

POLICY BRIEF

Building Resilience: Addressing the Impacts of Climate-related hazards on Livelihoods and Unpaid Household Labour in Uganda's Refugee-Hosting Districts.



Dried maize and groundnut crops in Rwamwanja Settlement (Uganda)

“Extreme heat, drought, floods, and strong winds do not just damage crops and markets, spoil goods and commodities, they also disrupt homes, families, and the daily work that holds life together.” *Local governments representative KI, Nyumanzi settlement, Uganda.*

Executive Summary

IMPACT Initiatives conducted a qualitative assessment to explore the impact of climate-related hazards on livelihoods among refugee and host communities in Uganda, specifically in Kampala City (Central Region), Rwamwanja Settlement in Kamwenge District (Southwestern Region) and Nyumanzi Settlement in Adjumani District (Northern Region), which represent diverse environmental contexts hosting significant refugee populations. The study examined how climate-related hazards affect income generation, productivity, and unpaid household labour and how the community is adapting to the different climatic changes through 31 Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) with community leaders, government representatives, persons with disabilities, Refugee Led Organizations (RLOs), and health and education representatives and 16 Participatory Workshops (PWs) with refugee and host community members.

The assessment focused on four primary climate-related hazards - extreme heat, drought, flooding which were predetermined before the study, while strong winds emerged as an additional hazard during the assessment. These identified hazards severely disrupt agricultural production, small-scale businesses, and casual labour opportunities across Uganda.

Other existing vulnerabilities, such as poverty, gender roles, and disability, intensify the impact of climate-related hazards on livelihoods and unpaid labour.¹ Women, persons with disabilities and children are reported to bear excess impacts due to gendered responsibilities, mobility constraints, and limited adaptive capacity. Communities, with

¹ UNDP, [Uganda gender analysis](#)

Key Messages

Extreme weather events such as heat, drought, floods and strong winds are getting more intense and frequent threatening both livelihoods and unpaid household labour activities in refugee-hosting districts in Uganda.

Women and girls face a greater burden of unpaid household labour than men and boys during these weather events who spend more time on water collection, caregiving and other household tasks.

Community coping strategies like shifting/adjusting work hours, digging drainage channels, water conservation are creative and resourceful but lack effectiveness without coordinated support at various levels.

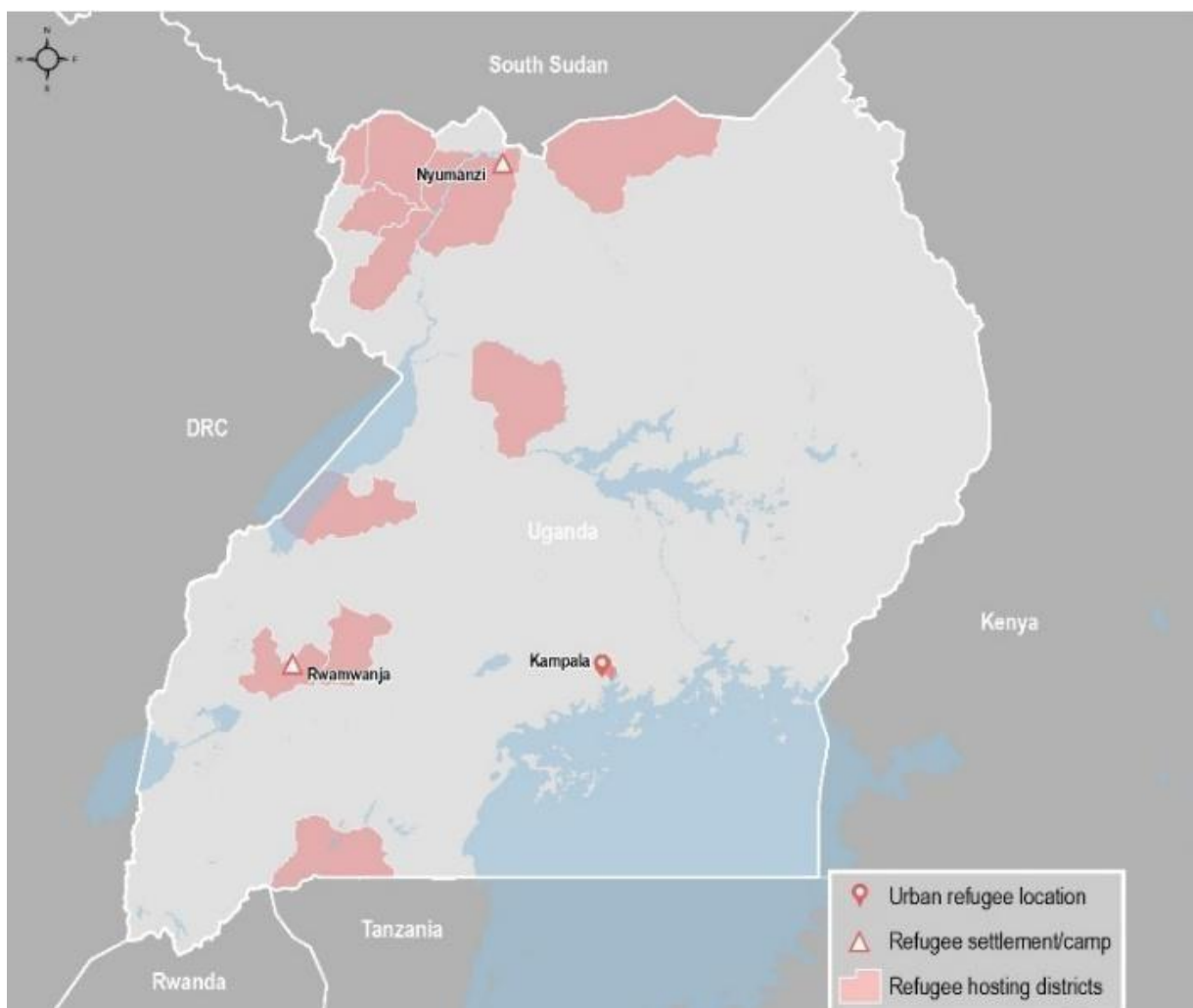
The policy makers, donors, and humanitarian players should integrate climate adaptation into planning through investing in resilient infrastructure, scaling up climate-smart agriculture, funding livelihood diversification, strengthening women's groups, and offering inclusive support that addresses vulnerable people's needs.

