

LEARNING FROM EACH OTHER

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An Orphan Care Organization in Uganda reveals a model that promises a breakthrough in the Cycle of Poverty, HIV/AIDS and Food Insecurity

For over two decades HIV/AIDS has ravaged Uganda leaving in its wake an orphan burden that far surpasses that left by its violent past and present. Orphans in Uganda represent the largest proportion of vulnerable children and their number in 2000 was estimated at between 1.65 and 2.35 million. About 25% of households in nearly all communities in Uganda care for orphans, women head 70% of these households. The Uganda Women's Effort to Save Orphans (UWESO), a local NGO founded in 1986, with the aim of empowering local communities to meet moral, social and economic needs of children, in particular orphans, in a sustainable manner.

In 1996, UWESO established a Savings and Credit Scheme (USCS) as an income generating support to the local communities most especially women in five pilot districts. Later in 2000, it expanded the programme to cover 10 of Uganda's 56 districts. By 2003 well over 15,000 mostly needy households had been trained and assisted in starting income generating activities. Furthermore, local private artisans had trained more than 200 orphans. It is estimated that over 30000 orphans and an equal number of non-orphan children living in foster families under UWESO Development Programme assistance had benefited from the project.

Over 80% of the UWESO AIDS program directly affects clients. The majority are widows or grandparents caring for 6 or more AIDS orphans. At enrolment many of the UWESO clients are very poor and so needy that they have no alternative sources of income rather than having to go through a 10-week training programme which they attend for two hours per week before they qualify for a small loan averaging less than USD \$ 20.

The UWESO Model: An Integrated Micro-Savings Operation with A Community Social Transformation Angle

By the year 2004, the UDP strategy included four elements aimed at the improvement and consolidation of savings and credit services through;

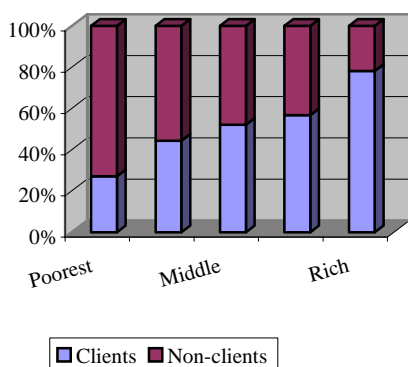
- i. Capacity building of members through cluster-based training which includes the transportation of district – based extension staff and officers from urban district centres to meet rural-based UWESO clients in different clusters and train them in slots ranging from soap and shoe polish making, bakery, cassava management, poultry, zero-grazing of cattle, brewing, banana growing, high value crop (vanilla and moringa) growing, bee keeping to counselling of adolescent orphans in sexuality and HIV/AIDS self protection. This training is demand driven.
- ii. Expansion of an artisan apprenticeship scheme, which trains orphans who are out of the formal school cycle to acquire skills for self-economic empowerment and managing their own businesses.
- iii. Extension of the saving and credit scheme to new areas.

- iv. Institutional capacity building for programme implementation and intensification of local and national advocacy efforts.

Results

A quantitative impact assessment study carried out in November and December 2003 among a sample of 417 UWESO clients, 197 orphan care giving households without any NGO assistance and 55 artisans revealed statistically significant improvement in housing and sanitation conditions of households, household utilities, livestock owned and food supply. A Household Wealth Index revealed less than one-third (31%) of the UWESO clients remained in the lowest two poverty quintiles compared to 56% of the households caring for orphans without NGO assistance or non clients (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Distribution of households by wealth and client status

