

Strengthening Uganda's Emergency Response and Recovery to COVID-19: Boosting national resilience to multi-hazard induced disaster risks and pandemics

Background

Uganda is currently being hit by several multi-faceted disasters. The impacts of climate change, food insecurity, and strained social services in refugee dense districts have overextended an already pressurized economy. In light of COVID-19, these circumstances have only worsened, creating a critical demand for additional attention and resources.

The agricultural sector of Uganda is particularly vulnerable, often experiencing weather-related risks such as flooding and landslides due to prolonged rainfall. A second wave of locusts - which has already invaded regions like Karamoja- is estimated to be up to 20 times worse than the first and threatens Uganda's already fragile food production.

Efforts to contain these hazards have been hampered by the emergence of COVID-19 and has averted the attention of many key stakeholders from one crisis to another. In particular, communities that live on Uganda's border face some of the highest exposure risks due to their positioning close to transport hubs. The emergence of these border hotspots have created the need for increased surveillance to ensure a more timely response in cases of natural or public health emergencies.

In response, UNDP Uganda together with the National Emergency Coordination and Operation Center (NECOC), with the financial support of approximately US\$350,000 from The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, have begun efforts to expand the management and resilience capacity of the Office of the Prime Minister of Uganda (OPM). This project will be instrumental in enhancing national response to multi-hazard induced disasters with benefits that stretch beyond COVID-19. This includes the optimised efficiency of systemic processes within NECOC together with its regional, district and cross-border supportive mechanisms.

"What we don't know about Africa and COVID-19 is far less important than what we do know. Because the things we do know are amazing and important and have surely contributed to Africa's overall success in weathering this disease."

Solomon Zewdu, Deputy Dr. for Global Development in Ethiopia & Africa
Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation

Approach and focus areas



Programme objectives

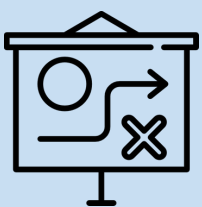
The framework of ongoing support between UNDP Uganda and the OPM has three major priorities and four areas of investment:

1. Strengthen evidence-based decision making to enable coordinated prioritization of resources towards the most impactful control efforts.
2. Expand risk mitigation efforts to decrease health and social-economic shocks caused by the pandemic.
3. Build up local institutional capabilities in response to COVID-19 and future emergencies including epidemics or pandemics.

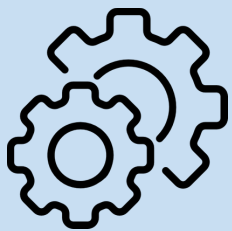
Policy, planning and budgeting



Deepening communications channels: This programme rollout aims to support the OPM for enhanced coordination of responses to disasters across sectors, ministries, departments, agencies and local governments. The support to OPM will also identify critical communication needs and limitations followed up with the launch of a strategic engagement process for all key actors.



Streamlining multi-sector planning: Investment will provide technical advice to the OPM for leadership for coordinated multi-sector planning, forecasting response needs, effective management and utilization of stimulus packages from Government and development partners. With it, local capabilities to respond to current and future emergencies will expand. Given the high refugee and cross-border migration from neighbouring countries, the programme aims to ramp up the Governments COVID-19 response capacity, therefore alleviating some strains put on the health care systems.



Facilitating test expansion: Deliverables will also address the Ministry of Health (MOH) request to build on the technical support given by the World Health Organisation (WHO) and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to the Uganda Virus Research Institute (UVRI). UVRI serves as the only centre in the country to expand urgently needed testing capabilities specifically for cross-border long-distance truck drivers. Focus will be given to strengthening the information flows between the sub-national and national arms of the NECOC through test analysis.



Safeguarding vulnerable communities: UVRI is a national institution that is also a regional partner for the foundation 'TB, HIV and Global Health Research and Development'- a subsidiary of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. These initiatives also work to strengthen the capacity for future emergency preparedness. Considering, Uganda's current policy on refugees, it is estimated that the influx of refugees will continue to create ongoing demand for COVID-19 testing capabilities. This investment will, therefore, contribute to the prevention and containment of COVID-19, alleviate suffering, and protect the most vulnerable populations. This includes refugees, host communities, subsistence farmers, children, women and persons in transit.

Challenges and considerations

The Office of the Prime Minister of Uganda, NECOC and UNDP is putting communities at the centre of climate change adaptation planning through its strategic programming on the national and local level. The current environmental conditions in Uganda pose multiple challenges to the work ahead, and include the following:

- Flooding at Lake Victoria and throughout The Nile system has reached the highest level ever recorded since 1964[1] . As a result, water transport facilities are hampered from normal operations due to submerged jetties and landing sites. The heavy rainfall has also disrupted water sanitation, health facilities, and businesses.
- Significant farmlands in the Busia and Kween districts of eastern Uganda; the Kasese, Bundibugyo and Ntoroko districts in south-western Uganda; and several districts of the central region of the Lake Victoria Basin are also flooded. This poses the danger of insufficient food supply for domestic consumption and the major losses of primary cash crops like rice, beans, and corn.
- Houses are being destroyed by frequent landslides. An assessment from OPM Department of Relief, Disaster Preparedness and Management indicated that as of 18 December 2019, the disasters had claimed lives of 38 and displaced 65,250 people[3] . The national and regional forecast show that the East African region will continue to receive rains, which already has negatively impacted 6.8 million Ugandans.

