

MAK in sh18b project to curb refugee crises

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In an effort to end borderland conflicts in the East African region, Makerere University (MAK), with support from the Norwegian government, has embarked on a project to understand the cause of the problem.

The five-year project, funded by Norwegian Agency for Development Co-operation (Norad), is to cost \$5m (about sh18b), and will end in 2019.

The study is being led by four PhD students sponsored under the same project and is being done in four districts on various concepts.

They include Busia (illegal cross-border trade known as *magendo*), Kitgum (migration of refugees from South Sudan), Karamoja (female genital mutilation - FGM) and Bundibugyo on the Ugandan border with the Democratic Republic of Congo (tracing Ebola).

Speaking during a seminar on borderlands dynamics in East Africa at Makerere on Monday, the co-ordinator of the project, Dr Eria Olowo Onyango from the school of social sciences, said they want to find the real cause of the various problems along the borders.

He stressed that they want to present the findings to Parliament so as to inform future policies.

"Issues about our borders have not been addressed, yet so many things are happening which, affect our people and economy. We think when we look at it in depth, we can easily influence policy," he said.

Onyango said findings already show that FGM has increased in both Uganda and Kenya, despite being outlawed many years ago.

"One of the researchers found out that the Pokot always cross into Uganda while the Sabiny of Uganda cross to Kenya whenever they want to do it (FGM). The practice has increased almost by 94% from 68% in both countries," he added.

Onyango said other 10 master's degree students are conducting different studies on truck drivers, child trafficking and illegal cross-border trade among others.

"We have also found out that women, such as those in Busia, are the chief architects of cross-border trade, which is a new trend," he said.

Onyango said studies also show that many of the truck drivers are not Ugandans or Kenyans.

"They are Somalis, with wives along all the truck routes. We must check their health status and the impact they leave in these areas," he said.

Onyango said all PhD students will be employed by



Kirumira

MAK after the completion of their projects.

The principal of the college of humanities and social sciences, Prof. Edward Kirumira, said the East African region needs to address issues of migration to protect its citizens.

He said the migration crisis of people from the hinterland, through the Mediterranean Sea, remains a big problem that needs to be addressed.

"We need to work with all stakeholders to address these issues. Many of our people die on the sea. We need to have an evidence-based discussion to come up with solutions with policy-makers and other stakeholders," he noted.

"Many refer to these movements as economic migrations, which is wrong. I believe that economic challenges are a result of political conflicts leading to migrations. We need these studies to address these issues."

The "Borderland Dynamics in East Africa" project seeks to build capacity development in research at the departments of sociology and anthropology at MAK, Addis Ababa and Khartoum universities. They also want to influence policy formulation to address border problems and build up a network.

The seminar was attended by professors from the University of Addis Ababa and Norway.

Refugee crisis

Uganda is home to about 1.3 million refugees, according to the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), more than twice the figure in June last year. Uganda ranks third after Turkey and Pakistan among countries hosting the largest number of refugees. On the continent, Uganda is now Africa's top refugee-hosting nation, with refugees from 13 countries.

Refugees from South Sudan fleeing conflict in the world's youngest nation constitute the biggest percentage (about 950,000).

The country is experiencing the fastest growing refugee crisis in the world, with the numbers stretching state and host community resources.