Self Help AFRICA

Lake Bunyoni Islands, Uganda

Uganda GREEN Project

New York Change-Maker's Ball

Special Project 2022

selfhelpafrica.org

INTRODUCTION

In 2023, Self Help Africa (SHA) strengthened its commitment to the communities of **Kabale** and **Rubanda Districts** in Uganda—regions facing increasing pressure from population growth, land fragmentation, soil erosion, deforestation, wetland degradation, persistent poverty, poor nutrition, and gender inequality.

With generous funding of **$113,680** from the 2022 New York Gala, SHA expanded the reach and impact of the **GREEN (Growing Resilience and Eco Enterprise) Project**.

The initiative focused on enhancing the resilience of smallholder farmers, women, and youth within the Lake Bunyonyi Sub-Catchment area by:

- Building the capacity of communities to adapt to and mitigate the effects of climate change;
- Addressing the root causes of gender inequalities and promoting social inclusion;
- Combating malnutrition through improved nutrition-sensitive agriculture practices;
- Enhancing financial inclusion and economic empowerment through support to savings groups and support to sustainable livelihoods.

PROJECT OVERVIEW

The GREEN Project focused on:

- **EMPOWERING** 1,000 smallholder farmers to achieve sustainable natural resource management by addressing environmental vulnerabilities, while focusing on improving the livelihoods of communities that depend on these natural resources.
- **SUPPORTING** the restoration of land to improve its productivity and enhance crop yields. Deliberate interventions were geared towards addressing the underlying drivers of poor nutrition at the household level.
- **STRENGTHENING** smallholder farmers and business groups to increase access to financial services and supported them to invest in green enterprises.

The initiative strengthened the resilience of 1,000 smallholder farmers by promoting sustainable land restoration, improved household nutrition, and inclusive natural resource management. It also enhanced financial access, enabling investment in green enterprises that drive long-term environmental and economic resilience.

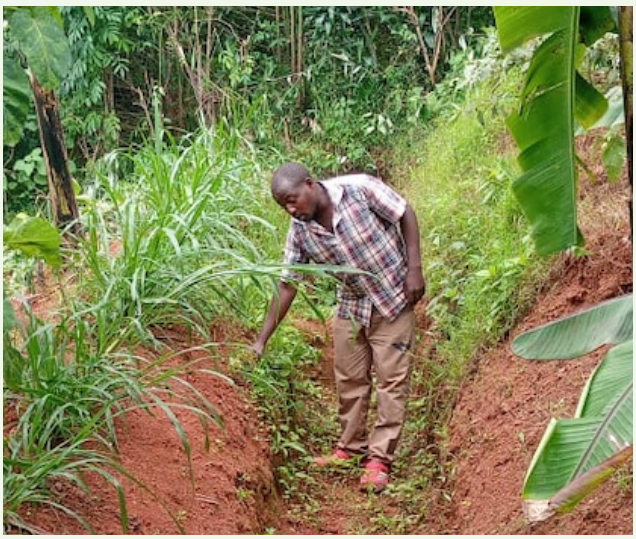
How Gideon Has Transformed His Family's Future

54-year-old Gideon Magara has experienced a remarkable transformation in his farming journey.

For years, Gideon relied on traditional methods, planting 25 kilograms of local bean seeds each season. This approach yielded only about 50 kilograms per harvest—barely enough to feed his family.

That changed when he took part in training sessions facilitated by Self Help Africa in Rugarambiro village, where he lives. The training focused on restoring soil fertility and improving land productivity. Farmers like Magara were given practical knowledge on improved land preparation, crop spacing, compost and liquid manure application, and were advised on weed and pest management, and on proper post-harvest handling. Gideon invested in 25 kilograms of Sugar30, an iron-rich, improved bean variety. The results were astounding: he harvested 250 kilograms of beans, five times his previous yield.

"I now have enough food for my family for seven months before the next harvest," he shared proudly. "I am no longer worried about what they will eat. I also sell the



surplus to earn income, which helps me pay school fees and buy other necessities."

Gideon's story is a testament to the power of knowledge, sustainable farming, and the impact of targeted agricultural interventions. He is one of many farmers who, through training and adoption of improved practices, are now harvesting hope, food security, and a better future.

