

AGRI INSIGHTS

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Editorial

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PROGRAM ANNUAL NEWSLETTER

COUNTRY DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE

I am pleased to share with you another information-packed annual program newsletter, providing a comprehensive view of our work throughout 2025. Since 1982, Heifer in Uganda has worked with over 5 million smallholder farming families in Northern, South-Western, Central and Eastern regions across 52 districts.

Heifer International Uganda has remained committed to enabling smallholder farming families, especially youth and women to achieve a sustainable living income by creating jobs and unlocking their potential to participate meaningfully in the local economy.

Throughout 2025, with six major projects, Heifer addressed key bottlenecks within the agricultural sector that limit farmers' productivity and profitability. As a result, we reached 331,600 smallholder farmers, created 55,000 agribusiness jobs, supported 1,800 enterprises and 125 farmer cooperatives. These cooperatives recorded an average annual turnover of UGX 2.25 billion and attracted UGX 1 billion in new investments from private-sector actors and commercial banks. Additionally, UGX 222 million was invested in young agri-tech innovators and agripreneurs with promising business ideas.

These efforts earned Heifer two national recognitions in 2025-the Agriculture Sector of the Year Award from the Ministry of Agriculture, Animal Industry and Fisheries and the International Agriculture Supporting Organisation of the year Award from the Office of the President for our outstanding contribution to strengthening farmer livelihoods and transforming the agriculture sector. We were also recognised by Nation Media Group's Empower Her Awards for the tremendous work done in uplifting women farmers in Uganda.



Heifer International Uganda was also privileged to host the continental AYuTe Next-Gen Youth Innovation Challenge, which showcased Africa's leading agri-tech innovators and celebrated youth-led technological advancement in a sector long perceived as traditional and unattractive to young people.

Such achievements would not have been possible without the invaluable support of our funding and non-funding partners, including the Mastercard Foundation, Mott Foundation, aBi Trust, the Government of Uganda, and Aqua for All.

We reaffirm our commitment to investing in innovative and transformative interventions, and to working with like-minded partners to create dignified and meaningful employment opportunities for women and youth in agriculture.

This newsletter is as much yours as it is ours. We invite you to explore the stories, share them, and continue walking with us as we unlock opportunities for young people in agribusiness.

Together, we are sowing seeds of transformation that will bear fruit for generations to come.

William Matovu

Country Director
Heifer International - Uganda



The Global Transformation Journey: How It Started, and How Uganda Is Leading the Way

Heifer International's global transformation is reshaping how the organization works and Uganda is not just following the trend; it is actively defining it. At the heart of this transformation is a bold shift: power is moving closer to the people who matter most—the farmers and frontline teams. Decisions are no longer made only from the top; they are informed by those who understand community needs firsthand.

This new way of working is building a locally led, globally connected organization one that listens deeply, responds quickly, and puts farmers at the centre of every choice. It is a mindset that embraces agility, inclusion, and humility.

Uganda has embraced this shift with full force. The Country Director William Matovu described the journey as an honest reflection about how Heifer must evolve in an increasingly complex development landscape, examining what still works, what must change, and what must be left behind.

“This is about rethinking how we operate in a changing donor environment, and letting go of old ways so we can better serve the smallholder farmer.”

Guided by this vision, the Senior Leadership Team has championed a countrywide transformation process rooted in open dialogue, shared learning, and mutual accountability. Frontline staff are now a vital voice in decision-making, sharing insights from the field that directly shape boardroom strategies. Conversations are more candid, solutions more collaborative, and decisions more grounded in reality.

During a recent leadership retreat, directors, managers, specialists, and coordinators reflected on how they are transforming individually. Many acknowledged that they are adopting humility, listening more deeply, and responding to staff needs with empathy and timeliness.

The journey is far from over, but Uganda is moving steadily, one deliberate step at a time toward a future where leadership is shared, community voices guide action, and where teams closest to impact lead the way. This is what it means to be locally led and globally connected, and Uganda is proudly charting the path.



