

# We used to be carried on the back, we now cross the river ourselves!



Mrs. Amina Chandia a group member pose for a photo with their Village Agent during a monitoring visit.

Photo credit: Rolex Aleku

From a humble back ground in Lefori Sub County, Moyo district exists a group of women called Amatura (*literally translating we shall develop in the madi dialect*) Young Women group. They came together because of the challenges the women were facing in their respective households ranging from food insecurity to income insecurity.

The group came into existence in 2020 initiated by thirty (30) women aged between 20 to 59 years of age who are purely madi by tribe. They intentionally refused men to join their group because of the gender stereotypes, Amina Chandiru says; **“Men usually want to make decisions themselves in such groups, so we want to see how far we can go as women alone.”**

The women have never received any support in any form from any institution or organization yet the members have continued to do saving using the basic knowledge they have, started businesses and never managed them well, and farming using the rudimentary methods.

In August, 2020 Rural Initiative Community Empowerment West Nile launched a project titled ‘Security Protection and Economic Empowerment in Uganda’ – SUPREME that aims at *‘Improving the Economic Wellbeing of host and refugee communities in Northern Uganda’*. The project is implemented in consortium of four partners namely; World Vision Uganda, ZOA, SNV and RICE West Nile with funding from the European Union. World Vision is the lead partner in the consortium. The project is implemented in four districts namely; Moyo, Obongi, Terego and Madi-okollo. Of the three outputs; RICE West Nile delivers on output 1 and 2 across the four sub counties (Lefori, Metu, Moyo and Palorinya a refugee hosting sub county) within two districts of Moyo and Obongi.

Active implementation of the project started in October, 2020 with selection of beneficiary savings and development clusters (SDCs). The project targets 333 SDCs across the Sub Counties. Upon consulting with the Sub County leadership, list of SDCs were submitted and later verified by RICE West Nile team where Amatura Young Women met the project defined selection criteria and were later absorbed under the project for empowerment. The project uses the SDC methodology, ERI approach, GALs and FMNR approaches to empower the SDC members. In January 2021 trainings with all the existing 267 SDCs started where SDC methodology and ERI were priority. The ERI approach has five modules. The first module empowers SDC members to identify what they have (local resources), plan and develop action plans at group and individual levels.

The group’s short-term goal was; Buy chicken for the group – and the long-term goal; construct a store for collective marketing. When the group established the demonstration garden of ground nut enterprise, they realized that achieving the goals were possible. The group members appreciate the good agronomic practices demonstrated in the garden and have further replicated in their individual gardens. Over time they have preferred line planting to broadcasting because of the high yield and ease in weeding. Post-harvest handling was inevitably appreciated; **“I used to just harvest and put them anywhere in the house, now I know that I need a carpet and have to dry the seeds properly before marketing.”** says Anifa Swaib a member.

In November 2021, the group members shared their savings for the whole cycle where they had cumulatively saved Ugandan shillings 4,764,000. Within three months in the current cycle, they had already saved Ugandan shillings 2,367,000. As commitment to achieving the group’s short-term goal, each member contributed Ugshs. 20,000. From all the 30 members, Ugshs. 600,000 was raised. 400,000 from this money was used to buy 60 one month old broiler chicken each at 5,000. The members kept aside Ugandan shillings

200,000 for meeting operation costs. They face a challenge in managing the chicken in terms of costs of feeding and technical knowledge. On average they spend 40,000 on weekly basis to buy feeds.

In the next five years, the group plans to grow to purchase ox-plough to avoid over spending on opening land for farming. The visible progress of the group has attracted many other community members to join them.

**“If we did not get the training to open our eyes, we would always be thinking of our husband’s pockets. As women we have to take decisions for ourselves. We have started small but with your support will reach where we want to be”** – Abiko Topista says.

The groups story of transformation is inspirational to many women who are financially unstable and struggling to provide for their household members. They hope that the program can reach and support more people to start saving. To them there are many women and men in the community who still don’t understand the importance of saving yet they want to improve their lives. They however remain grateful for the opportunity to enhance their skills and knowledge on savings, farming and general life.