Climate change adaptation in this context refers to changes in processes, practices and structures to moderate potential damages or to benefit from the opportunities associated with climate change.

support from government and development actors, have engaged in several coping strategies, including climate-smart agriculture, vocational training, infrastructure improvements and community-led initiatives. However, these are often insufficient in the face of repeated hazard. This policy brief summarizes key findings from the research and presents recommendations for policymakers, donors, and humanitarian/development partners to strengthen resilience, protect livelihoods, and reduce unpaid labour burdens in both refugee and host communities.

Introduction

Uganda is one of the largest refugee-hosting countries in the world, accommodating over 1.9 million refugees and asylum seekers as of July 2025, with the majority originating from South Sudan (53%) and Democratic Republic of Congo (33%).² Climate-related hazards (extreme heat, floods and drought) are common in Uganda’s refugee-hosting districts, including Kampala City, Rwamwanja and Nyumanzi Refugee Settlements. Communities have reported that these hazards have become increasingly intense, unpredictable, and disruptive to their lives and livelihoods. Over the past 30 years, the frequency and intensity of floods, droughts, and landslides have risen, with flooding becoming more common due to heavier rainfall.³ On average, 200,000 Ugandans are affected by disasters each year, and the impact of floods is worsening due to expanding infrastructure, growing human settlements, and broader development across the country.⁴



Map of assessed locations in Uganda

² UNHCR, [Uganda Comprehensive Refugee Response Portal](#), last consulted on 11th August 2025.

³ Ministry of Water and Environment, as cited in World Bank Group, [Climate Risk Country Profile – Uganda](#), May 2021.

⁴ CCD, [National-Climate-Change-Mainstreaming-Guidelines](#), April 2018.

Problem Statement

According to the Notre Dame Global Adaptation Initiative (ND-GAIN), Uganda is ranked as the 14th most vulnerable country globally and one of the least prepared (163 out of 182) countries to respond to climate related challenges.⁵ These climate related hazards harm the livelihoods of both refugees and host communities by disrupting agricultural production, small businesses, and casual labour opportunities and can increase unpaid household labour and domestic work, placing a heavier burden on women and girls who spend more time on water collection, caregiving, and other household tasks.⁶

High poverty levels, limited job opportunities, poor infrastructure, and dependence on climate-sensitive sectors such as agriculture exacerbate the effects of climate-related hazards. Refugee settlements like Nyumanzi and Rwamwanja and Kampala city are particularly vulnerable to floods and droughts, which damage homes, ruin crops, and limit access to markets. While refugee and host community members have engaged in various coping strategies, these strategies are mainly adopted out of necessity to deal with the immediate challenge but are not sustainable. Focused, climate-resilient, and long-term strategies and solutions are needed to build community resilience and counteract the negative impacts of these hazards on food security and income as well as reduce the risk of households resorting to harmful coping strategies. This research contributes to identifying potential solutions and offer insights to this overarching issue.

