

Refugees decry reduced food rations

GRAPHIC BY BRIAN SSEKAMATTE

When World Food Programme (WFP) reduced food rations of refugees in Uganda by 40%, many people who were depending on them got stranded. **Hope Mafaranga** visited Bidibidi refugee settlement in Yumbe district to analyse how they are coping and the measures that have been put in place to save them from starvation.

“When the World Food Programme (WFP) reduced our food rations, I knew that I was heading for a difficult time. It is a heartbreaking moment for every mother to see her children without enough food. I could not afford two meals for my family, says Rebecca Agiyo, a mother of seven.

Agiyo, a resident of Ariwa 1 in Zone 5, Bidibidi refugee settlement in Yumbe district, is among the 270,000 residing in the settlement. It houses people who escaped from the fighting that broke out in December 2013 in South Sudan, between government forces loyal to President Salva Kiir and former vice-president Dr Riek Machar. The fighting left many people needy and vulnerable.

Agiyo said back home, she was living a normal life, but when war broke out, she ran away with her family into Uganda, for safety. She said when the food ration was cut, other needs, such as clothes and education, became secondary.

“I rather have naked, but satisfied children. Buying clothes was not my primary need as I had to find means of feeding my children,” she said.

FUNDING ISSUES

William Asio, the assistant settlement commandant in the Office of the Prime Minister, said they are aware that food rations by WFP have been reduced by 40%.

Asio attributed the cut in food rations to the donors reducing funds and said many development partners are now in transition from emergency and to provision of long-term development support.

HIRING LAND FROM HOST COMMUNITY

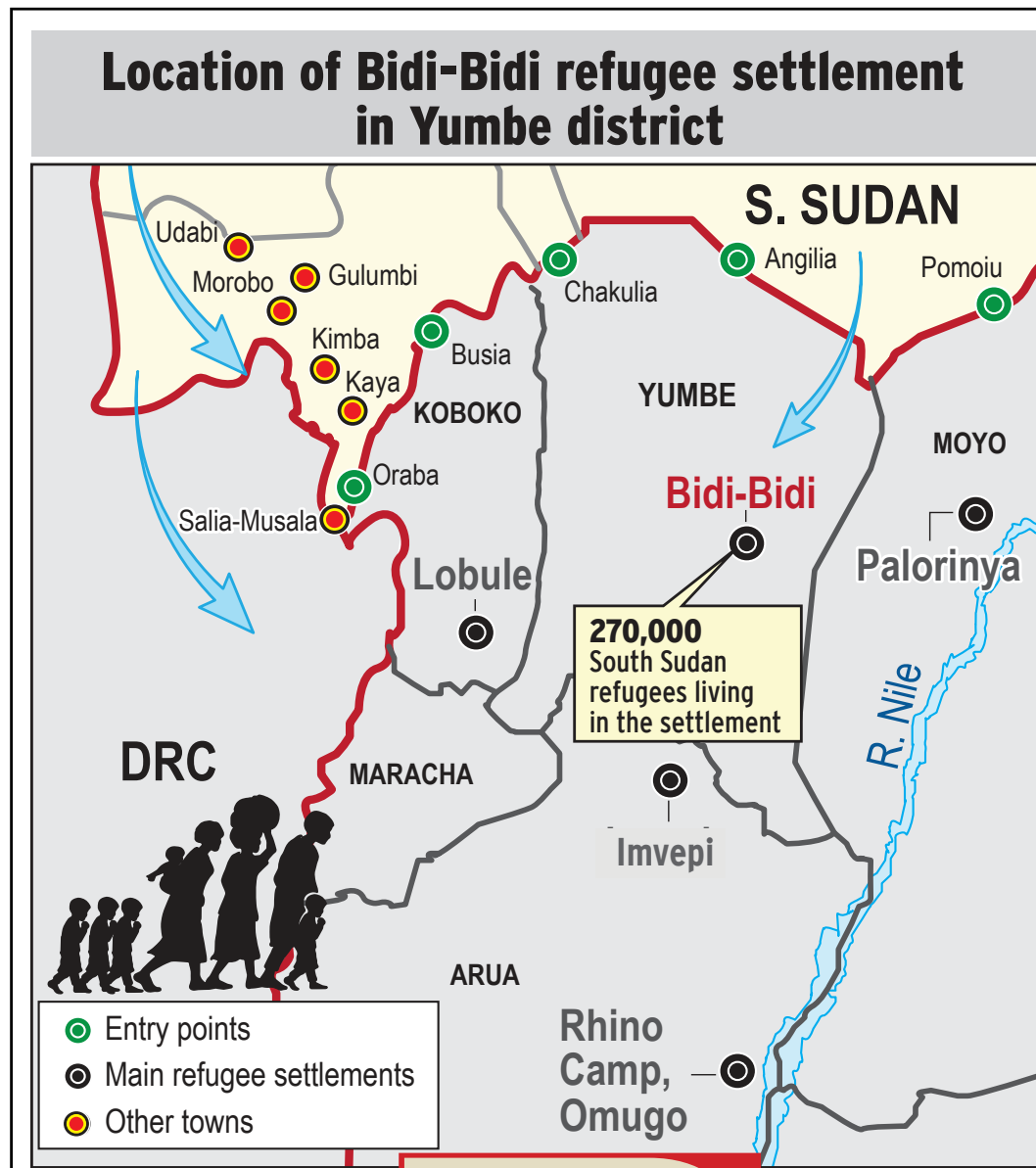
Moses Musema, another refugee, said with the assistance from the Adventist Development and Relief Agency International (ADRA) Uganda, refugees were supported to hire land from the host community to bridge the gap that was left by the reduction of WFP’s food rations.