A 'DREEM' come true- solar powered systems extended to Nakaseke

For dairy farmers in Nakaseke District, unreliable electricity, long dry spells, and limited access to clean water have long hindered milk production and profitability. But the Distributed Renewable Energy Ecosystem Model (DREEM) project implemented by Heifer International with support from the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, is now transforming the dairy value chain through productive solar energy.

Nakaseke lies in Uganda's cattle corridor, where most farmers and Milk Collection Centres (MCCs) operate off-grid. Without reliable power, cooperatives spend heavily on diesel generators and lose up to 15% of milk due to poor chilling facilities. Households face water shortages that compromise hygiene, livestock health, and overall milk quality.

DREEM is addressing these challenges by equipping four dairy cooperatives with solar-powered chillers, water pumps, storage tanks, and valley dams. Out of these four, three dairy cooperatives including Migani, Karyabulo and Kijumba in Nakaseke District Central Uganda have attained solar power for milk chilling. At household level, farmers are also accessing solar refrigerators, water pumps, and even solar-powered motorcycles for transporting milk. Community solar water systems with kiosks now provide clean water at only UGX 100 per jerrycan, easing the burden on women and children.

Already, the results are remarkable. Over 1,700 households have benefited from improved water access, fodder production, and quality milk handling. Nyakalongo Dairy Cooperative, for example, now chills up to 4,500 litres of milk daily and has eliminated its monthly water expenses, thanks to a new solar pumping system and 20,000-litre storage facility.

For farmers like 77-year-old John Baptist Sserwada and cooperative leaders like Wakyaka Benon, solar-powered equipment means more milk, healthier cows, reduced labour, and higher incomes.

Through DREEM, renewable energy is not only cutting costs and emissions, it is strengthening resilience and transforming rural dairy livelihoods in Nakaseke.



W4DB Project Delivers Clean Water to Kiboga Dairy Farmers

In June 2025, Heifer International Uganda celebrated a major milestone in the life of dairy farming in Kiboga district for they delivered clean water, powered by solar power, with support from Aqua For All. Water supply is in line with Heifer's mission of ending hunger and poverty by ensuring that communities have access to clean and sufficient water

William Matovu, the Country Director, noted that clean water is the lifeblood of dairy farming—from farm production, to bulking and to processing at the industry.

The UCX 1 billion (USD 249,536) Project was commissioned in collaboration with the Government of Uganda, Kiboga District Local Government, Aqua for All, and Dwaniro Dairy Cooperative. It supplies water to 1500 people in the district.

Heifer CEO Surita Sandosham while commissioning the project noted that access to water enhances dairy production and boosts productivity, and reduces the burden of women walking longer distances to collect unsafe water.

The W4DB project aims to improve access to clean and safe water for dairy farmers and is expected to significantly enhance dairy productivity and community livelihoods.



FY 25-Facts & Figures

331,600

Total number of smallholder farmers reached

55,000

(64% Women & 3%
PWD)

Agribusiness jobs created

1,800

(64% Women & 3%
PWD)

Agribusiness jobs created

82,903

Total number of families reached



Uganda's Development Future Depends on Catalytic Investments Not Handouts : Case Study - SAYE

By John Ssenyonga
Project Director-SAYE

Dwindling development funding in Uganda presents a dual crisis: it strains government financing while simultaneously slowing the country's progress toward inclusive and sustainable development. As external funding tightens, the pressure mounts for government and development partners to bridge widening gaps that directly impact livelihoods, limit economic opportunity, and compromise progress in critical sectors such as agriculture, education, and health.

Uganda's situation reflects a broader continental challenge. Across Africa, an estimated USD 1.6 trillion is required to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), according to the United Nations. Yet the current international financial architecture continues to marginalize African countries, offering neither the scale nor the responsiveness needed to confront the continent's demographic and development realities.

