

# Leaking tents, high pupil numbers strain teachers at refugee camp

**Condition.** Learning is often disrupted by harsh weather conditions at Bidi Bidi Settlement Camp while teachers handle more than 4,000 pupils.

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**YUMBE.** Mr Rasul Akule gets up at 6am daily to teach at Yangani Primary School at Bidi Bidi Settlement Camp for South Sudanese refugees in Yumbe District.

Bidi Bidi, which has about 272,000 refugees, is the second largest refugee settlement camp in the world.

On a rainy day, Mr Akule's teaching material often gets wet because his tent, now his staff quarter, leaks.

For this, rain has become a menace to Mr Akule and other teachers as they have to stand in the tent that normally accommodates two teachers, until the rain stops.

Their beddings are not spared either as the rain soaks them and have to be laid out to dry.

Mr Akule, who is paid Shs350,000 after tax deductions as his salary, sleeps on a mat, but his sleep is often disrupted every rainy night as his house (tent) is flooded with water.

Yet in the morning, Mr Akule has to get to class, even without a good night's sleep, to offer service for the South Sudanese pupils in a congested class.

Mr Akule also cannot catch an afternoon nap as the tent becomes too hot on sunny afternoons.

As he prepares to conduct his lessons, Mr Akule lacks the basic text books to do any additional reading.

“Sometimes we stop teaching, especially during the rainy season because the wind keeps blowing the tents off and it destroys teaching materials. It is really not a bed of roses to teach the refugees.”

RASUL AKULE, TEACHER AT BIDI BIDI SETTLEMENT CAMP

His dilemma is shared by the other 40 teachers at Yangani Primary School who handle nearly 4,786 pupils who live in 13 tents erected by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees in the compound.

“We are overwhelmed with 4,786 pupils compared to only 40 teachers that are here,” Mr Akule says, adding that the high number of pupils makes marking of exercise books an arduous task.

“During the rainy seasons, we have to stop lessons because the



**Needy.** Mr Rasul Akule shows the inside of his tent at Yangani Primary School at Bidi Bidi settlement camp. PHOTO BY FELIX WAROM OKELLO

tents keep leaking and destroy the learning materials,” he adds.

Indeed, at the camp, several of the makeshift classrooms have had their roofs blown off with some of the tents torn, leaving it open to wind and rain to batter the occupants.

One of the pupils, Grace Deng Kuol, says: “Sometimes we sympathise with the teachers, especially during the marking of exercises because they are overwhelmed. And studying is very difficult in congested classrooms, but there is no choice.”

There are only 290 text books that are distributed across the Bidi Bidi settlement. The South Sudan refugee pupils are taught in English using the Ugandan school syllabus.

To redeem the situation in the classrooms and staff quarters, the country director for Association for Aid and Relief, Japan, Mr Noriyasu Okayama, says: “We have designed a budget to construct permanent classrooms and staff quarters and this will help both the refugees and Ugandan teachers to have comfortable teaching.”

Recently, the Japanese government released Shs35 billion to assist the South Sudan refugees and landlords in the various settlement camps across Northern Uganda.

The Japanese Ambassador to Uganda, Mr Kazuaki Kameda, said the pupils would learn in a more conducive environment once the permanent classrooms are constructed.

Mr Kazuaki added that those who have escaped from the war remain in dire need of adequate water, food, shelter, classrooms, sanitation and yet funding from the



**Learning.** Refugee students in a classroom at Bidi Bidi Refugee Settlement Camp in Yumbe District. FILE PHOTO

international community remains meagre.

The Refugee Desk Officer for Arua, Mr Solomon Osakan, said: “Indeed, there is poor pupil-text book ratio, pupil-toilet stance ratio, pupil-desk ratio, pupil classroom

ratio-, with the teachers having to remove furniture to allow all pupils to fit inside the classroom.”

According to the statistics, classroom pupil ratio at the refugee camp stands at 1:153, yet the standard ratio recommended is 1:53, with desk ratio of 1:16 yet it is required at 1:3 and pit-latrines stance ratio of 1:170 instead of 1:40

Largely, education in the camps remains a daunting task for the government, refugee agencies and NGOs to improve if the literacy level of the South Sudanese refugees, who are willing to learn, is to be achieved.

But a viable solution seems to lie in stopping the South Sudan war. As Mr Kazuaki says: “African leaders must unite to solve the South Sudan crisis because they know and understand it well. IGAD and other African regional bodies should see that South Sudan leaders bear the costs of the war.”

**1:153**

**Classroom ratio.** Classroom pupil ratio at Bidi Bidi Settlement Camp refugee camp stands at 1:153, yet the recommended ratio is 1:53.

**4,786**

**Primary education.** Number of pupils at Yangani Primary School at the refugee camp. They are taught by only 40 teachers.