBTs understood their role very well and served with passion and commitment because they saw how they contributed to the project’s vision. The design of the project fostered strong linkages between results areas so that their work benefitted the whole project. The CBTs, for example, did not only contribute to women’s economic empowerment (WEE), but also participated in GBV prevention and response work.

**Opportunity for personal growth:** CBTs appreciated the trainings on WEE and GBV and the interaction with project participants and peers. This impacted their own lives and motivated some to assess their potential beyond project implementation. Oscar from Gulu, for instance, states: *“We got enough support I would say and appreciate it. There was closeness with the project supervisor, and we got to know each other and freely consulted on areas of personal growth.”*

CBTs drew lessons from the changes they observed among participants. They started saving themselves, and invested in income generating activities, for example retail shops or soap making. CBTs have acquired assets such as land which they plan to develop and established business enterprises. Several of them discovered their ability to implement more ambitious projects and returned to universities and other tertiary institutions to prepare for future opportunities. *“CBT work has transformed my life. Before, I did not know about VSLA. Now I am a VSLA member. I have 2.2 Million Shillings and own personal land. I support six children with school fees in my family”*, says Joy, CBT from Gulu.



## Challenges of working with Community Based Trainers

The CBTs were young and ambitious individuals with aspirations for a brighter future. Some CBTs opted to seek employment opportunities elsewhere based on their academic qualifications. Others returned to schools outside project locations. Two of the CBTs in Gulu and two in Arua, for example, possessed university and tertiary qualifications and secured positions in institutions and organizations situated beyond the project's locations. In Omugo settlement, there were dropouts because some CBTs relocated back to South Sudan or urban centers. Their departures created gaps which necessitated replacement and caused implementation delays in their location.



## Lessons for future programming

### Consider the cultural context and select individuals with high motivation to address local challenges

CBTs should have an understanding of gender, social and cultural norms in their communities, speak the same language and have the right tone to call for action, and to build and maintain a network of norms keepers to engage and influence. Profound knowledge of the local context and needs creates confidence in the project activities among participants and leads to better training outcomes. For example, refugees from

Omugo Refugees Settlement were excited and grateful that they have a CBT who is one of them and who speaks the local language which helped them understand the methodology well.

### **Ensure thorough orientation of the CBTs in their field of expertise and the whole project**

The effective preparation, training and continuous mentoring of the CBTs gave them a holistic understanding of the project's Theory of Change. They knew how their work contributed to the WAYREP's goals and objectives. This improved the quality of their work, their commitment and motivation.

### **Provide psychosocial and GBV training for CBTs**

It proved to be very beneficial that CBTs had acquired knowledge and skills in psychosocial support, GBV prevention and response during the COVID-19 pandemic. Their understanding of GBV facilitated synergies between the GBV and the WEE team and enabled the CBTs to identify and support GBV survivors, and to better understand challenges that participants were facing.

### **Ensure sustained outcomes and a lasting impact in the communities**

Being active and respected community members, CBTs can provide ongoing support and reinforce project activities to sustain impact even after the project phased out. However, for certain tasks and responsibilities, CBTs depended on project funding, which can only partly be covered by their linkages to local government and other partners. It would be important to develop a sustainable financing mechanism to support the continued operations of community-based structures.

### **Include activities to support the personal growth and economic strengthening of CBTs**

Personal learnings contributed to the motivation of CBTs. At the same time, some CBTs reported to have made sacrifices during project implementation that included business and personal costs to ensure that activities are implemented. Strengthening their capacities and creating new opportunities helps mitigate such issues and provides additional incentives.