KEY OUTCOMES

AREA OF FOCUS	IMPACT
SUSTAINABLE NATURAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT	• 1,898 (1,020 female; 878 male) project participants reached by the project with 819 adult women and 434 youths. • Six robust, community-led governance structures of Village Natural Resources Management composed of 54 (30m; 24f) established and strengthened to undertake leadership in Natural resources Management • Five advocacy committees composed of 49 (31m; 18f) established and dialogue with duty bearers on key NRM issues. • Six Village Natural Resources Management plans successfully developed and implemented. These plans serve as strategic tools for the Village Natural Resource Management Committees (VNRMCs), outlining clear actions, timelines, and responsibilities for restoring and protecting natural resources within respective villages. • 175 acres of land successfully restored through a range of sustainable land management practices. Key restoration interventions have included the establishment of water and soil contours to control surface runoff and reduce erosion, slope stabilization through terracing and vegetative cover to prevent landslides and loss of topsoil, agroforestry through targeted tree planting, application of organic manure and compost to improve soil fertility and boost crop productivity, cover cropping to reduce bare patches and increase ground cover for erosion control. **Communities now more resilient and better equipped to sustainably manage natural resources, with strengthened local governance and restored ecosystems contributing to long-term environmental protection.**
AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTION & PRODUCTIVITY	• 700 smallholder farmers reached using a Farmer Field School (FFS) approach reported increased agricultural output, representing 70% of the project's target. This progress is measured against a zero baseline, indicating a significant transformation in farming outcomes directly attributable to the project's interventions. • 59% of the households report enhanced dietary diversity with an acceptable Household Food Consumption Score (FCS) increase from 40% at baseline to 59%. This represents meaningful progress toward improved household nutrition. These results are based on a 7-day recall of consumption across 11 food groups, highlighted a positive shift in dietary habits. • Households also reported increased food availability—averaging 6.7 months per year, compared to 4 months at baseline—thanks to improved agricultural practices and nutrition training facilitated by the project. • The project successfully promoted seven (07) core climate smart agriculture practices interventions including kitchen gardening, establishment of water and soil contours, agroforestry, afforestation, organic manure composting, grass band establishment, and silage production. These practices contribute to improved agricultural productivity, environmental conservation, and increased adaptive capacity among farmers. • 700 farmers reached through Farmer Field Schools actively practice more than one CSA intervention, achieving 100% of the set target. This milestone reflects the project's strong commitment to building the capacity of farmers in sustainable agricultural production. The widespread adoption of CSA practices, demonstrates increased awareness and willingness among farmers to embrace climate-resilient farming methods. • 779 out of the targeted 950 smallholder households reported consuming at least three food groups per day, representing an achievement of approximately 82%. This improvement is largely attributed to the project's targeted interventions, including community-based nutrition awareness, cooking demonstrations, and the establishment of kitchen gardens, farming demonstration gardens and emphasis on improved crop varieties.

AREA OF FOCUS	IMPACT
	These efforts enhanced household awareness of balanced diets and increased access to diverse, home-grown food sources. Women, in particular, were empowered with knowledge on preparing nutritious meals using locally available ingredients, improving the nutritional status of both mothers and young children. • **Agricultural households have increased their food security, production, and dietary diversity through the adoption of climate-smart practices—enhancing their overall resilience to climate shocks.**

INCREASED FINANCIAL INCLUSION, GREEN GROWTH, & MARKET DEVELOPMENT	• According to the 2024 end-of-year assessment, 89% of smallholder farmers, youth, and women reported an increase in income, significantly surpassing the project's initial target of 73%. This remarkable progress reflects the success of the project's dual-pronged approach, which strategically combines natural resource conservation with green business development and financial inclusion.
	• 40 out of the targeted 30 business groups successfully established and supported across various business capacities. These groups have also been equipped with foundational business skills. A key milestone has been the development of practical and feasible business plans by each group. These plans serve as roadmaps for guiding their operations, setting growth targets, and managing resources effectively. The plans also enhance the groups' eligibility for support from service providers, SACCOs, and other development actors.
	• 32 out of the 30 targeted business groups have been successfully supported through micro-grants. The support was provided on a cost-sharing basis, with the project contributing 70% and the groups contributing 25–30% in materials, cash, or in-kind resources. Each grant was tailored to the unique needs and economic activities outlined in the group's approved business plan, developed with technical guidance. The financial support enabled groups to procure key inputs, enhance infrastructure, and strengthen operational capacity, resulting in improved productivity and income generation. Thanks to the support provided by 2022 New York Gala where most of this grant was allocated to the business groups
	• 873 out of the targeted 900 smallholder farmers have reported accessing financial services and products, representing a 97% achievement. These services were accessed through various channels, including Village Savings and Loan Associations (VSLAs), formal financial institutions such as banks and SACCOs, as well as government programs like the Parish Development Model (PDM). Equipping small holder farmers with the knowledge and confidence to engage with financial systems, the project has enhanced their ability to invest in productive activities, improve household resilience, and sustain green business ventures.
	• As a result of the project's targeted financial literacy training, business planning support, and facilitation of linkages to institutions, 33 out of 40 business groups successfully accessed a range of financial services and products. This is highlighted as below:-
	  • **Savings and Deposit Services:** 30 farmer groups own group and individual savings accounts at SACCOs and commercial banks like DFCU and Post banks.
	  • **Village saving and Loans Association (VSLAs) groups** . 40 of 40 targeted VSLAs participation in community-based Village Savings and Loan Associations (VSLAs). The 40 VSLAs have accumulated savings worth UGX31,804,300 since the inception of the GREEN project. Regular group savings contributions promote capital accumulation and internal lending
	  • **Loan Products from SACCOs**: So far, 07 business groups have acquired loans from the SACCOs to invest in green businesses.

