

Refugees leave as hunger strikes Palabek settlement

LAMNO

By Johnisani Ocaakon

As the World Food Programme (WFP) continues to reduce food rations for the refugees, Hellen Aciro 32, a single mother of six and a refugee from South Sudan and living in Palabek Refugee Settlement Camp, is not folding her hands to let her children starve.

Aciro knew that in order to survive, she needed skills that would help her start an income-generating activity to sustain her family beyond what WFP was giving refugees.

"I was interest in poultry, but I did not know how to start and how to run the business," she said.

A DREAM COME TRUE

Aciro was lucky to be skilled for three months in rearing birds at Don Bosco Vocational Training Centre.

She is among the 18,800 young people who were skilled under the four-year Skilling in Agripreneurship for Increased Youth Employment (SAY) project.

With funding from the Embassy of the Netherlands, the four-year project is implemented by AVSI Foundation Uganda, a non-governmental organisation.

"After the training, I was given 50 kuroiler chicks to start with. I learnt how to manage the chicks and how to market them," she said.

Aciro said she sold 50 birds and got sh1.5m, and she has reinvested it into the business to expand it.

"My husband abandoned me in Palabek and went back to South Sudan. He left me with the children without money. This work is helping me to raise my children and buy food for my family," she added.

EXPANSION

Aciro has also started a piggery project with the money she got from poultry and her business is bearing fruit.

"Life in this settlement has become difficult for refugees because the food rations they used to give have been reduced to only 3kg and this has forced many people to return to South Sudan to look for alternatives," she said.

FOOD REDUCTION

The reduction of food rations by the WFP for refugees from South Sudan hosted in Palabek Refugee Settlement in Lamwo district is forcing some of the refugees to return home.

John Udo, the head of the Refugee's Welfare Council at Palabek, said food reduction started in July last year.

PHOTOS BY JOHNISANI OCAKACON



Peter Oroma tending to his poultry in Palabek Refugee Settlement



Aciro rears pigs to improve her welfare at the settlement

He said the reduction has increased malnutrition and gender-based violence among the refugees and the host community.

He explained that people are grouped according to their vulnerabilities, where category one gets 6kg, category two 3kg and category three gets 0kg of food s.

"Some of the refugees have started going back to South Sudan, saying they cannot afford to stay in the settlement without food," he said.

Udo said conditions in the settlement have forced some refugees to start stealing food from the host community and this is contributing to a poor relationship between the host community and the refugees in Palabek, which houses an estimated 80,000 refugees from South Sudan.

Udo said early marriages and teenage pregnancies have increased in the settlement as parents prefer to marry off their daughters to get money to cater for their family.

Peter Oroma, another refugee who acquired the same skills ,has started

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a poultry business.

"Most people start rearing birds without skills and they lose them. I am hopeful that all my birds will survive because I know what to do after getting skills from the SAY project," he said.

Charles Opira, the monitoring and evaluation officer at Don Bosco Vocational Training Centre, said so far, about 388 youth from the refugee and host communities have

been trained on both horticulture and poultry rearing and issued with Directorate of Industrial Training certificates.

He said some of the students who are trained in these fields are from child-headed families, child mothers and single mothers who were vulnerable in the settlement.

"Some of these refugees who have acquired knowledge on agri-entrepreneurship are now self-employed and others have been employed both in Palabek and in South Sudan where we do follow up on how they are progressing in their business" Opira said.

Agnes Amony, the AVSI Foundation SAY project team leader for northern Uganda, said the project aims at empowering young people to improve food security and livelihoods.

"In northern Uganda, the project is focused on skilling the youth at the settlements in Palabek and Bidi Bidi so that they are able to enter into employment, with a total target of skilling 6,000 youth in both settlements in the value chains of horticulture and poultry among others," Amony said.

The Lamwo resident district commissioner, Geoffrey Oceng, said he received a report from WFP, indicating that the reduction in food rations to the refugees is due to challenges in food supply worldwide.

"People should know that the war in Ukraine and Russia has affected food supply by WFP, but they are still struggling to provide what they can to the refugees," Oceng said.

Oceng said government and humanitarian organisations are working together to skill and empower refugees in agri-entrepreneurship and vocational skills for employment and self-employment so that they are self-reliant.

Pastor remanded over burglary

KAGADI

The Kagadi Grade One Magistrate's Court, sitting in Kagadi town council, has sent on remand a 31-year-old pastor to Mambugu Government Prison on charges of burglary and theft. Court, heard on Wednesday last week that on July 26, in Kitonzi Cell, Kagadi town council, William Talemwa of Kigangaizi Born Again Church, broke into the house of Elidad Kateba and stole sh20m. Talemwa, a resident of Kigangaizi cell, allegedly broke into the house of Elidad Kateba of the same area. The accused pleaded not guilty, prompting the magistrate to remand him to Mambugu prison until August 18.

State House impostor sent to prison

JINJA

A man who has been allegedly defrauding unsuspecting residents while posing as an employee of the State House has been remanded to Kirinya prison in Jinja city. The suspect identified as Nuwagaba Abdallah Haman Ssempiija, 39, on Tuesday appeared before Jinja chief magistrate Jude Okumu Muwone, who remanded him until August 21, when he will re-appear for a hearing of his case. Court heard that on August 11, Nuwagaba went to Jinja Central Police Station and identified himself as a State House official before Detective Inspector of Police (IP) Michael Bogere. However, Bogere became suspicious, prompting police to verify his identity. The deputy press secretary to the President, Faruk Kirunda, stated that Nuwagaba has never been an employee of State House, leading to his arrest.

Fire guts Soroti Theological College

SOROTI

Fire on Tuesday Morning gutted the dormitory of Soroti Theological College in Soroti City and destroyed property worth sh150m. The fire, whose cause has not yet been ascertained, broke out when the students were busy writing their exams. Over 60 students studying to be lay readers at the college were affected. The college dean, Rev. Besweri Otekat, said documents, mattresses, clothes, beds, boxes, cash and phones, among others, were razed by the fire. Rev. Paul Ariko, the deputy college principal, said it is a great loss to the institution and students.