“I could not stand the embarrassment of failing to provide for my family. When ADRA-Uganda came with interventions of helping us acquire land, it was an answered prayer to me,” he said.

Musema, who has planted three acres of tomatoes, said he will sell them to Arua city and to other refugees, so as to buy food for his family.

INTERVENTION

Sam Businge, the project manager of Programme for Education, Advocacy, Counselling, and Economic



BIDI-BIDI: World Food Programme reduced the food ration of refugees by 40%

1,868 individuals supported by ADRA- Uganda with a livelihood project

Sh1.7b to support refugees in Bidibidi under the PEACE project funded Royal Norwegian Embassy and implemented by ADRA- Uganda

WHAT OTHERS SAY

Manoah Sakabada, a refugee: I have planted 1,600 cabbages and I am looking forward to selling each at sh3,000.

Champlain Dima, a refugee: The Office of the Prime Minister allocated me a 30x30ft plot. I constructed my shelter and grow crops for my family. I am thankful that the development partners have taken away our stress by enabling us to acquire land to supplement what the OPM gave us.

Empowerment (PEACE), said the sh1.7b project funded by the Royal Norwegian Embassy and implemented by ADRA-Uganda has supported 1,868 individuals, both among refugees and the host communities as per the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF).

“The projects support the farmers with agro-inputs, such as seeds and tools, to enable them cultivate crops which they use to supplement their dietary and nutritious needs following the drastic reduction in food rations,” he said.

Businge said together with other partners, such as Strømme Foundation and YGlobal, farmer groups have been supported with agronomic best practices, as technical backstopping in order to ensure maximum yield.

SUSTAINABILITY

In order to sustain the programme, the farmer groups have also been integrated into Community Managed Savings Groups (CMSG).

Emmanuel Sebi, the secretary of Asante Savings Group, said they have been equipped with skills in financial management, bookkeeping, loans and credit skills to manage their savings.

He said the group has savings of sh53m, adding that if it was not because of the COVID-19 pandemic, they could be having over sh100m in savings by now.

“We came as refugees seeking safety, but now are accountants and businessmen and women who understand the value of money,” he said.

Sebi who also operates a shop in Zone 3 within the refugee camp, said he got a loan from the CMSG to increase his business.

Jeremiah Kiwanuka, the livelihood officer at ADRA-Uganda, said they are encouraging refugees to start savings groups, something which allows them to save weekly.

“Each member must have an income-generating activity. They can borrow from the groups and start other income-generating activities to support their families,” he said.

Kiwanuka said the groups are given income-generating activities of their choice, ranging from grinding mills, goats for rearing, sewing machines and salon equipment, among others.

“The activities have greatly improved their savings culture and immensely contributed to better living conditions. Many members are now able to take their children to better schools, provide medical care for their families and build better shelter, among others,” he said.

Charles Ed II Aguilar, the ADRA-Uganda country director, said they have worked with faith-based and community-based organisations in over 20 districts for over 32 years.

“ADRA-Uganda has improved the livelihood of more than 200,000 direct beneficiaries in the last five years by implementing climate-smart agriculture, sustainable use and management of natural resources, food and nutrition security, income enhancement, vocational skills training and market linkages,” he said.

GOOD LEADERSHIP

Susan Gwoka, a mother of five and a member of the God With Us farmers group said: “The host community has been a parent to us and I do not feel like a refugee here,” she said.

CHALLENGES

Moses Musema, another farmer refugee, said despite all the good interventions, farmers in West Nile are facing climate-related challenges and called for other partners to intervene in ventures to mitigate environmental challenges.

“I have been in Uganda since 2015, but this part of the country only has one planting session due to unpredictable rainfall. If partners can give us tree seedlings, it can go a long way in reforesting the area and also give us a source of wood for use,” he said.