Cooperative Development & Global Communities:
Promoting Community Health & Nutrition

The Global Communities cooperative development programs utilize the cooperative business model to bring community members together providing them with the ability to purchase inputs and sell their produce together for greater income gains. For over 30 years, Global Communities has been working with cooperative members to achieve a comparative advantage in their markets; achieving economies of scale by lowering their costs and increasing their revenues by tapping into more lucrative markets with higher value and higher volume. Global Communities’ cooperative development programs USAID Developing Economic Strengthening Initiatives for Group ProductioN (DESIGN) and USAID Enabling Market Integration through Rural Group Empowerment (EMIRGE) have been working to facilitate business savvy cooperatives that can thrive, even in times of economic shock. As drivers of community resilience strategies, cooperatives are inherently rooted in their own communities and have vast potential as change makers within their own community.

How can cooperatives, which came together for a business solution, become leaders and drivers of change in civic engagement and endeavor to strengthen the entire community?

The DESIGN and EMIRGE programs work with the cooperatives to ask themselves how their cooperative can look objectively at the community around them and as a unified body become change makers. One natural link for the DESIGN and EMIRGE agricultural producer cooperatives in Uganda and Rwanda has been community nutrition and health. In Bushenyi, child malnutrition and stunting rates are among the highest in Uganda. In Rwanda, more than 95 percent of EMIRGE cooperative members are living with HIV/AIDS, the effects of which lead to weakened immune systems and increase susceptibility to secondary infections. DESIGN and EMIRGE teams work with cooperative boards to identify individuals and leverage cooperative members who have the predisposition to reach out to families across the communities. Together, cooperative members and Global Communities teams provide training on how best to utilize the food that is grown on their farms and available in local markets to increase overall health.

After cooperative technical trainings that are designed to strengthen the cooperative as an institution, Global
Communities also offers activities and workshops on how to increase the variety of foods in family diets. The program staff further teach about the nutrition content of the food in their diets, including infant and young child diets, and how it contributes to overall well-being. This is followed by opportunities to learn about how to measure body mass index (BMI) and what healthy ranges are. By coupling BMI with nutritional education, individuals can learn why they should focus on being within this range and also, what foods to eat to achieve that. When individuals or children fall into dangerous ranges, the cooperative is able to support families by having the information on which clinics to refer them to for higher levels of assistance.

Embedded within the community, cooperatives have the ability to organize members and transmit knowledge quickly. During the recent Ebola outbreak in West Africa, Ugandan citizens were particularly concerned after having experienced small Ebola outbreaks over the past decade. Global Communities brought together international expertise from the U.S. Center for Disease control and partnered with local clinics and the Ministry of Health to a design customized awareness campaign highlighting how the disease is spread and who to call or text and what radio stations to tune in to if questions or concerns arise. The information campaign was focused on introducing facts and dispelling rumors. The cooperatives were able to become a nexus for information quickly and efficiently. With the right tools the cooperative was able to focus on real information and dispel any cause for concern in the community.

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Global Communities is an international non-profit organization that works closely with communities worldwide create long-lasting, positive and community-led change that improves the lives and livelihoods of the vulnerable. Development is not something we do for people; it is something we do with them. We believe that the people who understand their needs best are the people of the community itself. Learn more at www.globalcommunities.org

Cooperative Ebola Virus Disease awareness campaign meeting for cooperative members