

Poor Kumi residents get free houses

KUMI

By Stella Naigino

Josephine Akol, a resident of Agoltom village in Kumi district, has for the last 25 years been living in a one-room mud and wattle house that would leak whenever it rained.

The HIV-positive woman faced stigma at the hands of her neighbours, which worsened her condition. She did not even have a toilet. Her family used to use other people's toilets.

"The day my neighbours realised that my family was using their toilets without their consent, I received a serious warning never to do it again. My solution was to use the bush," Akol said.

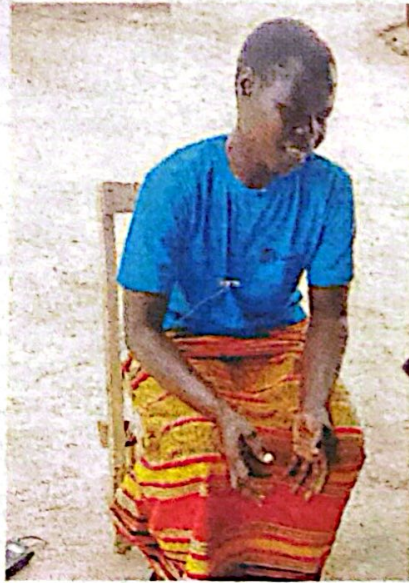
"Because of poor living conditions, my health kept on deteriorating, and I was always in and out of hospital because of poor hygiene at home," she added.

"When I was taken on by Habitat for Humanity, I knew my condition would change for the better. Today, I am clean and I have a place to put my utensils, a proper toilet and a water tank," she said.

"When it rains, I harvest water and I minimise on the number of times I visit the borehole," Akol said.

Isaac Ejang's story is not different from Akol's. He had a small grass thatched house where he was living with his seven children and his wife.

The house was leaking and whenever it would get windy, the entire family would join hands and each would hold a pole on the



Akol speaking to journalists

house to prevent it from falling.

"I tried to farm so that I could raise money and build another small and stable house for my family, but due to poor yields, my hope were shattered," Ejang explained.

"However, one day the chairman of our village informed me that I would be one of those to benefit from housing services that Habitat for Humanity would offer," he said.

"Today, my hopes of proper housing has been revived. I have a two-bedroom house with a sitting room and dining, coupled with a proper toilet and water tank," Ejang said.

Ejang and Akol are some of the 50 residents of Agoltom village in Kumi



One of the houses that were built for the locals in Kumi district. Photo by Stella Naigino

district who received free houses last Friday from Habitat for Humanity, an organisation that helps build houses for poor people.

The area MP, Ismail Orot, said due to the insurgence in the area in the past, people in Kumi are still struggling to recover.

"As a result, the housing is so poor and those who live near Lake Bisina suffer as a result of prolonged dry spells and yet many are living with HIV/AIDS.

"According to the Uganda Bureau

of Statistics, there is an improvement in housing in Uganda, but if the poor people are to get good housing, a lot has to be done," Oriot said.

He added that Uganda still has a housing deficit of about 550,000 units, a sign that Ugandans should work hand in hand with the Government to ensure that the present housing policy benefits all.

He made the remarks while attending a housing dedication ceremony at Bisina Lake View Primary School in Kumi sub-county.

Moses Simwogere, the acting managing director at Habitat for Humanity, said they decided to build the houses to ensure that people in rural areas have decent houses.

"Housing is one of the challenges people in rural areas face, but now that these have proper houses, they are left with a challenge of ensuring that the houses are kept in good shape and also have their children go to school, since they now come from good and clean homes," Simwogere said.