

# Funds meant for the elderly well-utilised – Irish Aid boss

By Olandason Wanyama

The visiting Irish Aid secretary general, Niall Burgess, has said the funds channelled for the elderly in Karamoja had successfully impacted on the lives of the Karimojong.

"I am confident in the partnership with the Government of Uganda. The beneficiaries have indicated to us they are getting their money and that it was good (programme)," he noted.

Burgess was speaking to hundreds of beneficiaries of the Senior Citizens Grant (SCG) under the Senior Assistant Grant for Empowerment (SAGE) government programme at Nawaikorot "A" in Nawaikorot parish, Napak district on Tuesday.

The Republic of Ireland and the British Department for International Development (DFID) have been the major funders of SAGE, managed by the Ministry of Gender Labour and Social development.

Earlier, Burgess visited a typical Karimojong settlement and later went to a Post Bank pay point at Nawaikorot "A" trading centre.

He also visited the Irish liaison office at Moroto district headquarters. In the afternoon, the delegation visited Rupa mining ground, located 5km towards the Uganda-Kenya border.

Burgess was accompanied by the Irish Ambassador to Uganda, Donal Cronin, who hailed the partnership between Uganda and Ireland. He said the SAGE intervention was positively impacting on the lives of the Karimojong.

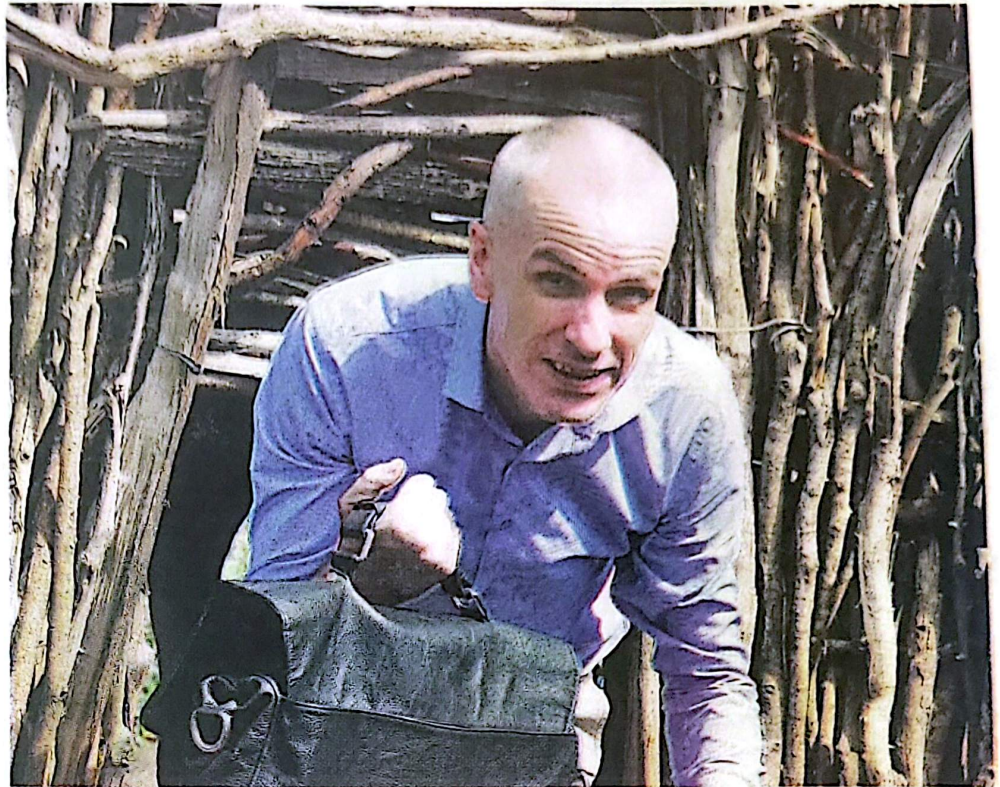
Cronin said the Irish people, being cattle-keepers, share the same values with the people of Karamoja.

He thanked the people of Karamoja for their hospitality and on behalf of the government of Ireland pledged support to the elderly until a time when the Government of Uganda will take over.

"We believe the programme will be sustainable," he said.

The state minister for Karamoja affairs, Moses Kizige, lauded the Irish government, for supporting the SAGE programme to improve the standards of living of Uganda's senior citizens.

Kizige said Karamoja lagged behind for decades due to the insecurity caused by thousands of illegal guns.



Irish ambassador to Uganda Donal Cronin crawls into a manyatta (homestead) in a settlement in Napak district on Tuesday. Photo by Olandason Wanyama

## THE SAGE PROGRAMME

The SAGE programme introduced in 2011 and currently operating in 35 of the 112 districts was meant to be rolled out to five other districts in this financial year that started this month. Under the programme, a sh25,000 cash payment is made to eligible older persons to boost their livelihood. Currently, a total of 172,654 out of the over 1.5 million older persons in the country are benefiting from the programme.

"Now that guns have gone silent, the region is headed for development," he noted.

### Timely intervention

The Napak district chairperson, Joseph Lomonyang, hailed the Ireland government on the timely intervention in Karamoja, saying the funds had lifted the lives of the people.

"The programme has put a smile on the faces of the people," he noted.

Lomonyang said the elderly citizens' grant is being implemented in all the district sub-counties. He said so far, over sh9b has been distributed to 7,470 beneficiaries in Napak district. A total of 2,469 of the beneficiaries are men, most of

whom have now built homes, bought livestock and started rearing chicken on a free-range system, according to Lomonyang.

He thanked the Government for lowering the age of the beneficiaries to 60 years in Karamoja, unlike other parts of the country where the minimum age has been set at 65.

Theresa Lomongin, a SAGE beneficiary, expressed happiness at the programme, saying she did not have a house before. "I used the money to buy materials and put up a house. I was also able to send some of my grandchildren to school," she explained.

Lomongin appealed to Ireland and Uganda government to increase the SAGE funds from the current monthly stipend of sh25,000 per beneficiary