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## 04 Lessons Learned and Emerging Best Practice

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04 LESSONS LEARNED AND  
EMERGING BEST PRACTICE

## 4.6 Uganda

### Setting Up and Improving Feedback Mechanisms



Photo by Will Baxter/CRS



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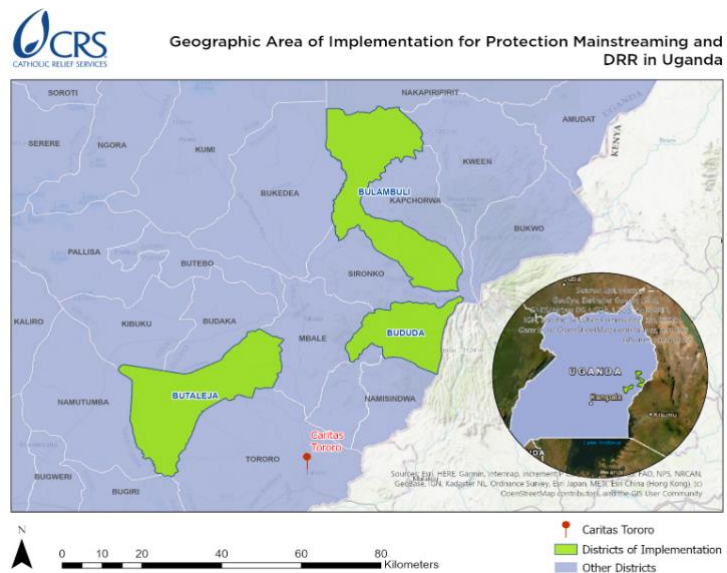


# Uganda: Setting Up and Improving Feedback Mechanisms

Catholic Relief Services (CRS) and local partner Caritas Archdiocese of Tororo launched the *Preparing to Enhance Protection in Disasters* (PrEPD) Project in 2021 in Uganda's rural districts of Butaleja, Bulambuli, and Bududa.

Prior assessments revealed gaps in national and local protection mechanisms and capacities, particularly channels for reporting feedback and complaints.

At the district and community levels, structures were in place to prevent and respond to protection issues. However, effective case management was undermined by the lack of accessible, integrated services and reporting mechanisms. The local institutions had weak procedures and there was ineffective coordination of services in districts. In addition, communities generally lacked information on how to report complaints, as well their rights and entitlements. This resulted in services not being used: yet at the time, there was a rise in sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) in at least one of the districts (Bulambuli).<sup>1</sup>



## Building Relationships

The PrEPD project team reached out to district government stakeholders in major departments. This included the Departments of Natural Resources, Public Works, Marketing and Production, Health, and Security/Police. These consultations identified key government partners who would later become safe and dignified programming focal points/champions. The discussions also facilitated access to communities in disaster prone areas.

## Leading By Example

With an entry point into communities, the project team was able to identify a gap around feedback mechanisms. In response, they developed educational materials on community rights and entitlements and translated them into local languages. They used stakeholder meetings to inform community members about feedback mechanisms including how to report complaints and what to expect in response. The team highlighted CRS' own hotline

<sup>1</sup> Bulambuli Government. (2020):

<https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=&ved=2ahUKEwjhsqSxhOb8AhVARUEAHQIjCaoQFnoECAsQAQ&url=https%3A%2F%2Fbulambuli.go.ug%2Fsites%2Ffiles%2FDraft%2520Bulambuli%2520SGBV%2520Situation%2520report.docx&usg=AOvVaw33jHKLUSosfvu0OpA7hvXZ>

feedback mechanism as well as Caritas Tororo's face-to-face mechanisms that project participants could use until a local feedback mechanism was put in place.

## Capacity Strengthening

The project team then shifted its focus to capacity strengthening. The team trained 282 people including government officials, village Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Committees (DRRMCs). They also trained volunteer community Safeguarding Agents to be the first point of contact for community members who had experienced harm, abuse, or exploitation. Half of the 32 Safeguarding Agents were female. The community Safeguarding Agents also served as a reliable source to share information with communities about the feedback mechanisms.