Methodology

The study used a qualitative approach to assess how climate hazards affect livelihoods and unpaid household labour in the Ugandan refugee hosting areas. Data was collected from 4 to 27 March 2025 including:

- **31 Key Informant Interviews (KIIs)** – **13** interviews in Rwamwanja Settlement, **12** in Kampala City and **6** in Nyumanzi Settlement with respondents including with community leaders, government officials, persons with disabilities, refugee-led organizations (RLOs), and representatives from health and education sectors.
- **16 Participatory Workshops (PWs)** were conducted with refugee and host community members in Rwamwanja Settlement, and data collected from the [ABACBA in Nyumanzi Settlement](#) was also incorporated into the analysis.

The KIIs and PWs examined patterns of climate-related hazards, the impacts of these hazards, existing coping strategies, and thoughts and recommendations about what could be done to manage these hazards.

Key Findings

Livelihoods

Respondents across Kampala City, Rwamwanja and Nyumanzi refugee settlements identified three main livelihood activities; own agriculture, casual labour, and small business, aligning with the results of IMPACT's [REACH UGA 2024-MSNA-Report July-2025](#). All three of these livelihood activities are impacted by climate related hazards. For those relying on agriculture, respondents highlighted cases of crop failures, damaged farmlands, destroyed storage facilities, and increased pests and diseases, contributing to increased food insecurity and reduced income. Casual labourers and small business owners noted that flooding made it difficult to access their workplaces and lowered customer turnout while extreme heat caused high fatigue, spoilage of goods, and reduced work opportunities, thus reducing the workers' productivity levels. Overall, respondents consistently reported facing four major hazards – extreme heat, drought, floods and strong winds and storms and noted that these hazards have intensified over the past five years, increasingly disrupting income generation, productivity, and access to services.

To adapt to these impacts, respondents mentioned that individuals used the some coping strategies,⁷ they would shift their work hours to starting early in the morning and finishing late when it's a little cooler while taking longer breaks during very hot hours, they would also harvest and store rainwater in tanks and jerrycans during the rainy season that will be used in dry seasons, use protective gear (e.g. umbrellas and gumboots), dig drainage channels to create passage for the water, and used modified livelihood practices such as adopting drought resistant seeds, practice early

⁵ ND-GAIN, [Uganda](#), 2021

⁶ ULEARN, [Climate-Research-report](#), March 2025.

⁷ Coping strategies in this context is defined as short term actions taken by individuals, households or communities to manage and survive crisis such as food insecurity, economic shocks or environmental disasters, often at the expense of the long-term wellbeing.

planting and intercropping and also shifting from agriculture to trade or services that are not climate sensitive. Respondents also reported some negative coping strategies, such as child labour and early marriage. In homes with food insecurity, prostitution and transactional relationships were reportedly used as survival strategy. Participants also frequently reported theft, smuggling, and robbery, especially among unemployed youth in Kampala City.

Unpaid household labour

Unpaid household labour, including cooking and food preparation, water and firewood collection, childcare, and house and compound cleaning, is negatively impacted by climate-related hazards. Women reported that food preparation becomes unbearable during extreme heat. As shelters overheat, women can experience physical exhaustion and dehydration. Dust caused by extreme heat, strong wind and drought makes compound and household cleaning more difficult as it prompts continuous cleaning. Furthermore, when waterpoints dry up, those who collect water are forced to travel longer distances. Floods have also destroyed kitchens and made firewood damp, leading to challenges in cooking.

Both refugee and host community members reported several coping strategies individuals use to adapt to these hazards, such as shifting cooking and water collection tasks to cooler hours of the day, conserving water through storage in tanks or jerrycans, re-using water for example water used for washing clothes can also be used for mopping or cleaning the house, keeping children indoors during floods and heat, wearing light-weight clothes during extreme heat, digging trench channels to create water passage, and levelling compounds. Respondents also reported some negative/risky coping strategies households and individuals employ to cope with these impacts, such as collecting water at night which exposes women and girls to risks of harassment, assault or even accidents in poorly lit environments, withdrawing children from school to help with chores not only undermines their right to education but also exposes them to risks of child labour, exploitation and early marriage especially for the girl child, and limiting hygiene practices (e.g. bathing once a day).