AREA OF FOCUS	IMPACT

	• **Microloans** through VSLAs to support seasonal needs and small-scale expansion. So far, 40 business groups have acquired loans worth UGX 24,179,845 (USD 6,723.77) through their VSLAs. Group loan schemes enabling joint liability borrowing to reduce individual risk.
	• **Linkage to Government Financing Programs.** Enrolment in the Parish Development Model (PDM), with 25 groups receiving start-up capital or revolving funds to invest in enterprise activities.
	
	• Financial Literacy and Business Management Tools
	  • Application of skills in budgeting, cash flow tracking, loan repayment planning, and record-keeping
	  • Development of bankable business plans, which were instrumental in securing loans and grants.
	
	Financial empowerment of smallholder farmers, women, and youth has improved income levels, enhanced access to capital, and fuelled the growth of inclusive, green enterprises in rural communities.

From Barren Landscapes to Bountiful Harvests

Farming on the steep slopes that fringe Lake Bunyonyi always left always left Python Niwomanyire vulnerable. Heavy rains would wash the soil from his farm into the lake, and at times, landslides swept his entire crops away.

Circumstances improved when Python joined others in implementing soil conservation measures, including check dams, terracing and strategic planting of protective grasses on the slopes, when Self Help Africa's GREEN Project came to his village.

Soon, he had built up defences against the rainwater, and his crop yields increased.

Python received training in Natural Resource Management (NRM), mastered agronomic practices and adopted climate-smart agriculture techniques. He constructed deep water trenches along the countours of the hillside, slowly the cascading water, combatting erosion and conserving soil nutrients.

His trenches effectively mitigated erosion, minimized runoff, and improved soil fertility. Python's struggling bean garden flourished, and has become a source of pride and abundance.

From Struggle to Success: Python's journey is a testament to the transformative power of knowledge and perseverance. Previously yielding only 35 kilograms of beans from his 1/4-acre plot, On his 1/4 acre plot his bean harvest doubled to a bountiful 76 kilograms after implementing the project's techniques.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Effective NRM Techniques: Water trench construction significantly controls erosion and enhances soil fertility.
- Increased Food Security: Improved soil fertility directly correlates with higher crop yields, ensuring food security for farmers.
- Impact of Knowledge Sharing: Dissemination of training equips farmers with essential skills for sustainable agricultural practices.

STRATEGIC ALIGNMENT

This project exemplifies Self Help Africa's commitment to its 2023–2027 Strategic Objectives:

- **Community-led and market-based development:** The GREEN Project empowered local communities to take ownership of their development through participatory planning, Farmer Field Schools (FFS), and support for grassroots business groups, ensuring that smallholder farmers—particularly women and youth—led and benefited from green enterprise growth.
- **Climate adaptation through local innovation:** The project promoted context-specific, climate-smart agricultural practices and sustainable land restoration techniques. Local innovations such as soil and water conservation structures, agroforestry, and organic composting were scaled to improve resilience to climate shocks.
- **Gender equality as a foundation for economic progress:** Through the identification and capacity building of gender champions, the project strengthened gender-responsive leadership and decision-making. Women were actively engaged in climate-smart agriculture, financial services, and enterprise development, fostering inclusion and equity at household and community levels.
- **Improved nutrition and food systems:** By integrating nutrition-sensitive agriculture, the project addressed root causes of malnutrition through kitchen gardens, improved crop diversity, cooking demonstrations, and community nutrition education. This resulted in better food availability and dietary diversity, particularly among women and children.

As part of our broader mission, the GREEN Project has demonstrated how integrated, people-centered approaches—linking climate adaptation, nutrition, gender equality, and inclusive economic development—can drive sustainable transformation at the grassroots level.

LOOKING AHEAD

While we are proud of the progress achieved, our work in Kabale and Rubanda districts is nearing completion, with only five months remaining until the project concludes in December. As we approach this important milestone, our focus is shifting towards ensuring sustainability and long-term impact.

Future plans include:

- Strengthening community structures to maintain the gains made
- Conducting final capacity-building sessions for community groups and stakeholders
- Finalizing documentation of lessons learned and best practices
- Strengthening farmer and private sector partnerships to improve collaboration for business development through business contracts and continuity.
- Supporting the transition of key responsibilities to district authorities and community-based organizations
- Holding discussions with district leadership and key partners to facilitate the transfer of responsibilities for Multi-Stakeholder Platforms (MSPs), with the intention of gradually stepping back while ensuring continuity in coordination, dialogue, and value chain innovation
- Consolidating the role of local advocacy committees to enhance community voices in decision-making and policy influence at district and sub-county levels

These strategic efforts aim to ensure that the achievements of the project are sustained and that local systems remain resilient, inclusive, and responsive well beyond the project's lifespan.

