



Water shortage remains big challenge for refugees

The forced migration of a large number of South Sudanese has seen over one million refugees seek safety in West Nile, Uganda. The fighting in South Sudan that broke out in December 2013 between government forces loyal to President Salva Kiir and the former vice-president, Dr Riek Machar, left many needy and vulnerable. For the next one month, *New Vision* will be publishing articles to highlight the plight of refugees under the campaign *Be Your Brother's Keeper* to encourage Ugandans to support refugees in all ways possible, writes John Onzima



Pupils at Mungaya Primary School drink from a tap stand constructed by ADRA

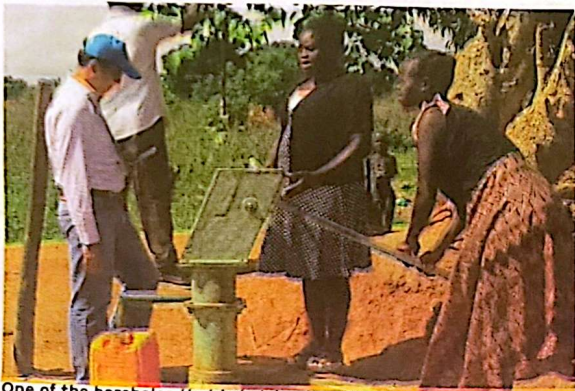
Thirsty, exhausted and dirty, South Sudanese refugees arrive in search of peace. But soon after, another need arises – water. Water shortage continues to affect most settlements in Adjumani district.

Despite heavy investment in Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH), the United Nations (UN) and its implementing agencies are struggling to provide sufficient safe water for refugees. This is because most of the settlements in Adjumani are located in water-stressed parts of the district.

"When we first came here, we walked over 5km in search of water," says Rosemary Kiden, a mother of three in Agojo refugee settlement.

"At the water point, people are many. So if you want to get it quickly, you have to go another 3km to areas occupied by the host community, where you will either be asked to pay for the water or told to leave," Kiden says.

By December last year, Agojo settlement had more than 38,552 refugees in 6,425 households.



One of the boreholes that is helping to mitigate the water shortage

Latrine coverage in settlements

Despite the water shortage, by June 2017, refugees in Adjumani had registered tremendous success in latrine coverage, standing at 78.1% for the 32,319 households across the settlements, according to Lutheran World Federation (LWF), a UN WASH partner. Pagirinya settlement, which has a population of over 35,000, had 78.2% latrine coverage, a drastic improvement compared to previous years, according to the agencies.

This success is being attributed to work done by over 228 hygiene promoters recruited by implementing

partners across the settlements in the district.

The hygiene promoters, who also comprise refugees, work to sensitise the population about the importance of using a pit latrine.

The refugees are given latrine digging tools – hoes, pick axes, spades and buckets. They are also given a hygiene kit comprising a five-litre Jerrycan and soap.

However, households with handwashing facilities stand at 53.9%, representing only 17,410 households across the settlements in the district, according to LWF.

The settlement was first opened in the 1990s for refugees fleeing the second Sudanese War (1983-2005).

When the settlement first opened,

WASH agencies partnering with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) attempted to distribute the water to refugees.

"The agencies allotted 40 litres of water per household a day at the peak of the water crisis," Kiden says.

When they first arrived in 2016, it was much more worrying because there was a cholera outbreak in the distant Pagirinya settlement.

"Since people were moving from one settlement to another, we feared getting infected," she adds.

Given its rocky nature drilling permanent water sources such as boreholes is a difficult task.

It is the same case at Elema refugee Settlement east of Adjumani, where refugees and the host community struggle for water.

While marking the International Water Day this year at Pakelle sub-county headquarters, the councillor for Ibibaworo parish, Grace Mungayo, stormed the celebration with a bottle of dirty water, which

Timeline

2013

President Salva Kiir fires his entire cabinet, including vice-president Riek Machar. Violence erupts and fighting breaks out between government forces and soldiers loyal to Machar.

2014

The South Sudanese government and Machar's forces sign a cease-fire

2016

President Kiir reinstates Machar as vice-president as part of a deal to end the civil war. He is sworn-in in April. In July, fighting breaks out between government forces and soldiers loyal to Machar. Hundreds are left dead, and Machar flees the country. He is sacked again and replaced by Taban Deng Gai.

2017

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees says numbers of refugees who have fled South Sudan tops 1.5 million.

numbers increased significantly. Mungayo added, "The teary Mungayo said the council yielded no response from the authorities."

Patricia Ajio, a youth forum councillor in Pakelle, says the water situation in Ibibaworo, particularly in Padiga village and Elema settlement, requires urgent attention.

"We ask UN agencies to urge local government to come up with a solution. Water is a basic need and we are desperate," Ajio says.

Richard Izakare, an official from Adjumani district water office, stands 62%, with the refugee population worst affected by the shortfall.

Coupled with the increasing number of refugees water shortages acutely hits the settlements during dry seasons.

According to Godfrey Manga, the assistant district health officer in charge of environment, water coverage in the refugee settlements has been declining since 2014.

Manga says on average, water per person stands at 15.2 litres, a decline from the previous 17.7 litres, which is way below the national target of 20 litres per person.

"Plan International constructed two boreholes, which has partially solved the challenge," says Victoria Adrawa, the secretary of the water user committee for Block 1 in Agojo settlement.

"However, the two boreholes are not enough for the 354 households but they are better than nothing," Adrawa says.

"We try to avoid breakage by forming user management committees to ensure that the boreholes remain functional. Through the user committees, each