

Water, food and firewood: Kyaka refugees' risk traps

KYELEGWA

By Wilson Asiimwe

When violence between the Hema and Lendu communities of the Democratic Republic of Congo broke out in January 2017, 21-year-old Kaseru Paluku fled to Ntoroko district in Uganda.

Now a resident of Kyaka II Refugee Settlement in Kyegegwa district, Paluku cuts a distraught figure.

"My father fled with my siblings but my mother was killed in the fighting," he says.

Paluku says the most sensitive part of his life that was disrupted by the violence is education.

Paluku's predicament is the tip of the iceberg as there are many other Congolese refugees in a similar situation or worse.

Alex Twongyirwe, the deputy commandant of Kyaka Refugee Settlement, says the settlement has only one secondary school that accommodates both the refugees and the host community.

"The population is huge for this school and students are congested with limited teachers," he says.

Several of his colleagues are holed up at Kyaka II Refugee Settlement and enduring challenges such as poverty, water, food and sanitary facilities shortage.

"Life in a refugee settlement makes you give up on your dreams. Many of us cannot study; we do not have enough food and water. We sometimes rely on well-wishers," Jovian Nyiransenga, 23, a refugee, says.

Nyiransenga, however, praised the Ugandan refugee policy, which allows them to move freely. She says the policy does not discriminate people based on their nationality.

Nyiransenga Umana, the refugee zonal welfare council secretary, says poverty among refugees forces many young girls to drop out of school and get married to people who can provide for them.

"Children and women in Kaborogota and Mukondo are sometimes attacked by host communities, especially when they go out to collect firewood. It exposes girls and women to sexual



Refugees carrying utensils they received from ADRA officials at Kyaka on Friday. Photo by Wilson Asiimwe

violence," Umana says.

Water shortage

Umana says water and sanitation is a challenge in the new arrivals' section.

"There are limited hand pumps, especially in Sweswe and Kitionzi, which leads to congestion at water points. Many girls delay in water queues and become vulnerable to rapists as they go back to their homes," Umana says.

Some of the young refugee girls in the settlements have appealed to humanitarian agencies to address the challenge of early marriages and teenage pregnancies.

Established by the Government, Kyaka II Refugee Settlement currently is hosting over 1,160 refugees, majority of whom are from the Democratic Republic of Congo and Rwanda.

The refugees in the camp, 80% of whom are women and children, also complain about poor services at the nearby Bujubuli Health Centre.

Jovian Kabugho, a refugee at the camp, says whenever they go to the

health facility, they do not get services.

She says that one of the greatest challenges at the facility is the language barrier between the refugees and health staff.

Twongyirwe says the settlement is also facing the challenge of space shortage due to the increasing number of refugees.

BETWEEN THE LINES:

■ Sam Businge, a project manager at the Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA) Uganda, says water per capita is 10.6 litres per day yet recommended amount is 15 litres per day.

"We have been encouraging refugees to practise climate smart agriculture, where they plant vegetables on the small plots of land we allocate to them. This enables them to supplement the relief food

that is given to them," he says.

Twongyirwe says they have not been able to provide the refugees with all services due to financial constraints.

He says the Government in partnership with World Food Programme (WFP) give sh31,000 to each refugee who opts for cash instead of food every month.

Environmental impact

Twongyirwe says there is need to address environmental destruction in the settlement as most trees have been cut down.

"All the trees have been cut down for fuel and construction," he says.

Sam Businge, a project manager at the Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA) Uganda, says water per capita is 10.6 litres per day yet the recommended amount is 15 litres per day.

He says latrine coverage still remains low at 50.6%. Businge says hand-washing facility coverage is at 18%.

"Refugees travel long distances to collect firewood, which exposes them

LOCAL VIEWS ON THE REFUGEE SITUATION



Neema Kabugho, resident of Bwiriza zone: We need more water sources because we spend a lot of time looking for water. As a result, many of our colleagues end up being raped and defiled.



Ericana Kaseru, resident of Bwiriza: All the trees have been cut down for firewood. We are facing a water crisis.



Jovian Owimana, resident of Buliti: We need a health facility in our zone because many of the children and elderly cannot manage to walk the long distance to Bujubuli Health Centre.



Swaibu Ibrahim, resident of Bwiriza: We have peace in the camp. The only challenge is lack of food. We are given sh31,000 per month that means sh1,000 to feed a person per day. It is little.

to sexual violence," he says.

A ray of hope

Businge says to improve the situation, ADRA has recruited 10 hygiene promoters to sensitise refugees about hygiene. Among those targeted are 8,000 new arrivals and the host community.

"We shall distribute over 2,000 jerrycans for water collection and water storage to promote safe water chain," Businge says.

He says the sh2.6b Kyaka II Hospital, which was constructed with funding from Adventist Help, is 99% complete and would be handed over by the contractor.

"We need to have the hospital registered by end of January and operations begin in February. This will relieve the area government health facility of pressure from the huge numbers," Businge says.

Man killed in fight over sh2,000, suspect on the run

APAC

By Egessa Hajusu

A man in Apac district was on Monday killed by a relative in a fight over sh2,000.

The Police said Andrew Onono, 32, a resident of Atek village in Apac sub-county, reportedly killed his cousin, Moses Ongu Jogo, 38, after stabbing him three times in the neck

using a kitchen knife.

Joel Omunu, an eyewitness, said the fight started with a disagreement over a smartphone. Jogo reportedly hired Onono's smartphone for a day at sh2,000. Later, Jogo said the smartphone had failed to work and demanded that Onono refunds his money — leading to the fight.

"Jogo requested Onono to lend him his phone for a day at sh2,000," Omunu said.

Jogo, who was stabbed a day after returning home from his farm in Nwoya district, is survived by two wives and four children.

By press time, the body had been taken to Aduku Health Centre IV in Kwania district for a post-mortem.

Apac district Police commander Philip Mukasa said: "We are looking for the suspect."

The incident comes barely a week after Jimmy Okabo, a resident of

Olilim sub-county in Otuke district, was stabbed to death over sh300.

Okabo was reportedly stabbed in the back by his friend, only identified as Okello Oje, while struggling for the money after playing cards at Starch Factory B, Adyel division in Lira municipality.

James Obala, an eyewitness, said Oje refused to pay Okabo sh300 after losing a game to him, which resulted in the fight.

Okabo died on arrival at hospital. The suspect is also on the run.

The LC1 vice-chairperson of Starch Factory B village, Mike Atworo, said many youth in the area had become addicted to gambling.

"The rate at which the young people are gambling is very high. Recently, one lost an eye in a fight over sh1,000 after a card game," Atworo said.