

THE FOREST IS UNDER THREAT AS SOME PARTS HAVE BEEN CLEARED TO PUT UP TEMPORARY SHELTERS

Refugees strain Bugoma forest

By Francis Emorut

Bugoma forest in the southwest of Hoima and northeast of Kyenjojo districts has been encroached on by refugees who cut trees for building temporary shelters and for firewood.

The encroachment is worrying government officials and other stakeholders.

The refugees, who have fled their countries due to conflicts and tribal clashes, are from Rwanda, Burundi, South Sudan, Kenya, Sudan and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC).

They were offered sanctuary at Kyangwali Refugee Settlement camp in Hoima district by the Government.

The new arrivals stand at 31,430 refugees, while the previous ones were 35,791.

When *New Vision* visited the Kyangwali Refugee Settlement camp, the refugees were seen

REFUGEES SPEAK OUT

A refugee: Where do you expect us to get logs for building our shelters and firewood for cooking?

Shal Tabo whose husband was killed by a militia group DRC: My children and I have not eaten food since we arrived here.

Nsina Mape: The food they serve us is of poor quality.

cutting trees to build their houses.

"Where do you expect us to get logs for building our shelters and firewood for cooking?" asked a refugee who was carrying logs cut from Bugoma forest.

With the continuous influx of refugees, the forest is under threat as some parts have been cleared to put up temporary shelters and for cultivation.

"We are worried about

the deforestation. There is need to come up with an alternative source of energy," Jolly Kebrungi, the settlement commandant, said.

She encouraged refugees to use bricks and preserve the forest.

She called on partners to come up with alternative energy sources to mitigate tree cutting.

Kebrungi was speaking to journalists who visited the



Refugee women from the Democratic Republic of Congo carrying firewood from Bugoma forest on Wednesday. Photo by Francis Emorut

refugee settlement camp last week. The trip was organised by Uganda Red Cross Society (URCS).

On cholera outbreak, the commandant said the Government has contained the situation.

Robert Kwesiga, the secretary general of Uganda Red Cross Society, said deforestation is exacerbated by the effect of climate change, which is a global challenge.

He pointed out that whenever there is a big population in an area, cutting of trees for firewood is inevitable, but should be discouraged as it is a silent disaster.

He called on the state and non-state actors to provide services that protect the environment and innovate alternative sources of energy.

The refugees' concerns

The refugees complained about the inadequate food and inadequate water. The new arrivals complained of spending more than four days without food, apart from being served with biscuits.

"My children and I have not eaten food since we arrived here," said Shal Tabo, whose husband was killed by a militia group in the north Kivu, Democratic Republic of Congo.

Nsina Mape, who was cooking cabbages to feed her children, said the food they are served is of poor quality.

Asked about refugees' concerns on food, Kebrungi declined to comment, saying it was the responsibility of the World Food Programme.

"In any emergency, food is not the first, it's the water. The first entry point is how do you

ON THE GROUND

Jolly Kebrungi, the settlement commandant, encouraged refugees to use bricks and preserve the forest. She called on partners to come up with alternative energy sources to mitigate tree cutting.

save life," Kwesiga said.

He said URCS was addressing the issue of water supplies by installing a plant to pump water from River Nkuzi.

Irene Nakasiita, the URCS public relations and communications manager, said the water would be treated first before it is pumped into the water tanks.

She said this strategy would enable each refugee to access 20 litres of water per day as per the UN required standards compared to the current 13 litres.

On cholera outbreak

Kebrungi said cholera no longer poses a threat following measures that have been put in place to prevent more deaths. At least 22 people died of the disease in the camp before it was contained.

She outlined some of the measures taken to combat the disease such as, setting up a health team, emphasis on hand-washing after visiting the latrine, water treatment, adequate supply of drugs, community sensitisation and

setting up of isolation units. Nakasiita said efforts are being made to strengthen cholera prevention and response, including improved water, sanitation facilities and services, case identification and surveillance, establishment of cholera treatment units at landing sites and settlement areas, community engagement and hygiene promotion done with support from URCS.

Cholera is characterised by diarrhoea, vomiting and kills a person within a few hours. It can be spread through drinking water and eating food contaminated with faeces of an infected person.

Other factors responsible for its spread include poor personal hygiene, especially not washing hands after visiting the latrine toilet, using contaminated water, poor sanitation as occurs in open defecation and eating food prepared under unhygienic conditions.

At the camp, hand-washing small tanks have been introduced and spraying of disinfectants on shoes/feet of every refugee entering or moving out of the camp.

The settlement has continued to receive new arrivals of refugees every day, following tribal clashes in the DRC over land. Over 20 buses ply the route from Lake Albert to Kyangwali to transport refugees.

Officials from the Office of the Prime Minister were trying to cope with the big number of refugees using a biometric system to register them, especially after the scandal of inflated numbers of refugees in the country.

INTERNATIONAL HEALTH SCIENCES UNIVERSITY

(CLARKE INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY)

with pleasure invites you to the first "Professor Yunus Annual Public Lecture"

Title: Rethinking Business Education

Professor Yunus, Nobel Prize winning social entrepreneur and Founder of Grameen Bank, will be offering his insight on changes needed in business education.

Venue: Serena Hotel, Katonga Hall

Date: March 6 th 2018 | Time: 3:00-5:00PM

(Free Entrance)