Expected outcomes



To implement the targets outlined by the UNDP framework agreement with the OPM, and to further optimise systemic processes within NECOC, this programme aims to achieve the following goals:

Expand capacity for COVID-19 testing and increase border surveillance in Kampala City, high-risk cross border points, and transportation corridors:

- Resources will be channeled towards providing rapid assessments to gauge levels of COVID-19 in Uganda. This action will supplement the vital community assessment work already taking place in the country.
- Investment both financial and intellectual- will contribute to pandemic prevention and containment targeted at vulnerable communities. Reinforcements will be provided to border committees for more effective surveillance. This will include cross-border capacity building for analysis and will produce important lessons for related disasters such as Ebola, locusts, floods, drought, etc.
- This support will leverage UNDP's past and ongoing investment in activating NECOC, including the current efforts to equip its district, regional and border support mechanisms.

Strengthen national coordination capacities for emergency response and recovery with a robust Knowledge Management System for the NECOC:

- UNDP will support creating a more vigorous and updated early warning system to promote resilient infrastructures. This blueprint will be housed within NECOC and mapped on the national and local levels.
- UNDP technical teams will contribute to the establishment of a bespoke epidemic preparedness, response and recovery system through harnessing synergies across sectors and actors. Through this work, Uganda will have significantly improved its long-term ability to manage emergencies while building its best practices, insights and partnerships.

Establish a Think Tank to further curate vital information from the emergency response and coordination ecosystem:

- UNDP will fortify pathways for strengthening risk management by forming a Think Tank comprised of critical experts to further provide support to NECOC. Specialists will consult on the economic and governmental impacts of the pandemic.
- This Think Tank will have an auxiliary team of eight researchers from Makerere University supported by eight research grants. UNDP will also provide a Senior Gender Advisor who will ensure gender analysis is integrated into all policy and programmatic work produced by the Think Tank and NECOC (ie: policy briefs, academic articles, etc.).
- A small interdisciplinary portion of the Think Tank will function in-house at the OPM. This will secure that consistent independent analyses is provided quickly to improve governmental response times. Such support will foster heightened knowledge management and policymaking for a stronger national resilience disaster risks.

Development Timeline

30 July 2020

- Recruit and deploy a multidisciplinary team of four specialists - two supporting disaster risk, one knowledge manager, and one communications specialist. This core team will form a Think Tank at NECOC. The team will also be able to consult on cross-border disaster risk coordination.
- Generate and document knowledge to inform policy and practice. Support capacity building through conducting training for the local government key stakeholders.
- Facilitate strategic communication and engagement of stakeholders within government, community security organisations, the private sector, academia, development partners, cultural institutions, and faith-based organizations.

30 October 2020

Provide small grant funding to support research by members attached to the Think Tank.



30 June 2021

- Expand national capacity for COVID- 19 testing and increase border surveillance with cross-border coordination.
- Support the conducting of periodic rapid risk assessments and local level surveillance in hotspots for COVID-19 detection and reporting. Community-based healthcare workers will also be provided motorbikes or bicycles for increased mobility through hotspots.
- Provide a grant to the Uganda Virus Research Institute (UVRI) to strengthen timely testing and collaboration between sub-national and national arms of the NECOC.
- Strengthen national coordination capacities for emergency response and recovery through a robust Knowledge Management System for the NECOC.
- Conduct strategic risk assessments; prepare and disseminate analytical reports, policy briefs and best practices to inform policy, planning, budgeting and stakeholder engagement on COVID-19 and other disasters.

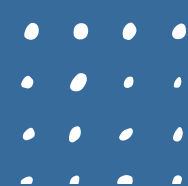
30 December 2020

Design a multi-sector strategy to inform short, medium and long-term capacity development for disaster risk reduction and mitigation.

About UNDP Uganda

UNDP is the leading United Nations organization fighting to end the injustices of poverty, inequality and climate change. Working with our broad network of experts and partners in 170 countries, we help nations to build integrated, lasting solutions for people and planet.

In Uganda, UNDP supports the Government to achieve sustainable development, create opportunities for empowerment, protect the environment, minimise natural and man-made disasters, build strategic partnerships and improve the quality of life for all citizens.



United Nations Development Programme
Plot 11 Yusuf Lule Road Kampala Uganda

Email: innocent.ejolu@undp.org/ registry.ug@undp.org

For media enquiries / dissemination: michael.mubangizi@undp.org

Website: www.ug.undp.org