In Uganda, these structural constraints take an especially heavy toll. More than 7 million Ugandans live in absolute poverty, and between 700,000 and over a million new young people join the labor force each year outpacing job creation. Youth make up the majority of our population, yet many of them cannot access meaningful job opportunities. A rising number are turning to gambling, drugs, and other coping mechanisms as frustration over unmet potential growth.

Despite the contributions of international development agencies and government, the gap between development intentions and lived realities remains wide. For decades, the model has remained largely unchanged: bring in supplies, distribute inputs, implement a project for a few years, and move on. When the funding dries up, so do the benefits. Far too many Ugandans have yet to experience meaningful, transformative, lasting change in their daily lives.

Agriculture which has long been considered Uganda's economic backbone employs over 70% of the population and contributes more than a quarter of the nation's GDP. Yet millions of smallholder farmers continue to struggle. The paradox is clear: if agriculture is the bedrock of the economy, why are the people who sustain it still living in poverty? Is agriculture profitable for the average Ugandan? Are they operating with the right knowledge, tools, and market connections? The truth is that agriculture has not been treated as a modern, entrepreneurial, and dignified enterprise. Many past development approaches have reinforced dependency by providing short-term inputs and handouts, often with limited business-driven investment models.

A Shift in Approach: From Handouts to Catalytic, leverage and community driven approaches

A promising shift is now emerging one that places smallholders farmers, young people, communities, and local systems at the centre of development design and implementation. Initiatives like the Mastercard Foundation's Young Africa Works strategy acknowledge that Africa's youth bulge is not a burden but a powerful asset if meaningfully engaged. Working with partners such as Heifer International, aBi Trust, Ripple Effect, GOAL, WFP, and others, these programs are moving away from short-term humanitarian aid toward holistic, catalytic, and youth-driven development pathways.

A strong example is the Strengthening Agribusiness for Youth Employment (SAYE) project in Busoga, implemented by Heifer International in partnership with the Mastercard Foundation and a consortium including ASIGMA, CURAD, FSD Uganda, and FSME. The project aims to support 250,000 young people aged 16-35 to transition into dignified and fulfilling work by 2029.

This ambitious goal demands more than traditional development interventions. SAYE deliberately rejects the handout model and instead promotes catalytic funding, cost-sharing, community ownership, and market-oriented enterprise development.

How SAYE is Changing the Development Landscape in Busoga

SAYE works across value chains poultry, beef, horticulture, and oilseeds, while also building off-farm employment pathways through incubation (via CURAD) and enterprise development (via FSME). Crucially, participants are not passive recipients; they are co-investors and co-creators with the private sector and local actors.

For instance, in poultry production:

- Young people contribute UGX 1,952,000 to access 800 high-quality broiler chicks, with feeds
- A total of 121,000 birds channelled to 147 groups in the last 3 months and young people contributing UGX 294,000,000.
- They identify their own land, construct poultry houses, and undergo intensive training.
- After the first production cycle, the record average gross earnings of about UGX 8,00,000 to sustain the enterprise independently by purchasing inputs, expanding production, and linking to markets.

This co-investment approach is altering expectations within communities. Project funding is now complemented by contributions from participants,

families, local governments, and private-sector actors. This applies to other enterprises such as goats, horticulture and oilseeds.

Measurable Impact

Within a span of one, SAYE has mobilized:

- Over **UGX 3.5 billion** in leveraged resources
- **8,794 acres** of cultivated land
- **1,713** youth-led businesses, **59.7%** of which are women-owned
- **23,428** young people accessing loans
- **UGX 369 million** accessed as credit
- Nearly 85,000 youth reached, with 55,766 transitioned to work

These numbers reflect more than outputs but a transformed mindset and a new development paradigm.

Challenges persist. Deep-rooted cultural norms continue to restrict women's participation, especially regarding land ownership. Youth living with disabilities also face structural barriers. SAYE confronts these realities directly by targeting 70% women and 3% youth with disabilities, intentionally reshaping narratives about who can lead and thrive in agribusiness. Partnerships with local institutions like Busoga Kingdom, churches, research organizations and communities landlords is opening new ways of mobilizing access to local resources particularly land.

