

**Demands.** The refugees say they are engaging in various activities to earn income for their families.

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**LAMWO.** Several South Sudanese refugees in Palabek Gem Refugee Settlement Camp in Lamwo District have resorted to charcoal burning and crushing stones to make ends meet, *Daily Monitor* has established.

This revelation comes in the wake of increased crackdown against illegal tree-cutting by district officials and non-governmental organisations to save green vegetation in Lamwo.

An investigation by *Daily Monitor* reveals that most of those engaged in the trade in the refugee settlement camps are women.

Uganda hosts nearly 1.4 million refugees with Lamwo District alone accommodating some 30,000 South Sudanese Refugees fleeing civil strife in Africa's youngest country.

On a sunny Tuesday afternoon, Ms Joska Anek, 23, crushes loose stones by the road side in Block B at Palabek Gem Refugee Settlement Camp.

She fled from Pajok in Magwi County, South Sudan, in 2017. Ms Anek has settled at the camp with her two children and husband who operate as boda boda rider.

It's her third day crushing the loose stones that she collects early morning from a nearby stream, daily.

Ms Anek says she was forced into crushing stones by the biting poverty in the settlement camp.

"What we receive here is only monthly food rations from the Office of the Prime Minister (OPM). We have no alternative ways of earning money; and if I don't engage in an activity that raises money for me, how will I buy clothes and other necessities for me and the children?" Ms Anek wonders.

She anticipates earning Shs200,000 after selling heaps of crushed stones, which are used as aggregate in construction. "I have no other option here in the settlement camp, I also can't just beg because no one will give me the money. I am using what is available within the camp to make ends meet," Ms Anek says.

Ms Maria Lalam, 32, another refugee in the settlement camp, is also engaged in charcoal trade.

Ms Lalam also fled from Pajok fol-

# S. Sudan refugees resort to charcoal, stone crushing



80,000 TREES PLANTED

Mr Henry Mukiibi, the LWF Environment and Energy Project Manager in northern Uganda, said the organisation has so far planted some 80,000 assorted tree species within the refugee settlement camp since last year.

He also said they have secured funds from the European Union to introduce apiaary farming in the buffer zones within the refugee settlement camp that are being encroached on.

In Adjumani District, figures from the local government indicate that more than 11 million trees have been cut down since the latest refugee influx started in December 2013.

Following a war that broke out between rebels and government forces in the area.

**Making ends meet.** Ms Joska Anek crushes stones by the roadside in Block B at Palabek Gem Refugee Settlement Camp on Tuesday. PHOTO BY JULIUS OCUNGI

She says she started burning charcoal with the help of her husband to raise money to meet their family demands.

"We came as refugees and left our businesses behind in South Sudan, and after nearly a year in the settlement camp, life has turned out rough for us. My husband and I haven't been able to find any work. We decided to burn charcoal instead," Ms Lalam says.

She says they are cutting down trees that are not endangered since some of them have been marked 'not for cutting.'

If there are alternative ways of giving refugees' cash, we would welcome it; this would solve the challenges we are facing," Ms Lalam says.

Environmentalists and OPM officials during celebrations to mark World Environment Day at Palabek Gem Refugee Settlement Camp on

Tuesday warned that activities being carried out by the refugees threaten the environment and risk degradation.

Mr David Wangwe, the Palabek Gem Settlement Commandant, told *Daily Monitor* in an interview that the on-going charcoal burning by South Sudanese refugees poses danger to conservation.

He said OPM in partnership with the Lutheran World Federation [LWF] have launched an awareness drive among the refugees and host communities on the dangers of tree cutting and seeking alternative energy sources.

"We have trees that are marked and shouldn't be cut, that was our first step towards saving endangered tree species, but that alone can't guarantee their safety, what we are embarking on is the use of alternative energy sources so that trees are saved," Mr Wangwe said.

BY FELIX WAROM OKELLO

Refugees resort to charcoal, stone crushing