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BY GLORIA IRANKUNDA

KAMPALA. A new climate initiative is set to roll out large-scale clean cooking and reforestation programmes in refugee-hosting areas in Uganda and Rwanda.

Led by United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) with partners BB Energy, Farm Africa, Tree Aid, and World Agroforestry (ICRAF), the initiative will be implemented under the Refugee Environmental Protection Fund, a refugee-led platform using carbon markets to support displacement-affected areas.

The programme will begin in June with pilot projects in Uganda's Bidibidi and Kyangwali refugee settlements, as well as Kigeme camp in Rwanda, following feasibility studies and government approvals.

In its initial phase, the project is expected to reach more than 50,000 households with clean cooking solu-

New climate initiative to transform refugee settlements

tions, reducing dependence on firewood for household use. At the same time, more than 7,000 hectares of degraded land will be restored through agroforestry, natural regeneration, and community-based tree planting.

Aim

Project developers said the long-term ambition is to restore more than 100,000 hectares of land, extend clean cooking access to more than one million refugees and host community members, and cut carbon emissions by up to six million tonnes annually.

Officials said the project introduces a new approach to funding refugee and environmental programmes by tapping into private climate finance.

"This marks a structural shift in how we finance environmental and pro-

tection responses in displacement settings," said Mr Siddhartha Sinha, the head of Innovative Financing at UN-

BACKGROUND

Uganda hosts more than 1.5 million refugees and asylum seekers, the largest refugee population in Africa. Settlements such as Bidibidi and Kyangwali are facing growing environmental pressure due to demand for firewood and land for farming. The initiative seeks to ease this pressure by combining clean energy access with landscape restoration, while creating green jobs.

HCR, in a press release on April 9.

Implementation will be split between two consortia operating across Uganda and Rwanda.

The BB Energy-led consortium, supported by Hamerkop and Fairventures, will take charge of activities in Bidibidi settlement and oversee clean cooking interventions in Kigeme camp. Its focus will be on solutions that reduce reliance on firewood while improving indoor air quality.

Mr Mohamed Bassatne, the chief executive officer of BB Energy, said the 10-year commitment will not only restore degraded forests but also improve health outcomes and support climate action.

"This partnership will use carbon markets and private sector support to advance UNHCR's work with refugees.

Our 10-year commitment to clean cooking and forest restoration will improve health, restore habitats, and help tackle climate change," said Mr Bassatne.

On the other hand, the consortium comprising Farm Africa, Tree Aid, and ICRAF will lead restoration work in Kyangwali settlement and co-manage reforestation in Kigeme. Their approach will centre on community-led restoration, agroforestry systems, and biodiversity conservation.

Mr Samuel Arop, the Uganda Country Representative at Farm Africa, said involving local communities is critical to the success of such initiatives.

"Community-led restoration is central to long-term success. We will work closely with refugees and host communities to ensure environmental gains translate into tangible local benefits," he said.