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Villa Nangiro,
Rupa, Moroto District,
Karamoja

“There has been a lot of change since women were included. We can now sit at the same table with our husbands and discuss our assets. There is no more looking down on women”.

RUPA COMMUNITY STRIKES GOLD



“Previously, women were not included in any land issues. We would only hear about it. But when the trust was formed, it did not segregate women. We have all benefitted equally”, says Villa, who received two million Uganda shillings from the land surface rights compensations.

“My daughter is at the university studying medicine and surgery”, says Villa Nangiro, elated. “You see here in Karamoja, girls are thought not to be able to study courses like medicine and surgery”, she adds, the pride in her voice almost tangible.

Villa, a mother of five who looks after a family of 25, lives in Rupa sub-county, Moroto District, in the Karamoja region of North-eastern Uganda.

Karamoja is an astonishing display of rocky semi-arid plains punctuated with mountain ranges breathtakingly weaving in and out of the horizon. Though the soil and climate do not readily support agriculture, beneath the beautiful hills and expansive plains reside rich deposits of an array of minerals including marble, gold, limestone, and other precious stones.

The Karamojong have, however, over the years had no noticeable benefit from these resources, with the region remaining one of the poorest in the country. Most of the mining is done by foreign companies, with the indigenous communities for a long time hardly having any say in mineral resource governance.

“But that has changed ever since USAID/CSSA supported us to form Rupa Community Development Trust”, says Paul Aleper Kaluwat, a board member of the trust.

To support the indigenous pastoral communities to achieve equitable benefits sharing, USAID/Uganda Civil Society Strengthening Activity (CSSA) is working with Ugandan CSO Africa Leadership Institute (AFLI) to organize these communities, train them, and provide them platforms to engage with the government and mining companies and influence how the minerals are managed.

“In working with USAID/CSSA, we discovered that if we transform the traditional clans into Communal Land Associations, they can register and become legal entities, which can hold land in trust of all their members”, says David Pulkol, the Executive Director of AFLI.

Among other avenues, USAID/CSSA facilitates an Inter-agency meeting every six months that brings these associations to a round table with the mining companies and the government, getting them fully involved in mineral discussions and providing them an opportunity to negotiate fair compensation, and the outcomes have so far been astonishing.

“We received 8 billion Uganda shillings (USD 2.1 million) from Sunbird for land surface rights compensation”, Paul says.

After being supported by USAID/CSSA to form and legally register the Rupa Community Development Trust, the trust was provided leadership and advocacy training to enable them to effectively negotiate with the mining companies on behalf of community members such as Villa Nangiro. Women's representation and participation was keenly ascertained since the traditional clans are male-dominated.



Artisan miners extracting marble in Moroto, Karamoja.

Through the different platforms and avenues created by USAID/CSSA, the communities were able to engage the government and mining companies to allow artisan miners to continue their operations alongside the mining companies.

“Previously, women were not included in any land issues”, Villa says. “We would only hear about it. But when the trust was formed, we have all benefitted equally. Personally, I received two million Uganda shillings from the land surface rights compensation”.

“I invested part of that money in my garden, I used part of it to start a brewing business, and I also bought some animals”.

Villa says she got over 46 bags of harvests from her garden, the business she started is thriving, and the animals have multiplied.

“As I speak, the 10 goats I bought have multiplied to 80. I also have 15 cattle and one pig that has just farrowed eight piglets”, she smiles.

To ignite the holistic transformation of these communities, USAID/CSSA prepares them to advocate for more than just monetary handouts, as Paul elaborates.



Villa (left) attending to her goats, which have multiplied to 80 from the 10 she initially bought. Villa also harvested up to 46 bags from her garden, which she cultivated with part of the money she received.



“During the negotiations facilitated by USAID/CSSA, and using the advocacy skills we received, we got Sunbird to agree to drill 24 boreholes in Rupa, build a fully equipped health center, give us an ambulance, build a tertiary institution, and sponsor 10 students at university every year for 49 years”.

Villa’s daughter is one of the pioneer beneficiaries of the university scholarship agreement, an opportunity she says she never dreamt of.

“I never thought my daughter could ever attain university education”, she says. “Not only are they paying her tuition - they are also taking care of accommodation, feeding, and healthcare”.

To complement the scholarships, the trust has also set aside part of the money received to pay children from Rupa at secondary and tertiary level, currently paying 153 students in secondary school.



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“The coming of USAID/CSSA is changing us education-wise. Rupa was very backward in terms of education”, Paul says.

Besides education, there has also been a plausible improvement in the quality of the day-to-day lives of the community members.

“Previously, getting basic healthcare was very hard. We would go to the government hospital and line up the whole day, and sometimes still come back with no treatment. But we can now afford private clinics”, Villa says.

With the profit from her different ventures, Villa says she has also been able to buy land where she plans to build a new home for her family, “Where we currently stay is very small and crowded, and there is hardly any space to even construct a latrine.”

Villa says beyond the economic transformation, the USAID/CSSA support has also greatly impacted the position of women in their community.

“There has been a lot of change since women were included. We can now sit at the same table with our husbands and discuss our assets. There is no more looking down on women”.

“The coming of USAID/CSSA has been nothing but a blessing. We would not have been able to achieve all these on our own”.



David Pulkol
Executive Director,
AFLI



As part of the project, USAID/CSSA is also facilitating a radio talk show through which AFLI can bring on board different technocrats (like government geologists) to reach more people to inform them on new developments such as new mining laws. The communities also call in during the show to share any concerns they have, such as illegal mining taking place.



USAID/Uganda Civil Society Strengthening Activity is a five-year Activity funded by USAID and implemented by East-West Management Institute that aims at supporting the capacity strengthening of Ugandan Civil Society Organizations to contribute to their improved development outcomes in four thematic areas: Health, with particular attention paid to achieving Uganda’s HIV/AIDS’ reduction goals; Education, youth, and child development; Agriculture and food security; and Democracy, rights, and governance.



About USAID/CSSA

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