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“It’s amazing how much the communities already know about climate change. They’ve seen the effects and identified it for themselves.”

Gertrude Kabusimbi feels that a major benefit of the International Conference on Evaluating Climate Change and Development was the opportunity to share her successes as well as learn from others and exchange ideas about the evaluation of mitigation and adaptation efforts and the overarching challenges of climate change. By engaging with the various participants at

the conference and learning about the resources and methods available, Kabusimbi knows that she will be bringing something valuable back to her organization and the communities with whom she works.

In her role with Support for Women in Agriculture and Environment (SWAGEN), Kabusimbi works with rural communities around Rwoho Forest Reserve in Uganda to enhance conservation efforts and reduce the impacts of climate change on the ground. Much of the project work is funded by community donations, both cash and in kind, while the rest is financed by a small grant from the Global Environment Facility (GEF).

She points out that the farmers in these communities are acutely aware of the impacts that climate change is having. Kabusimbi notes, “Rains don’t come on time any more. They’re very erratic, violent and destructive. This has had impacts on the growing season, which has become shorter, and droughts are prolonged.”

The communities understand the importance of reducing the effects of climate change and have been evaluating the impact of their activities. Currently, they evaluate their mitigation impacts by comparing baseline measures against periodic surveys of both qualitative and quantitative findings to determine overall levels of change in such variables as annual rainfall, length of the growing season, and periods of prolonged drought. Interviews and focus groups are also used to ask questions and generate analyses to assess project impacts. These on-the-ground evaluations are performed at different phases of the project life cycle to ensure continuous project effectiveness and improvements in project design.

The success of this ongoing work has enhanced SWAGEN's visibility and helped it obtain a second round of funding from the GEF. However, Kabusimbi acknowledges that there is more to be done, in particular addressing resource constraints, including the lack of equipment, technical support, and the finances to enact wide-scale change. Kabusimbi also highlights the need for enhanced capacity among community members and partners to implement more effective community-based evaluation, both for mitigation and adaptation purposes.

Although community training includes sessions on adaptation and the importance of this work, Kabusimbi does not foresee adaptation approaches being adopted by these communities in the near future. She points out that they see "adaptation as something that should occur later. They feel that addressing the most immediate threats to their livelihoods is more pressing and liken longer-term adaptation measures to accepting and surrendering to the effects of climate change."

Despite this attitude, the communities are already developing alternative income-generating schemes and SWAGEN is working with the government of Uganda to develop an adaptation agenda, including a new policy enabling community participation in conservation through collaborative forest management.

Overall, Kabusimbi points out that SWAGEN's work has empowered women in the project communities. "They are setting an example in the community and setting the pace for future change," she says

She predicts that "women will very much be at the forefront of development in these communities, particularly as it relates to climate change mitigation and adaptation as they have a direct effect on the resources they need to perform their household roles, like keeping soils fertile and collecting fuelwood and water."

She sees a need for women to play a broader role in mitigation and adaptation work. As such, Kabusimbi stresses the importance of targeting women as leaders and building their knowledge of climate change, evaluation tools, and methods to increase their capacity and enable them to better contribute to climate change evaluation in the future.

According to Kabusimbi, this outcome will improve current conditions and create inroads for the adaptation work needed to preserve the future viability of these communities and others internationally. To make this a reality, she believes that there needs to be a concerted effort to ensure women's involvement in community-based climate change evaluation.

Kabusimbi hopes that her participation at the conference, and the opportunity it has given her to meet other practitioners and learn from evaluators and implementing agencies, will help her organization and the communities build the needed capacity, overcome the constraints to their continued success, and set an example for project replication throughout Uganda and around the world.