Young women and youth with disabilities are now emerging as business owners, producers, innovators, and leaders demonstrating that inclusive agribusiness is not only possible, but essential.

A Call for the Future of Development Financing

Projects like SAYE illuminate what the future of development financing in Uganda and Africa must look like:

- Locally anchored, youth-centered, and market-driven
- Catalytic rather than consumptive
- Co-financed, co-owned, and community-embedded
- Focused on dignity, agency, and sustainable livelihoods

Uganda's young people do not need handouts. They need partners willing to walk with them, build their capacity, strengthen their ecosystems, and empower them to realize their ambitions. With the right investments and the right approach, Uganda's youth can turn demographic pressure into unprecedented opportunity not only for themselves but for the nation.

The path forward is clear: development must evolve from giving aid to building systems that work, businesses that thrive, and youth who lead. SAYE is proof that this transformation is underway and that the future of development funding must be catalytic and rooted in dignity for all.





Heifer Uganda's clean energy transition journey

By Enock Mutinga
Renewable Energy Coordinator.

Energy access is critical to increase agricultural productivity, ensure well-being, and to build climate resilience. Access to clean energy is still a challenge in Uganda as only 10% of rural households are connected to the electricity grid.

However, in the communities where Heifer International Uganda works, the foundation of a clean energy transition has been laid. By using distributed clean energy solutions and technologies as an enabler in our programs, we are helping farming households and Cooperatives to use these off-grid solutions, to power their energy and water needs.

We have piloted an asset-financing model with a partial grant and cost-sharing mechanism, where farmers have accessed basic energy solutions, we have distributed solar torches and solar home systems, that have enabled them to increase their productive hours, improve household safety, and reduce dependence on kerosene.

This has been expanded to productive use of solar energy solutions that include solar-powered water pumps, that enable year-round farm water supply and solar fridges that reduce milk loss. Other farmers have invested in solar-powered chaff cutters that reduce the effort of feed preparation and electric motorcycles that provide affordable, low-emission farm-to-market transportation.

The Cooperatives have also taken steps to address their energy and water challenges. At 7 milk collection centres, solar energy now powers the machines that cool the farmers' milk before transportation to the milk processors. This has lowered energy costs for the cooperatives by 45% and improved reliability on collective milk chilling services for thousands of cooperative members.

We have also piloted 2 Cooperative-managed solar-powered community water systems that provide water for farmers, households, businesses, and Cooperatives. The Cooperative operates and maintains the systems and sells the water to its customers. These systems have improved the quality of milk and resulted in a drop in milk rejection by the dairy processor from 2.4% to 0.4% - leading to increased incomes for farmers.

These farmer and Cooperative energy and water pilot solutions have demonstrated the possibilities that a rural energy transition can deliver. The success of these pilots shows that increased energy access and productive use solutions can be attained at scale when we combine the right financing with strong partnerships, and community-led ownership.



Busoga Kingdom Commends SAYE's Transformative Efforts

The SAYE Project continued to strengthen its partnership with the Busoga Kingdom through a courtesy visit to the Igenge Palace in Bugembe, Jinja. Led by the SAYE Project Director, John Ssenyonga, the delegation had the exceptional honor of meeting His Majesty Isebantu William Wilberforce Gabula Nadiope IV, the Kyabazinga of Busoga.

This engagement follows a recent visit by Kingdom officials to the SAYE Project, during which they had the opportunity to:

- Observe SAYE interventions first-hand,
- Interact with project participants, and
- Explore potential areas of collaboration, including the allocation of Kingdom-owned land to support youth block farming initiatives.

During that visit, the Minister for General Duties in the Office of the Katuukiro, Owek. Edward Paul Munaaba, expressed profound appreciation for SAYE's unwavering commitment to uplifting young people in the region. He emphasized that SAYE stands out as a true partner to the Kingdom in its mission to create sustainable youth employment.