Recommendations

To address the challenges mentioned above, a set of recommendations is proposed for policymakers, government officials, donors, development partners, UN agencies, and humanitarian organizations. These recommendations are drawn from the suggested solutions put forward by the community/respondents during data collection.

For Policymakers & Government (National & District)

- **Integrate climate adaptation into refugee and host community development plans** by first conducting vulnerability assessments with refugee and host communities to identify the most vulnerable and recurrent risks. Based on the findings, District Development Plans (DDPs) then incorporates adaptation measures and strategies for heat and drought, such as restrictions on outdoor work during extreme heat, compensation for reduced hours, and access to insurance systems to protect the most vulnerable.
- **Expand climate-resilient infrastructure (e.g. water points, storage, shaded markets).** National and district authorities can construct flood-resistant water points, elevated or solar powered boreholes, rainwater harvesting systems for year-round supply, permanent shaded markets and climate resilient storage facilities to reduce post-harvest losses. These programs can be financed through private public partnerships.
- **Strengthening agricultural extension services promoting drought-tolerant crops and climate-smart techniques (e.g. mulching and irrigation) in partnership with universities and academia.** These services will equip both refugee and host community farmers with the knowledge and resources to adapt to climate change.
- **Invest in decentralized climate services and early warning systems,** including community training and equipment for localized forecasting and hazard response. Continuous work with the Uganda National Meteorological Authority (UNMA) to get updates on climatic conditions for each region and district for easy interventions.

For Donors & Development Partners

- **Fund long-term livelihood diversification programmes that reduce climate vulnerability.** Financing multi-year programs that diversify livelihoods can reduce dependence on sectors affected by climate, like rain-fed agriculture. Long-term funding cycles for programs that provide skills training, support small business startups,

improve agricultural value, and connect communities to markets for alternative income sources support communities to develop sustainable businesses that can endure climate shocks.

- **Support women's groups and cooperatives to reduce the high burden of unpaid labour.** Climate shocks frequently extend the hours women spend collecting water and firewood and increase caregiving responsibilities – all of which are often unpaid labour activities. Donors can do more to alleviate these burdens by financing women's cooperatives and self-help groups that offer child-care facilities, clean energy technology, fixing water points closer to the settlements and household time-saving equipment.
- **Invest in localized early warning systems and disaster preparedness training.** Investments in community early warning systems help to ensure vulnerable people can prepare themselves and respond to extreme weather events before they occur. These systems should be developed and implemented hand in hand with Uganda National Meteorological Authority (UNMA) and can be delivered through local radio networks, SMS, and traditional leaders.

For UN Agencies & Humanitarian Actors

- **Mainstream climate risk reduction into humanitarian programming.** UN agencies and humanitarian actors should incorporate climate-related disaster reduction components into all stages of humanitarian programming - from planning to implementation and monitoring. This includes designing interventions that address emergency needs as well as reducing long-term climate vulnerability, for instance, including flood risk mapping in the choice of shelter site or climate-smart agriculture in food security initiatives.
- **Provide targeted assistance for vulnerable groups, especially women, girls, and persons with disability.** There is need to step up efforts to address how climate change impacts women, girls, and persons with disability as these were mentioned as the most vulnerable. This could mean giving out adaptive devices (crutches, white canes) to persons with disability and livelihood skills programs that are specific to their needs. Disaster risk reduction and recovery programs should include gender and disability sensitive approaches to make sure that everyone's needs are considered and addressed.
- **There is a strong need to support community-led, non-donor reliant initiatives** considering the reduced donor funding, such as strengthening refugee - host village savings and loan associations (VSLA) to finance small scale adaptation projects, promoting community tree planting groups to rehabilitate degraded land and empowering water management committees to overcome maintenance of local water points. Such initiatives can be sustained through local governance structures and traditional knowledge systems, ensuring continuity beyond external support.

This policy brief presents findings, lessons and recommendations identified through a research study conducted by IMPACT Initiatives on the [Impacts of Climate-Related Hazards on Livelihoods and Unpaid Household Labour](#) in Uganda's refugee-hosting districts. This brief was produced by IMPACT-REACH Uganda.