

UGANDA

Country Office Newsletter

UN Women Uganda Newsletter 2023

**Championing Gender Equality and Women
Empowerment in Uganda's Refugee Response**



UN Women Country Representative meets West Nile UNAC, calls for joint programming in refugee response

UN Women Country Representative, Paulina Chiwangu (PhD) has commended the West Nile United Nations Area Coordination (UNAC) coordination role that has enabled UN Women and sister UN Agencies to demonstrate Delivery as One in the West Nile region. Paulina Chiwangu, made the remarks during a meeting with the West Nile UNAC on Tuesday February 28th, 2023.

Speaking on behalf of the West Nile UNAC, the UN Area Coordinator Paul Kenya (UNHCR) urged UN Agencies implementing programmes in West Nile region to scale up their interventions around livelihoods to mitigate the impact of reduced rations for refugees.

“As UNAC our specific request is for UN women and other UN Agencies to support our effort

in Joint Programming, Common premise, and visibility” remarked Mr. Kenya, noting that owing to the reduction in funding, UN Agencies must program differently to complement each other and utilise the available funds more efficiently.

The UN Women Country Representative, Paulina Chiwangu, commended the effort of the UNAC in advancing gender equality and women’s empowerment in West Nile region and observed that we are implementing programmes in fragile environments with unprecedented challenges and competing priorities both in Uganda and globally from donors, which requires us to rethink how we operate.

West Nile region hosts at least 48% of the total refugee population in Uganda. The meeting was attended by Heads of Sub-Offices of the UN Agencies in Arua, including WHO, WFP, FAO, UNFPA, UNDSS and representatives from Office of Prime Minister in Arua.



Some of the West Nile UNAC members that attended the dinner meeting with Dr. Paulina Chiwangu on 28th February 2023. Photo Credit: UN Women / Denis Onen

Yumbe and Adjumani District Local Governments commended for their efforts in advancing gender equality and women empowerment.



LC V Vice Chairperson Yumbe district with UN Women Country Representative pose for a photo after the meeting with district officials on 1st March 2023.

The District Local Governments of Yumbe and Adjumani have been heralded for their leadership and relentless efforts in supporting refugee responses and for championing the advancement of gender equality and women's empowerment in humanitarian programming.

The acknowledgement was made by the UN Women Country Representative, Paulina Chiwangu (PhD) during her maiden visit to West Nile in March 2023, in which she paid a courtesy visit to the district leadership in both Adjumani and Yumbe districts.

The Yumbe District LC V Vice Chairperson, Mr. Kayaih Linus acknowledged the support of UN Women that is enabling young women in the refugee and host community to regain

their livelihoods especially after the COVID-19 pandemic. Mr. Kayaih noted that the capacity building trainings in leadership have enabled women to articulate issues during committee meetings and called for strengthening the coordination work and more resources so that more refugees benefit.

In her remarks, Paulina Chiwangu (PhD) reassured the District Local Governments of UN Women's commitment to continued collaboration and partnership with the Government of Uganda, DLGs and communities to enhance the lives of women and girls and make the realization of their rights a reality.

With funding from the Government of Norway and Government of Japan, UN Women is implementing the Leadership, Empowerment, Access and Protection (LEAP) Programme in Adjumani, Yumbe, Terego and Kyegegwa with a focus on enhancing women's participation in refugee response planning and recovery interventions.

Office of the prime Minister urges partners to support livelihood programming for refugees, as the impact of reduced food rations to refugees bites harder.



L-R: Titus Jogo Refugee Desk Officer Adjumani, UN Women Country Rep Dr. Paulina Chiwangu, Miriam Namuwenge Community Services at OPM Adjumani. Photo Credit: UN Women / Allen Ankunda

Office of the Prime Minister has urged development partners to support livelihood programming targeting refugees which can help to address the challenges faced by refugees due to reduction in refugee rations.

