

Lack of equipment demotivating Jinja COVID-19 health workers

Host communities supporting Omugo refugees

NORTHERN

Refugees in Omugo, an extension of Rhino camp, are co-existing with host communities.

The refugees are living peacefully with the host communities as the two parties share land for farming. According to Joyce Sitima, a refugee living in village one, Tank 19, the host communities gave them three acres, where they grew maize and beans, which helped improved their livelihood and feed their families. "I used to have a small garden at home, where I planted vegetables but planting maize and beans helped to improve my family's diet," she said. Dilek Deng, a youth from Omugo refugee settlement, said: "When we arrived in 2017, all we had was 30 by 30 metres of land and it was hard to cultivate." He said they realised that they needed to co-exist by forming saving groups in order to attract partners, which won the trust of host communities to give them land freely or at a subsidised fee.

JINJA

By Jackie Nambogga

One of the issues demotivating COVID-19 frontline health workers at Jinja Regional Referral Hospital is lack of personal protective equipment (PPEs), the hospital director, Dr Florence Tugumisirize, has said.

While receiving an assortment of medical equipment from the Uganda Medical Association UMA at the hospital last Thursday, Tugumisirize said they had run short of sanitisers at the isolation unit and as a result, they were using jik.

"Our alcohol got finished and the frontline team at the isolation centre were being



PHOTO BY JACKIE NAMBOGGA

Tugumisirize giving a speech after receiving an assortment of medical equipment from the Uganda Medical Association recently

sanitised with jik, but I kept praying for a miracle, which God answered by a donation,

including sanitisers, which we shall directly dispatch to the isolation unit," she said.

Dr Joseph Garvin Nyanzi, the spokesperson of the Uganda Medical Association (UMA),

said they held a fundraising with support from Open Society Eastern Africa initiative, which enabled them to procure medical assortments, which were distributed across their 14 branches countrywide.

Nyanzi said this was aimed at aiding their colleagues in the struggle against COVID-19.

Other items included masks, gloves, face shields and aprons. As doctors, Nyanzi said they deemed it necessary to join Government by fundraising for such necessities needed in the care and treatment of patients.

"Government alone cannot fight COVID-19, so we found it necessary to join in the fundraising. We are responsible for what happens in the health sector as much as the Government," he said.



Declaration of vanilla harvest dates will promote quality harvest and increase farmer incomes

In the shadow of the Rwenzori Mountains, farmers from the Rwenzori Farmers' Cooperative Union (RFCU), have been sleeping in their fields for months now, under the moonlight, guarding their vanilla plants from thieves and waiting to sell the ripe and mature vanilla. In the current market, the highest quality organic vanilla can earn them up to one hundred thousand shillings per kilo. With the money from the vanilla harvest they will be able to pay school fees, improve their homes, and, for a lucky few with many kilos of vanilla, buy more land for their family.

Until recently, these farmers had no protections, and because of the high market value, vanilla theft was rampant. However, in the past year, key actors in the Uganda vanilla sector have joined forces to protect farmers and the country's reputation as a source for high quality vanilla. Catholic Relief Services (CRS), an international non-profit organization, has been working since 2016 with over 3,000 farmers to improve the quality of vanilla in Uganda. In partnership with the government of Uganda, the Sustainable Vanilla Initiative (SVI), an international vanilla industry association, and the Vanilla Exporters Association (VANEX), a Ugandan vanilla trade organization, CRS has engaged both district and national government structures

for a regulatory framework to protect and promote high-quality vanilla through declaration of harvest dates. In addition to advocating for harvest dates, CRS, has facilitated the development of by-laws and ordinances at the district level to protect the crop and stop theft.

Uganda's vanilla, mostly exported for beverage and pharmaceutical production, accounts for 5 percent of global production and is in demand due to its high vanillin content, the natural ingredient that gives the rich vanilla taste and smell. Uganda's rich soil, two rainy seasons and skilled farmers are an added advantage for a top-quality Ugandan vanilla. Unfortunately, farmers were losing significant parts of their harvest, as their vanilla is stolen and sold to unscrupulous buyers. At the same time the Ugandan vanilla industry saw its international reputation tarnished, as stolen beans are usually immature and low quality.

To address the theft and early sales, on June 4, 2020, the Ministry of Agriculture announced harvest dates to protect the industry from thieves that steal the crop and sell immature poor-quality beans to unscrupulous buyers. This was the second year that harvest dates are declared, and progress has been made. "Since the declaration of the harvest dates



For the second year in a row, CRS Uganda meets with key government officials, vanilla farmers, VANEX, SVI and police to promote harvest dates. Photo by Chariton Namuwoza for CRS/2019

last year, and the ordinances to protect vanilla, we've seen a decrease in thefts. This will raise the overall quality of Ugandan vanilla and we hope more international buyers will come buy our vanilla," explained Jimmy Police, the General Manager of RFCU.

As a result of the collaboration between the Government of Uganda, SVI, VANEX, and CRS, the Ugandan vanilla industry is poised to produce higher quality vanilla, resulting in a higher price for the farmers, better quality product for buyers and processors and an improved reputation for Uganda as the most sought after vanilla in the world.

"CRS' work is driven by our commitment to work with the Government of Uganda to increase the number of vanilla farmers and their production, increase quality and export of the crop, and having vanilla farmers earn a better living all while protecting Uganda's landscapes. We are happy with the results we are starting to see," said Niek de Goeij, CRS Uganda's Country Representative.

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