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Gender Responsive Circular Economy Innovations for Food and Energy Security of Refugee and Host Communities in East Africa

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Abstract

In the East African sub-region with about 3.2 million refugees and nearly 5.8 million internally displaced people, competition over resources such as firewood, fertile land and water is becoming a common source of social tension between refugee and their surrounding host communities. Located mostly in dry landscapes with poor soils, the increasing population pressure accelerates the loss of vegetative cover, erosion and land degradation, making small-scale agricultural production challenging. Lack of access to adequate cooking energy forces refugees to trade and barter food aid so as to acquire firewood from host communities. Women suffer in particular under the dwindling accessibility of firewood. To complement the insufficient aid received, few refugees and host communities are attempting to improve their livelihoods through growing crops and trees but are faced with the challenges of low rainfall and poor soils.

In response to these challenges, a project that applies gender responsive circular economy concept was developed and implemented by the International Water Management Institute (WMI), Agroforestry Centre (ICRAF), International Center for Tropical Agriculture (CIAT) and Penn State University. The project adapts gender responsive solutions that recover energy, soil nutrients and grey water while enhancing the functions of agro-ecological systems and building business models. Gender integration is a key component of the project as refugee communities are disproportionately women and children from many cultural backgrounds. Furthermore, the project involves both refugee and host communities in its implementation of activities as the influx of displaced persons and the engagement of the donor community, has changed the living conditions for host communities in ways that require careful consultation with local leadership to avoid unintended and unwanted consequences.

Keywords: Circular economy, East Africa, gender, refugees, resource recovery and reuse