

Civilians are not a target



World Vision staff serve food to refugees at Bidi Bidi Refugee Settlement in Yumbe District recently.

COURTESY PHOTO

'Humanitarian work demands commitment'

Commemorate. World Humanitarian Day is held annually to pay tribute to aid workers who risk their lives in humanitarian service and to rally support for people affected by crises in the world.

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"Humanitarian work demands commitment which in the end gets so absorbing. This limits delivery on my other obligations as a sister, an auntie and a daughter," says Ms Annittah Atwiine, Humanitarian.

Annittah Atwiine is a humanitarian working with World Vision Uganda at Bidi Bidi Refugee Settlement in Yumbe District.

Her role is to provide management of food assistance to refugees and ensure it is loaded from the warehouse and delivered to the refugees.

She also ensures that refugees receive the right food through the distribution team.

During a typical execution of general food distribution, she wakes up at 6.30a.m. She says her prayers as well as for the day's activities, the team she works with and for the refugees they serve.

She does all this inside a tent before briefing each of the four team leaders on the final distribution points.

At 8a.m she reads and re-

sponds to work-related emails.

"I then process the loading orders for the subsequent day of food distribution according to the plan. I check and review distribution and complaints reports for the previous day. At 10a.m, I set off to the field to monitor and supervise the general food distribution activities at different points," she narrates.

"At each point, I ensure compliance and adherence to the agreed and recommended distribution system to serve the persons of concern (refugees)," Ms Atwiine says, adding that extremely vulnerable individuals are prioritised during the serving.

Bidi Bidi Settlement has five zones and 26 food distribution points, all of which Ms Atwiine moves to, according to the schedule. In a day, she distributes four to five points in one zone.

At 5p.m, all food distribution points are closed. She then tasks all team leaders to account for the distribution for the day, including recording food balances that are returned to the World Food Programme

(WFP) warehouse.

Each day, she receives close to 50 calls to sort out issues concerning food and beneficiaries' complaints with her distribution team from WFP, UNHCR, Office of the Prime Minister and other humanitarian agencies.

Challenges

Ms Atwiine says accommodation is one of the big challenges at Bidi Bidi Refugee Settlement. She says, as a woman, staying in a tent is challenging as sanitation facilities are wanting and provides very limited privacy.

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mands commitment' which in the end gets so absorbing. This limits delivery on my other obligations as a sister, an auntie and a daughter. It has created a gap in my personal life that I'm only able to see my family three times a year," Ms Atwiine says.

The humanitarian sector, according to Ms Atwiine, is a male dominated sector.

As a leader at the refugee settlement, she is supposed to provide leadership to a male dominated team, which she says at times, becomes difficult to command respect, considering the cultural myths and attitudes associated with female

leadership.

Ms Susan Alupo of Refugee Law Project, says as the number of refugees seeking assistance increases, they come with traumatic and painful stories they narrate to workers.

These sad narrations, she says, sometimes wear out the organisation staff.

"We have a programme called care for care givers where guest speakers and clinical psychologists talk to our staff about dealing with challenges faced at work. The mental and psychological needs of staff are taken care of by external counsellors who come on a quarterly basis to give advice to staff that may be overwhelmed with work or feel emotionally drained," Ms Alupo says.

A two days leave is also granted to the field staff in addition to working until 1p.m on the last Friday of every month. This, Alupo says, is meant to give staff some time to rest, replenish the lost energy and take care of their personal affairs.

Mr Gilbert Kamanga, the national director at World Vision Uganda, says in case of emergencies, the staff, despite their busy schedule, are allowed time to be away from work.

"The work we do is stressful. As an organisation, we take our staff as the greatest asset. We carry out staff security awareness to enable them understand what they are supposed to do," Mr Kamanga says.

SOUTH SUDAN REFUGEES IN UGANDA

According to the United Nations High Commission for Refugees, more than 1,800 South Sudan refugees a day have fled to Uganda in the past year. The influx has become the fastest growing refugee crisis in the world. More than 85 per cent of South Sudan refugees in Uganda are women and children under the age of 18. The humanitarian agency also says Uganda deserves praise for maintaining open borders to refugees and for its progressive approach to asylum. Uganda provides refugees with land on which they build houses, grow crops, gives them freedom of movement and the right to work, and grants them access to public services such as health care and education.