

UN, govt tell refugees to grow own food

Alternatives. Dwindling relief food rations and diminishing land offers by host communities amid growing refugee population, and with no end in sight to the South Sudan war, has prompted humanitarian agencies to explore long-term solutions to address feeding needs.

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KAMPALA. In a swift of strategy, the United Nations is to provide high-quality, high-yielding seeds so that refugees start planting their own food instead of relying on relief.

Dr José Graziano da Silva, the director general of the Food Agricultural Organisation (FAO), said they will be providing seeds and simple practical gardening tools to enable refugees farm and supplement their own diets with fresh foods.

He made the revelation during last week's trip to refugee camps in Adjumani District, one of several in Uganda currently hosting more than one million South Sudanese refugees.

"The problem is that we don't have enough resources to provide food on a sustained basis nor can we help them go home until the war ends; that is why we need to have them involved in farming in order to supplement their diets," said Dr Da Silva.

Dwindling relief food rations and diminishing land offers by host communities amid growing refugee population, and with no end in sight to the South Sudan war, has prompted humanitarian agencies to explore long-term solutions to address feeding needs.

Dr Da Silva, who presided over the distribution of the seeds at Agojo Settlement Camp in Adjumani District on August 30, said food security without addressing nutrition is wrong and urged the refugees to start growing vegetables to supplement their diet.

He explained that refugees have no land of their own, but that FAO



Relief. The director general of FAO Dr José Graziano da Silva (right) hands over maize seeds at Agojo Camp to a South Sudan refugee recently as Agriculture minister Ssempijja looks on. COURTESY PHOTO

encourages them to join the local host populations to form groups in the ratio of 3:7 [where local host populations are three and refugees are seven] in order to access seeds and land for planting seeds.

"In a world where so many people are selfishly closing their doors, closing their borders, not allowing refugees to come, Uganda's example deserves praise and admiration from the whole international community," Dr Da Silva said.

The core role of FAO, the UN food agency headquartered in Rome, to ensure "people have regular access to enough high-quality food to lead active, healthy lives".

As such, eradication of hunger, food insecurity and malnutrition alongside elimination of poverty shape its global works.

Ms Beatrice Okello, the senior

KEY ISSUE

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programme officer FAO Uganda, said they have secured *sukuma wiki*, tomatoes, spinach, egg plants, soya beans, beans and maize, onion and carrots for the refugees to plant.

She explained that refugee and host families would each, respectively, get 2.5kg of Maize and 2.5kg of cereals and vegetables for this year's second planting season. The seeds are worth Shs17m. "The refugees will eat some of the products and sell the products from the gardens and use the cash to buy food at the local markets where host and refugee communities trade side by side," Ms Okello said.

Agriculture minister Vincent Ssempijja urged donors to ramp up

support to refugees, saying their swelling numbers strain available social services and relations with host communities.

"Refugees are getting desperate with lack of food, water, shelter and other basic services. As a country we have provided land and safety, but the refugees need to be integrated into farming to produce their own food," the minister said.

Mr Ssempijja said as Uganda provides land, social services and security to South Sudanese refugees "as sisters and brothers, the international community should show solidarity with [the refugees], Ugandan government and people".