

REFUGEES IN WEST NILE GET NEW CLASSROOMS, FARM

PHOTO BY EDDIE SSEJJOBA

By Eddie Ssejjoba

In a bid to improve the livelihoods of displaced persons, Palorinya Refugee Settlement in Obongi district, West Nile has received two classroom blocks and a demonstration farm through donor support.

The projects, which are part of a \$2m (sh3b) Integrated Livelihood, Education and Protection (ILEAP) project, were commissioned in Obongi on March 12.

The projects were implemented by the ChildFund Uganda, a non-government organisation with funding from the Korea International Cooperation Agency (KOICA).

ChildFund worked in collaboration with ChorogUsan for Children (Korea Childfund) and Good Farmers, a non-government organisation.

ENHANCING REFUGEES WELL-BEING

The projects are intended to enhance the well-being of children and their families in the refugee settlement, which are mainly from South Sudan.

Established in December 2016, the settlement hosts refugees who fled war in South Sudan. It currently hosts over 142,000 refugees, with children constituting up to 53% of the population.

Speaking during the commissioning of the facilities, the ChildFund Uganda country director, Titus Tumusiime, thanked KOICA, ChorogUsan for Children and Good Farmers for supporting humanitarian causes in the country.

He said the refugees still face enormous challenges, including overcrowded classrooms, food insecurity, limited access to quality early childhood education, few teachers and domestic violence.



Jihe (second-right), Hashaka (centre), assistant RDC Habiba Furaha Umuhooza (left) and other leaders during the commissioning of one of the blocks in Palorinya Refugee Settlement last Thursday

“Recent reductions in humanitarian funding and declining food rations have made it even more difficult for families to meet their basic needs. These realities compel us to work harder to implement self-reliant initiatives that strengthen both refugee and host communities, enabling them to sustainably provide for their families,” he noted.

CLASSROOM BLOCKS CONSTRUCTED

Tumusiime said through collaborations with other partners, they had constructed a three-classroom block, an office and a five-stance latrine at Sacred Heart Early Childhood Development Centre, which will benefit 579 children.

He said another two-classroom block has also been constructed at Salvation Early Childhood Development Centre to accommodate 253 children, who

were previously studying under a tree. ChildFund has also renovated classrooms at the same school and at Sinai Early Childhood Development Centre with 400 children.

Other officials in attendance were KOICA country director Ahn Jihee, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) head of field office Jelvas Musau and ChildFund international humanitarian director Radwa el Manssy.

The others were Obongi Resident District Commissioner Samuel Mpimbaza Hashaka, Hashaka’s assistant Habiba Omuhooza, Obongi district secretary for education Michael Azubu and the Chief Administrative Officer (CAO), Job Tabu.

The leaders commended ChildFund for the support in the education of vulnerable children, especially

that the settlement has been facing challenges in early childhood education, with a caregiver-to-learner ratio standing of 1:87, coupled with overcrowded classrooms at a ratio of 1:230.

FARM PROJECT

Tumusiime further hailed ChildFund for setting up a modern poultry and goat farm at Morobi North to provide practical training to refugees and 175 farmer groups, in addition to boosting the nutrition of refugees.

By linking education with livelihood opportunities, Tumusiime explained, the interventions would support families to become self-reliant and break poverty cycles.

“We are grateful to the Government of Uganda, Obongi District Local Government, UNHCR, KOICA and the Embassy of the Republic of Korea,

as well as our partners, parents, and caregivers for the continued support, which demonstrates the power of partnership in transforming the lives of vulnerable children and communities,” Tumusiime said.

On behalf of KOICA, Jihee said that they would remain committed to maintaining their partnership and continued engagements in West Nile region, which has hosted large numbers of refugees.

She said they want the project aimed to make families more resilient and opportunities for children to thrive.

“Beyond infrastructure, this project represents our shared commitment to empowering communities, protecting children and promoting peaceful co-existence between refugees and host communities,” Jihee explained.

LEADERS SPEAK

Hashaka lauded Childfund for introducing the livelihood programme, which he said provided permanent solutions for the refugee homesteads to fend for themselves at a time when donor funding is dwindling.

He, however, appealed to the settlement management to upgrade the established Early Childhood Development Centres (ECDCs) into primary schools to enable the over 611, children who graduate from the nursery section make progress.

The CAO said he was so impressed with the modern demonstration farm at Palorinya and asked refugees and nationals to copy what was being demonstrated.

He, however, urged parents to take their children to school, saying the district would soon launch operations to arrest parents who fail to send children to school.