

SPRING 2020

REFLECTIONS ON THE BIDIBIDI AND MAAJI FOOD AND LIVELIHOOD PROGRAMS

A COLLABORATION OF SECTOR 39 AND THE NORWEGIAN REFUGEE
COUNCIL

CANDIDATE NUMBER: 213097



THE MAAJI AND BIDIBIDI PERMACULTURE TRAINING

In collaboration with the Norwegian Refugee Council, Sector39 led a 6-month permaculture design course in 2018 for refugees and host community members in the Bidibidi and Maaji settlements in the West Nile region of Uganda. Permaculture is a practice that aims to design “sustainable human settlements” and is “a philosophy and an approach to land use which weaves together microclimate, annual and perennial plants, animals, soil, water management, and human needs into intricately connected, productive communities” (Epstein HaLevi *et al.*, 2020). In the Bidibidi and Maaji settlements, the refugee population is much larger than the local population and many do not have a background in farming or gardening. While they have been allocated land plots, food security and limited employment opportunities is a significant concern. Permaculture design has strong potential to address these challenges.

The objective of the project was to train refugees and community members about permaculture approaches to improve access and diversity of food. Sector39 is at the start of conducting an evaluation of the evolution and sustainability of the project over the past two. Many course participants are eager to share their stories about the impact this project had on their families and communities.

This brief overview of the project is intended to introduce Sector39’s work to future collaborators and funders. The information informing this overview comes from Sector 39 blog posts and video footage.



Participants with their training completion certificates.

PROJECT BACKGROUND

The project was organized into three phases. The first phase was a residential two-week training, full of demonstrations and key explanations. Sector39 took a “Training of Trainers” (ToT) approach in which participants not only learn about permaculture, but they are trained to become trainers of the material. There were 40 participants total, with a mix of South Sudanese refugees and host community members. Upon completion of the training, participants were instructed to reach out to four-five individuals to train, and through this ToT approach, at least 200 people have received training.

The initial two-week training demonstrated how to use local and natural resources. Methods of arranging resources showed how one can reinforce and enhance certain environmental outcomes, ultimately leading to improved food security and independent livelihoods. The training and demonstrations encouraged participants to analyze why certain techniques work to better understand the rationale in the design. Training covered topics such as composting, building fertile soils, grafting fruit trees, trapping water, building raised plant beds, and creating energy efficient stoves. By demonstrating and showing approaches, rather than telling participants what to do, Sector 39 created an environment in which participants could take what they learned and tailor it to their own personal circumstances.

The second part of the training focused on how to support individuals to take their ideas back to their homes, adapt them as needed, and implement their new ideas. An important part of this stage is for participants to educate and communicate to community members why and how they are doing what they are doing. The last major aspect of the project was to encourage enterprise development so that people can replicate their ideas and turn them into small businesses. This will support the livelihoods of community members while also building support for a permaculture approach.

Individuals involved in supportive and logistic roles for the training also took an interest in learning about permaculture. When the translators weren’t translating, they were taking notes and absorbing the demonstrations. The Norwegian Refugee Council and conference center staff frequently attended lessons and were eager to learn about permaculture.

Prior to the training, many of the participants expressed that they felt that their destiny was out of their control given limited opportunities and dependence on aid for food. Sector39 felt strongly about providing a supportive training space in which participants feel like partners with agency to innovate and adapt permaculture ideas to their lives. By creating pathways for communities to be self-reliant, this project has helped build resilience and local resources. In particular, the energy efficient stove has taken off in both settlements, allowing families to save on fuel costs. The manual will be translated into 5 languages in order to support the ToT model of ongoing and continued training. Through the evaluation of the project, Sector39 will have a richer understanding of the reach of the projects in Maaji and Bidibidi, which will help secure support from funders and will also provide important feedback for Sector39. 📌

TRAINING REFLECTIONS



Translator Julius and training participants Grace and Godfrey

“Permaculture changed my life”- Grace¹

GRACE

After the training in June, Grace returned to her home and started implementing permaculture design around her compound. Knowledge about permaculture quickly spread throughout her neighborhood because she trained four other people and her neighbors learned new practices through observation. Grace describes the training as life changing, as she now can pick fresh vegetables rather than going to the market. She's opened up income streams through selling her produce, and a few months after the initial training, she earned 100,000 shillings from onions, 20,000 shillings from Okra, and additional money from other produce. She is moved by how the compounds in her neighborhood are now all green, and she is a strong advocate for continued training opportunities.

JULIUS

Julius reflects on his experiences as a translator for the training with a sense of accomplishment, graciousness, and excitement for what the future holds. While Julius didn't participate in the full training, what he learned and his involvement with the project inspires and empowers him. He saw improvements throughout the community quickly emerge with the adoption of permaculture techniques. Julius observed that many of the refugees who did not receive training took inspiration from neighbors and adopted approaches to meet their own needs. Julius found that prior to the training many people had flat cultivation, and now they have crops in rows with fruitful yields. He reports that attitudes about agriculture are changing, and the quantity and productivity of yields continues to improve.



First onion seedlings after training



Permaculture training in action



Techniques applied to improve yields



Building an energy efficient, fuel saving, and smoke-free stove



Completed stove