The call while was made by the Refugee Desk Officer Adjumani Mr. Titus Jogo and OPM Camp Commandant Mr. Micheal Nabugere during their separate meetings with UN Women Country Representative Paulina Chiwangu while on mission to West Nile early this month in March 2023.

The Refugee Desk Officer for Adjumani District Mr. Titus Jogo observed that the reduction in funding and rations to refugees have impacted negatively on the refugees forcing refugees to adopt negative coping mechanisms. “Every morning I receive children who have been abandoned because parents are unable to feed them. Cases of suicide are also increasing” remarked Mr. Titus Jogo.

In Yumbe the Camp Commandant for Bidi Bidi Refugee Settlements noted that refugees are now surviving on one meal a day, schools are non-functional in the afternoons because children have no food and can't be attentive in class, and girls are more affected because the reduction has also affected the distribution of menstrual hygiene kits.

During this visit, UN Women was commended for its instrumental role in lifting the voice of

women in refugee leadership. “UN Women support has contributed to more women taking on leadership roles in the refugee welfare committees. UN Women has been involved in the planning process for the refugee welfare committee elections and has advocated for women involved in leadership. This advocacy led to 40% of the RWC seats being reserved for women” remarked Mr. Nabugere.

The RDO Adjumani further noted that the leadership trainings have enabled women to be more articulate and have a high representation of 52% which has put Adjumani on the list of model districts in terms of women representation on refugee welcome committees.

Women involvement in refugee leadership has increased from 10% in 2017 to 54% and 48% in 2022 in Adjumani and Yumbe respectively. With

funding from the Government of Norway, UN Women in partnership with Refuge Law Project conducted leadership trainings for women and implemented English For Adults programme which contributed to building the confidence levels of the refugee women enabling them compete for and take up leadership roles in the refugee settlements.

Paulina Chiwangu, who was on her maiden visit of West Nile paid a courtesy visit to OPM in both Adjumani and Yumbe with the aim of strengthening collaboration between OPM and UN Women in Refugee and humanitarian response. She commended OPM for coordinating the refugee work and emphasised the need for livelihood programming to enable the refugees to be self-sustaining.



Dr. Paulina Chiwangu poses for a photo with Mr. Micheal Nabugere OPM Camp Commandant Bidi Bidi Settlement during the courtesy visit on 1st March 2023. Photo Credit: UN Women / Allen Ankunda

English for Adult (EFA) Programme gives a ray of hope to refugees to attain the desired education



Rose, participant in English for Adults Classes Level 1 sharing what she has learned. Rose was able to express herself using some basic English sentences which she was able to do before joining the EFA classes. Photo Credit: UN Women / Allen Ankunda

Mary Awate, 38, has lived in Bidi Bidi refugee Settlement with her husband and five children since September 2016. Back in South Sudan, Awate dropped out of school and got married after the death of her father due to lack of school fees.

“When the English for Adult Programme was started in my community, I saw this is an opportunity to further my education” comments Awate. However, her husband did not approve of this and considered it a waste of time saying that Awate was too old to go back to school.

The determination that Awate had moved her to register and start the classes.

“On the days when I have class, I do all the house chores early and leave home when food is ready and all the chores done. With this my husband has no excuse to refuse me to attend the classes” says Awate.

Awate who is currently in Level 5 looks forward to completing level six that can qualify her to do entry exams to attain tertiary education. My first born sat for Senior 4 last year and I tell my children that we shall graduate together. My dream is to graduate from university and get a formal job” says Awate.

Awate is not the only refugee nursing such a dream. Rose Tabu in her fifties, is another refugee who recently enrolled for EFA programme and is still at Level 1. “I was married off at an early age and missed education. Life as a refugee is challenging when you cannot communicate in English. I am grateful to UN Women for opening a learning centre in my

community which has enabled me to learn some basic English” says Rose Tabu.

Tabu is happy that she can now communicate directly with the doctor when she goes to the health center for medical care and is able to buy things from the market without being cheated.