## Local Ownership

Next the project team worked closely with its government focal points to map shock-responsive feedback mechanisms using the *Feedback Mechanism Context Analysis and Consultation tool*. They found that the main feedback mechanism in use was local government structures. Feedback reported to these structures was logged in a central registry and sent to the appropriate department by the district's Chief Executive Officer. This mechanism could be used by anyone, but it was rarely used by community members. This may be because of a lack of awareness. The assessment also showed that the receipt and management of sensitive complaints depended on individual civil servants who were regarded as more trustworthy by communities. The project team asked the local government to take the lead in setting up more reliable reporting channels for the community.

## Putting feedback mechanisms to the test

Disaster struck before the project team could complete its activities. In July 2022, there was flooding in the Mt. Elgon region where the project's three target districts are located. Heavy rains caused major damage affecting approximately 13,000 households. Around 5,000 were displaced from their homes.<sup>2</sup> Government responders, Caritas Tororo, and CRS needed to act quickly:

- With support from local governments, Caritas Tororo, CRS, and World Vision Uganda received funding from the USAID-funded East and Central Africa Rapid Response Fund. This supported a cash response to meet the immediate needs of 2,500 of the affected households in Bulambuli and Bududa districts.
- Educational materials on rights and entitlements developed through the project were adapted and shared during the response. In addition, CRS' and Caritas Tororo's feedback mechanisms were widely used. The toll-free line was particularly useful for identifying inclusion/exclusion errors among those registered to receive support.

## Next Steps

The project team is continuing to work with government stakeholders and DRRMCs to develop or improve simple feedback mechanisms. Planned activities include testing existing mechanisms to find gaps, developing Standard Operating Procedures using the *Feedback Mechanisms - Standard Operating Procedures (SoPs)* tool, and creating information-sharing plans. When completed, DRRMCs in each of the three targeted districts will have a functional,

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*"As a community development officer, safe and dignified programming has broadened my deeper understanding on community engagement... this has clearly illustrated that, in all programming, safety comes first and what matters the most is how the intervention is being conducted."*

**- COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT OFFICER  
IN BUDUDA**

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*"What came out clear during the recent response was [that] communities where we have implemented the safe and dignified programming are confident reaching out using the accountability mechanisms, especially the feedback structures. One family that felt left [out] used the CRS toll-free line and called the subcounty and Caritas Director to consider them for inclusion [in the project]".*

**- COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT WORKER  
IN BUDUDA**

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<sup>2</sup> Ugandan Red Cross Society (URCS) and the Ministry of Health

safe, and accessible feedback mechanism. CRS will also work more with its partner Caritas Tororo to strengthen its feedback mechanisms.

## Lesson Learned

- **Strong relationships with local governments support the uptake of the principles of safe and dignified programming.** The strong relationship built with local government structures has led to the adoption of safe and dignified programming principles.
- **Strengthening local leadership enhances results.** Working with local government structures complements and provides support to mechanisms already in place. It also increases confidence among communities about their government's potential to respond.
- **Local ownership is critical for lasting impact.** CRS and Caritas do not always have the influence to change the mindset of government officials who are not committed to safe and dignified programming. The project team is highlighting these issues with district DRRMCs when they are identified. They work with them to make sure that staff with the appropriate service-oriented mindset are given the responsibility of managing the feedback mechanisms.
- **Additional time may be needed for start-up and sustainability.** District stakeholders noted the project was not long enough to set up the feedback mechanisms. This work needs the investment of district funds or the procurement of equipment, but local governments do not currently have budgets to cover this. It can take time to address these issues.
- **Safe and dignified programming needs to be embedded and not just seen as an add-on.** When safe and dignified programming is not deliberately included in preparedness and response plans, the risk of harm to the most vulnerable remains high, particularly in contexts that do not have adequate accountability mechanisms.

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*“The major gap I have identified is on the side of the referral pathways. Even when we have strengthened them at all levels, these could be compromised especially in favor of the well off against the poor... given the fact that there are no clear mechanisms of holding the two accountable”*

**- COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT OFFICER  
IN BUDUDA**