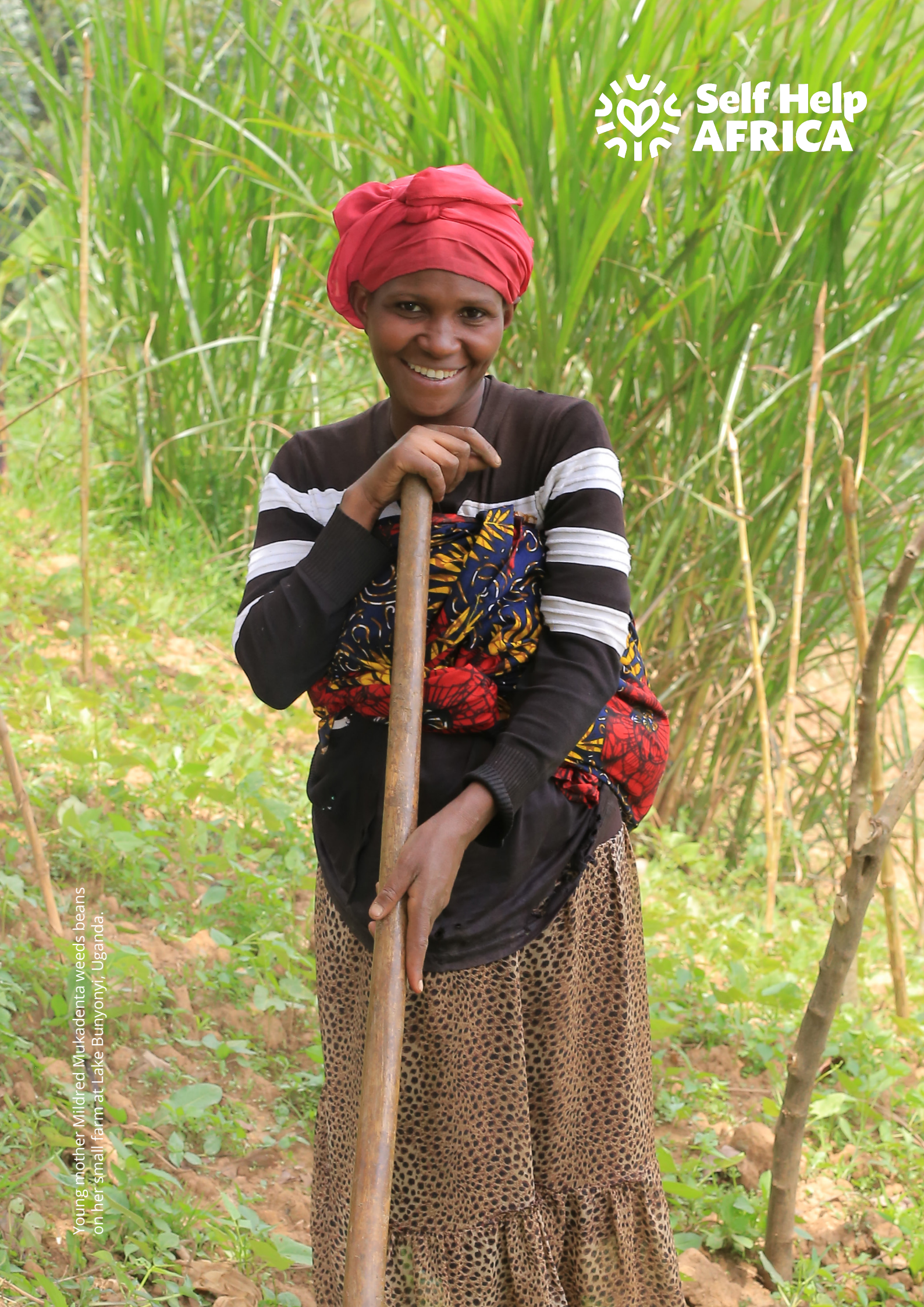
THANK YOU

To our board, donors, and partners:
'thank you' for walking this journey with us.

Your dedication has sparked meaningful change—helping communities not just overcome challenges but build lasting solutions for a stronger future. Your belief in our mission has made all the difference.

As we approach the final stretch of this project, we remain inspired by what we've achieved together—and excited about what still lies ahead.

Let's continue building impact, hand in hand.



Young mother Mildred Mukadenta weeds beans on her small farm at Lake Bunyonyi, Uganda.