Through partnership with Refugee Law Project, UN Women has implemented the English for Adults (EFA) programmes in refugee settlements in Adjumani, Yumbe and Terego since 2018. The EFA programme has enabled refugee women to gain literacy, numeracy and learn to communicate in English which has enabled them to get job opportunities in the community and take up leadership roles on community structures. After completing the six levels of the EFA programme, learners can do a pre-entry test that enables them to access tertiary education. At least over 1300 refugees have gone through the programme since 2020.



Awate sharing her testimony during the visit of the Country Rep to Zone 2 in Bidi Bidi Settlement on 1st March 2023. Photo Credit: UN Women / Allen Ankunda

Empowering refugee women holistically



Molly Ajonye has benefited from all the pillars of the UN Women LEAP Programme which has empowered her holistically. Molly shared how she has used her skills to advocate for women and encourage women to utilise the skills they gain from trainings. Photo Credit: UN Women / Allen Ankunda

Molly Ajonye, a refugee woman living in Bidi Bidi refugee settlement in Yumbe district is a model of what holistic programming can achieve in transforming the lives of refugees.

Molly who has living in Bidi Bidi since July 2016 is now an advocate for women empowerment in her community.

“The thing which made me very happy is that when we arrived here TPO gave us psychosocial support for our trauma. We were overthinking and crying because our relatives passed away. When we survived that trauma, I joined EFA, and women’s groups.

“When I arrived here as a refugee I suffered from depression and mental health issues. I was identified by UN Women partner TPO and received psychosocial support. After the

sessions my mental health improved and I was enrolled into the English for Adult (EFA) programme conducted by Refugee Law Project” says Molly.

The training enabled Molly to enhance her literacy skills and to be fluent in speaking English. “When I graduated from the EFA programme in 2020, I used my certificate to look for job opportunities. I now act as a translator for most humanitarian organisations because I can translate from English to Arabic the language that most refugees understand” remarks Molly with energy and joy.

“After finishing the EFA course we were enrolled for leadership trainings, where we learn public speaking. I learned communication skills and gained confidence to speak to many people” Molly comments.

The leadership trainings have enhanced Molly’s confidence and she was elected to serve on the Refugee Welfare Committee in her Zone. Molly who is now an advocate for women in her community, challenges women who have gone through the EFA programme to be creative specially during this season when refugees are faced with reduction in food rations.

“We need more learning centres so that women don’t have to walk long distances to attend classes. As refugees we appreciate the introduction of ICT training but access to computers is limited because most of the empowerment centres don’t have computer facilities” says Molly while addressing the UN Women Country Representative.

Paulina Chiwangu congratulated the women who have graduated from the English for Adults course, and encouraged more women to embrace the opportunities and make themselves and their families better. “As refugees you should not limit yourselves. Embrace the opportunities to learn and be empowered. When a woman is empowered the family benefits. Learning is not limited. Whatever your age is you can learn. When you learn you get empowered and are able to change your family and community”.

The UN Women Leadership Empowerment Access and Protection (LEAP) Programme enhances the capacity of refugee and host community women to participate in leadership, be economically empowered and also access protection services making them to be holistically empowered.



Molly Ajonye demonstrated how she can now read and write English after completing the English for Adult Programme. Photo Credit: UN Women / Eva Sibanda

Access to Mental health services improves the wellbeing of refugees living in Bidi Bidi Settlement



Rose Night the Cluster 2 Chairperson Bidi Bidi giving remarks during the Country Reps visit on 1 March 2023. Photo Credit: UN Women / Allen Ankunda

Josephine, a South Sudanese refugee living in Bidi Bidi Settlement was at the verge of committing suicide because of the trauma caused by the war experiences back in South Sudan that included the death of both her parents. Even when Josephine arrived in Uganda and was resettled in Bidi Bidi as a refugee, she did not see any reason for living after all she had no support to fall back on.