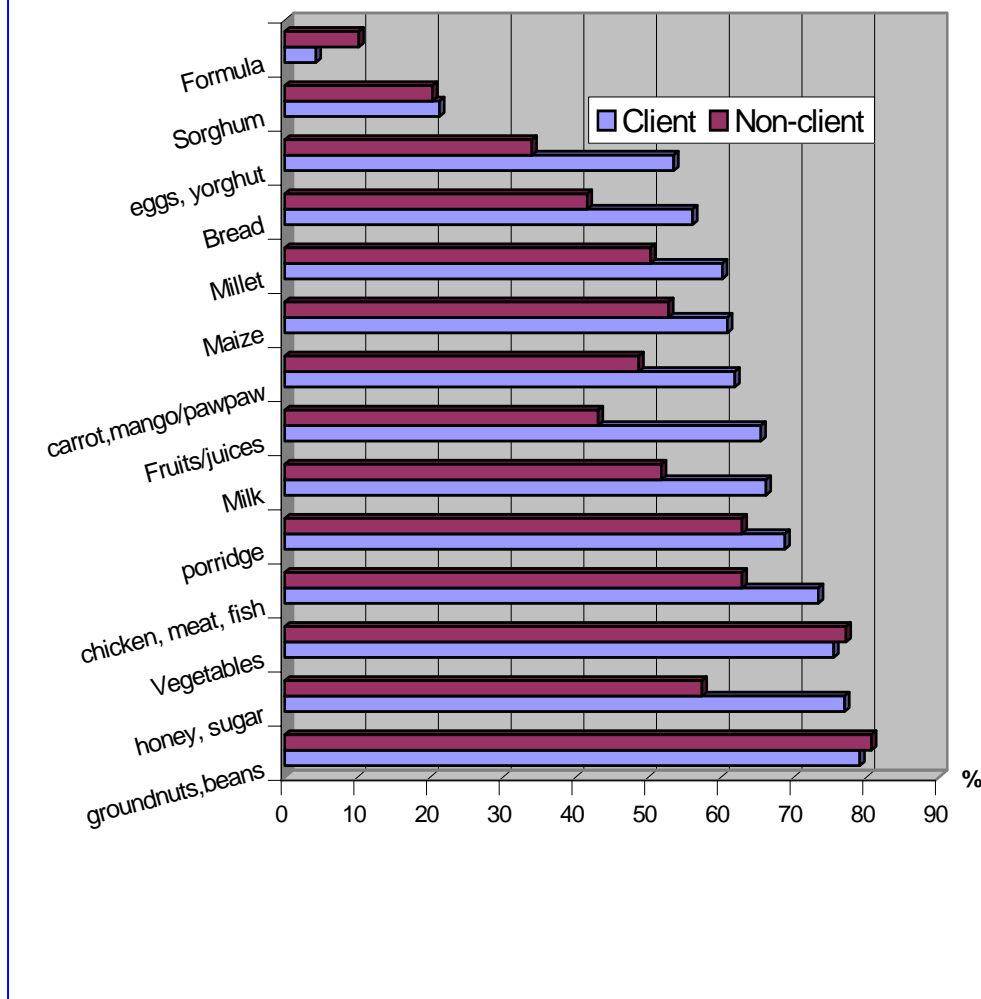


In terms of nutrition UWESO client households are offering more meals and significantly higher varieties of foodstuffs to their children (mostly orphans) and adults than the non-client households (Table 1).

Table 1: Number of meals eaten per day by client status

	Number of meals	Client	Non-client
Children	1	1.4	5.6
	2	41.2	44.7
	3	43.6	19.8
	4+	9.1	5.1
	Mean	2.64	2.34
Adults	1	1.2	6.1
	2	46.8	43.1
	3	40.5	20.3
	4+	7.4	5.6
	Mean	2.57	2.37

Figure 3.11: Foodstuffs eaten by children in the 2 weeks prior to the survey



Moreover, while more than twice as many of UWESO clients than non-clients are likely to be earning income from trade, the pre-occupation with trade has not alienated the clients from agriculture, but seems to have translated agriculture into a commercial activity more than within the non-client households.

Table 2: Main sources of income by client status

	Client/ % (n=417)	Non-client % (n=197)
Trade	82.1	39.0
Agriculture	56.0	45.1
Artisan	8.5	10.6
Professional/Administrative	6.2	7.2
Casual labour	0.9	4.6
Other	3.0	2.5

Conclusion

The strength of UWESO's model in managing HIV/AIDS affected household's economic, nutrition intake and social functioning lies in working with the poorest of the poor and the most vulnerable households that have been affected by HIV/AIDS as

well as armed conflict. These groups of widows and orphans have with time been transformed into economically productive entities that are able to not only sustain their livelihoods but also demonstrate an ability to handle economically viable enterprises. The enterprises go beyond mere survival to progress in housing, food and nutrition as well as general economic well-being and education of the orphans, non-orphan children and the clients themselves. To do the above most effectively the different components of the UWESO Development Programme have been mutually supportive. The UWESO Model recommends itself for replication in many other areas of rural Africa confronted by the challenges of HIV/AIDS, rural poverty and resultant food insecurity.