“The SAYE Project is providing employment without asking for any qualifications, and beyond that, they are equipping you with skills that make you experts in agribusiness,” he remarked.



During the meeting with the Kyabazinga, project representatives led by John Ssenyonga underscored the critical importance of land as a foundation for agribusiness. They expressed heartfelt gratitude to the Kingdom for making land accessible to young agripreneurs and highlighted the need for continued support to further expand land access and strengthen youth economic empowerment in the agribusiness sector.

His Majesty commended the SAYE Project for its transformative impact, particularly in enabling young people especially young women to access dignified work. He noted the strong synergies between SAYE and existing Kingdom programs, emphasizing the importance of equipping youth with modern entrepreneurial skills, fostering positive mindset change, and maintaining cultural grounding as they pursue economic advancement.

Together, these engagements lay a strong foundation for the forthcoming Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the Kingdom and the SAYE project which will further deepen collaboration in transitioning young people into dignified and fulfilling work.

40 Million Reasons to Believe: Vision Fund Boosts Production and Resilience for Bugiri's SHGs.

By Victoria Abuin Adong
Intervention Manager-Rural and agriculture Finance - FSDU



Vision Fund Uganda is a microfinance organization whose mission is etched in empowering families to become financially resilient whilst unlocking economic potential for communities to thrive. It is in this shared understanding of financial inclusion and economic empowerment that the institution is also a participating Financial Institution of the Micro and Small Enterprise Recovery Fund (MSERF) program under Financial Sector Deepening Uganda, demonstrating the tremendous ability of working together towards a shared goal.

The Iganga Branch of Vision Fund has made significant strides in supporting young people under the SAYE Project within Busoga community. 14 Self-Help Groups (SHGs) in Bugiri applied for loans worth 60 million, 9 groups have accessed a total of 40 million and 5 groups under assessment for loans totaling to 20 million. This achievement is confirmation that community groups when given the right tools, can transition into formal financial ecosystems.

This has given youth, women and Persons With Disabilities (PWDs) from the communities the opportunity to access the much-needed capital to grow their agribusinesses. The provision of capital to the SHGs will help to create the essential link between these community-based financial models to be supported by the larger mainstream Financial Institutions in Busoga, ultimately creating new pathways for accessing finance and promoting inclusive economic growth.

In the words of Audre Lorde, "There is no such thing as a single-issue struggle, because we do not live single-issue lives." In the same spirit, our participants face several challenges in accessing formal finance these being institutional barriers around policy, guidelines and requirements and conscious and unconscious biases towards youth, women and PWDs. This achievement begins to dismantle these obstacles, opening significant pathways for access to sustainable long-term financial inclusion.

To support the SHGs further, the branch provides tailored financial literacy training and guides on how to manage funds responsibly, which is an approach that is at the forefront of the institution's financial service delivery model. The group lending model used focuses on the group borrowing and internal lending to its members, creating an environment of mutual support and self-reliance.

Additionally, during SHG weekly meetings, which usually occur at community halls, youth centers or chairpersons' residential places, the staff of Vision Fund attend and provide members with hands-on support. HPI's 12 cornerstones and principles have played a big role in creating a positive and safe environment for young people which has prepared them for services such as finance. Vision Fund's provision of finance to SHG members enhances these benefits by enabling members to start/sustain agribusinesses, grow current agribusinesses, and strengthen their family's financial position.

In the long run, the success of these 14 SHGs regarding loan repayments will play a significant role in determining the potential to expand to other SHGs in the region. Through this experiential partnership, Vision Fund and FSD Uganda aim to unlock opportunities for thousands of young people empowering them not only to build livelihoods but also to shape financially resilient, self-sustaining communities.

HEIFER INTERNATIONAL UGANDA in the news



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Media features

Our Partners

Heifer's values-based partnerships connecting smallholder farmers to markets, capital and technology.

In partnership with



Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations



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MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS
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