

Uganda's friendly laws allow refugees to integrate

PHOTO BY HOPE MAFARANGA



Refugees being trained to repair motorcycles at Bidi Bidi Refugee Settlement in Yumbe district



Women training in hairdressing at the refugee settlement

Being a refugee is no death sentence

By Hope Mafaranga

"Leaving my motherland seemed like a dream. I was scared of what would befall me and my countrymen who were running away from a burning house in South Sudan to an unknown culture, language, food and people," said Bashir Tomeka, a resident of Bidi Bidi refugee settlement in Yumbe district.

Tomeka is one of the 270,000 refugees who fled war in South Sudan. In December 2013, fighting broke out between forces loyal to President Silva Kiir and those of his deputy Riek Machar. Kiir accused Machar of plotting a coup against him.

Tomeka, who arrived in Uganda in 2018 aged 15, said life was not easy, especially because his dream was to become a lawyer.

He said settling into a new life at Bidi Bidi was difficult, but the Government and development partners made him feel at home.

"My dream was to study to become a lawyer so that I could defend my people who were being abused. With the war that broke out in my country, my aspiration became a dream," he said.

Uganda hosts the largest number of refugees in Africa. They come mostly from South Sudan, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Burundi.

Tomeka said at the beginning of

FACT CHECK

270,000

The approximate number of refugees who fled South Sudan when war broke out in 2013.



Bashir Tomeka

this year, the youth in the refugee settlement were fortunate when Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA) Uganda in partnership with Bugema University Vocational School started training and empowering them with life skills in mechanics, tailoring, construction and hair dressing.

"With this new partnership, I saw a green light at the end of the tunnel," Tomeka, who is being trained in mechanics, said.

Tomeka lauds Uganda's refugee-friendly policies that allow them to get training and better their lives.

"If I go back to South Sudan, I will leave Uganda with skills in repairing motorcycles and my life will never be same again," he said.

Sam Businge the project manager for Aducation, Advocacy, Counselling and Economic Empowerment (PEACE) project, said the project to empower the youth is funded by the Royal Norwegian Embassy and implemented by ADRA Uganda in, Bidi Bidi refugee settlement.

Businge said the programme focuses on three main activities: education, economic empowerment and psychosocial support for South Sudanese refugee communities.

Businge said the 420 youth in the settlement who are going through training, will be awarded certificates from Bugema University Vocational School, adding this will give the trainees an opportunity to use their

documents to get employment.

"We are also working with the Directorate of Institute Training to ensure that the trainees' certificates are certified. This will help them to use their certificates not only in Uganda but also in other countries," Businge said.

Agnes Amani 19, who is being trained in tailoring said the training is a life-changing opportunity as she hopes to get her machine to start her own business.

"I will not look for a job after the training because I am getting skills which I will use to start my own business," she said.

Asked how the refugees will utilise the skills gained, Businge said they will be given start-up kits to start their businesses.

Charles Ed II Aguilar, the ADRA Uganda country director, said training and capacity-building activities are critical to job creation and contribute to the growth and stability of the local economy and livelihood.

Stella Jovia, who is training in hair dressing at Love and Lovely Salon within the settlement, said with the training, she is hopeful of becoming a better citizen.

She says she has always had a dream of starting her salon in the near future. She hopes to use the skills she has gained to train other refugees to reduce donor dependence.

WHAT OTHERS SAY



William Asio, assistant settlement commandant in the Office of the Prime Minister

Training the youth in skills will reduce

redundancy and also give them life skills to help them even when they leave Uganda.

Duku Aruzai, tailor trainer

I am happy to train the young people and give them knowledge which they will use to make a living and sustain their lives.



Mark Makumbi, coordinator technical vocational training

Uganda has favourable refugee policies including free movement.

This will enable the trainees get jobs even in the host communities and other districts because they are not limited in movement.

Benon Babumba, director programmes ADRA

When people run from war, they lose everything, including livelihood. Giving people hope and restoring their dreams is paramount.

