

By Agnes Kyotalengerire

Nakivale Refugee Settlement in Isingiro district, Uganda, is one of the oldest and largest refugee settlements in the country, hosting approximately 180,000 refugees, nearly half of whom are school-going children.

This has placed significant pressure on existing education infrastructure, underscoring the need for continued investment in school facilities and improved learning environments.

In response, Finn Church Aid (FCA) Uganda has commissioned new dormitory blocks at Rubondo Community Secondary School in Nakivale Refugee Settlement, with the aim of increasing access to secondary education, enabling learners to stay in school and supporting completion.

The newly unveiled facility includes two boys' dormitory blocks with a combined capacity of 112 beds, furnished with 224 mattresses and equipped with a solar lighting system. The facility also features a bathroom block, latrine block and rainwater harvesting tanks.

These facilities were constructed with funding from Université de Sherbrooke (University of Sherbrooke), Canada.

FCA Uganda, in partnership with Université de Sherbrooke, has implemented the Kazoza project, a six-month pilot initiative aimed at increasing access to safe and inclusive secondary education for refugee children in Nakivale Refugee Settlement.

The project supported the construction of key school facilities and the installation of a gravity water scheme to improve access to clean and reliable water within the school.

Université de Sherbrooke has also provided learning materials and supported teacher professional development, while running an exchange programme that enables its students to engage with learners at Rubondo Community Secondary School. They have also provided co-curricular support, including sports equipment such as balls and uniforms.

The commissioning event, held on March 20, was presided over by Nakivale deputy settlement commandant James Mugume, on behalf of the Office of the Prime Minister.

Mugume said the development complements government efforts. "We are happy for the addition of the new dormitory facilities, which complement government efforts to improve access to education. We thank FCA for building partnerships such as this with Université de Sherbrooke that bring such improvements. We also encourage FCA to continue bringing more developments

FCA UGANDA BOOSTS REFUGEE EDUCATION



Ssenkima (second-left), deputy settlement commandant of Nakivale James Mugume (third-left), Prof. Ntebutse (centre) and Prof. Roy (second-right) from Université de Sherbrooke, cutting the ribbon to officially commission the new dormitory blocks in a bid to increase access to secondary education

ONGOING SUPPORT TO EDUCATION IN NAKIVALE

FCA supports education for refugees across settlements in Uganda.

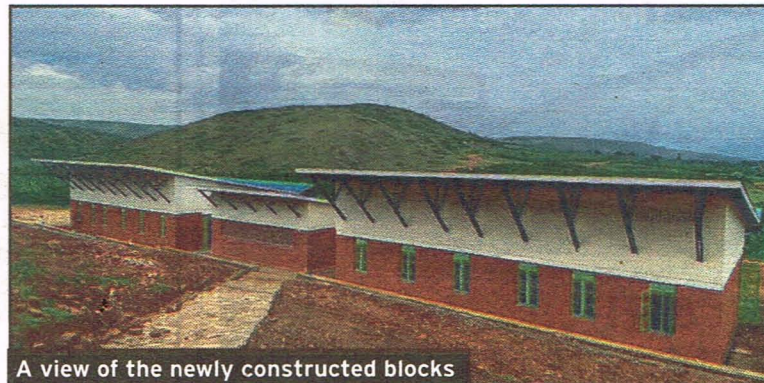
In Nakivale Refugee Settlement, the organisation focuses on strengthening access to quality education through the construction of classroom blocks and improvements in water, sanitation and hygiene facilities.

At Rubondo Community Secondary School, FCA, with its own disaster funds, has already constructed four classroom blocks, helping to ease congestion and create a more conducive learning environment for students.

to the area, even if they are no longer implementing partners in the settlement," he said.

Also present was a delegation from Université de Sherbrooke, including Prof. Nathalie Roy, dean of the faculty of engineering; Prof. Jean Gabin Ntebutse, director of the bachelor of education in secondary education programme; and Etienne Doyon, executive director of Carrefour de solidarité internationale.

Prof. Jean Gabin Ntebutse, the initiator of the project, commended Uganda's progressive refugee policy, saying despite challenges, the country continues to provide unique opportunities for refugees.



A view of the newly constructed blocks

He emphasised the critical role of education in shaping future leaders and strengthening communities.

"These dormitories reinforce the fact that Rubondo Community Secondary School is also a place of humanity and hope. They symbolise an environment where young people, whether refugees or from host communities, can learn together, grow together and share a common future," he said.

The project, valued at US\$201,213 (sh757m), is particularly significant as it focuses on supporting boys' education.

Wycliffe Nshaka, the country director of FCA Uganda, said secondary education for refugees in Uganda faces severe bottlenecks, with only 11% to 12.1% enrolment, leaving a vast majority out of school.

"Key challenges include extreme

poverty that limits refugee parents' ability to pay school fees, long distances to schools, overcrowded classrooms, a shortage of textbooks, language barriers and high dropout rates particularly among girls due to early marriage and domestic responsibilities. In addition, there are only two secondary schools within or near the refugee settlement, forcing learners to undertake long and often unsafe daily commutes," he said.

Nshaka emphasised that, "This investment reflects FCA's commitment to ensuring that every refugee child has access to safe, inclusive and quality education regardless of funding cuts in the humanitarian sector. By improving learning environments, we are supporting not only access, but also retention and completion."

He expressed appreciation to

Université de Sherbrooke for its partnership in making the initiative possible.

"We are aware of the funding situation in the sector, where education is not always considered lifesaving. We appreciate partners who recognise education as a fundamental human right and a powerful tool to change the world."

Stephen Ssenkima, head of programmes at FCA Uganda, said previously the school did not have dormitories for boys, forcing them to sleep in classrooms meant for learning.

"By providing dormitory facilities, we are addressing this barrier and enabling more students to attend and stay in school," he said.

Rubondo Community Secondary School serves both refugee and host community learners from Uganda, the DR Congo, Somalia, Burundi and South Sudan.

WHAT OTHERS SAY

The school headteacher, Edmond Mukasa, welcomed the new infrastructure, saying it will strengthen the school's boarding capacity and improve learning conditions. He applauded FCA and Université de Sherbrooke for their continued support to both refugee and host community education.

Crispus Ayebazibwe, a student at the school, said the decent accommodation will go a long way in improving their welfare, hence boosting their academic performance.

"We shall now be able to stay at school, concentrate on our studies, and perform better," said Ayebazibwe, who also serves as the school's head boy.

He called upon Université de Sherbrooke officials to construct a perimeter wall around the dormitories to prevent escapism and to enhance security.

SAFETY MEASURES

Following the recent fire outbreak at a dormitory at Ntenungi Secondary School in Rwamwanja Refugee Settlement, FCA Uganda has strengthened safety measures across its supported schools to enhance the safety and wellbeing of learners.

These measures include improved fire safety awareness among students and staff, installation and maintenance of more fire-fighting equipment, and sensitisation on emergency preparedness and response procedures.

FCA is also working with the school management to ensure proper dormitory safety standards, including regular safety checks, clear evacuation routes and adherence to safety guidelines to minimise any possible risks.