“I wanted to kill myself. I could not bear the trauma anymore. One day my neighbour invited me for a training session that

was being conducted by Transcultural Psychosocial Organisation (TPO) after attending the training for two days I was enrolled for therapy sessions which helped me to get better. I now believe there is more to life than committing suicide” says Josephine.

After the therapy sessions, Josephine and her Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) group members were supported with starting capital which enabled them to engage in income generating activities. Josephine was also selected to do vocational training in tailoring. This has paved way for her to live a productive life.

According to Rose Night, the Cluster 2 Chairperson of Zone 2 in Bidi Bidi Settlement,

cases of suicide in villages where refugees have access to Psychosocial Support have reduced. “As leaders we used to register many cases of GBV, suicide and child battering but these have reduced as refugees get mental health services and adopt better coping mechanisms. The money that they receive after graduating from the CBT sessions helps them to start income generating activities which are going to be more relevant now when refugees are faced with reductions in the rations” Rose comments.

Kenyi Emmanuel also testifies of how the psychoeducation sessions raised his knowledge about mental health which transformed his life. “Before the project I viewed everyone who approached me as coming kill me. The trauma was very high. When I attended the psychoeducation sessions, I didn’t believe that I would get well. But through the CBT sessions, I got well and I am now productive. The income

generative activity start-up support has boosted my family’s wellbeing as I am able to provide them with food” Kenyi narrates how his life has changed for the better.

Speaking to the beneficiaries of the mental health psychosocial support, the UN Women Country Representative, Paulina Chiwangu commended them for their commitment to consistently attend therapy and called upon humanitarian actors to create a unified voice that influences the provision of required services and opportunities in favour of people with and survivors of mental health issues in Uganda.

Through funding from the Government of Sweden and the Government of Japan, UN Women has been able to provide mental health psychosocial support services to refugees in different settlements in Yumbe, Adjumani, Terego and Kyegegwa.



Dr. Paulina Chiwangu shares a light phot moment with beneficiaries of the Psychosocial Support programme in Bidi Bidi settlement. Photo Credit: UN Women / Allen Ankunda

UN Women Country Representative meets UNHCR Heads of Field Offices in Moyo and Adjumani



Dr. Paulina Chiwangu shares a photo moment with UNHCR Head of Office in Adjumani, Iris Bloom (third from left). Photo Credit: Allen Ankunda

As part of her visit to West Nile, Paulina Chiwangu took off time to meet with the UNHCR Heads of Offices in Moyo and Adjumani. During the meeting, Paulina discussed issues related to collaboration in line with the global compact on refugees and how to strengthen refugee response programming in the region.

Dhananjaya Bhattarai, Head of Office UNCHR Moyo noted that as “a UNAC we need to identify local initiatives and promote them to benefit refugees. When these local initiatives are supported, they in turn are able to build the capacity and benefit the refugees and host community”.

Paulina called for innovative ways to achieve the goal of the UN in Uganda and highlighted the need for Joint Programming at such a

time where there is a challenge of reduction in funding and rations to refugees.

“We have to be innovative on how we can achieve our goals of empowering refugees amidst the reductions in refugee rations and finances. We need to maximise what we have through joint programming as a UN”, said Paulina Chiwangu.

Iris Blom, UNHCR Head of Sub Office in Adjumani observed that “There are a lot of things we can do together to strengthen our complementary role in our programming. I am strongly inviting UN Women to join us and we do joint programming especially in livelihood programming”.

Paulina re-echoed the need to deliver as one and leverage our leadership roles to address the needs of refugees and emphasised the need for programming being informed by gender analysis and human rights approach.



Dhananjaya Bhattarai, Head of Office UNCHR Moyo with UN Country Rep, Dr. Paulina Chiwangu at the UNCHR Sub Office in Moyo on 2nd March 2023. Photo Credit: Allen Ankunda

Women rights community-based organisations in Adjumani district commended for ensuring that women participate in peace building processes



Some of the beneficiaries of Overcomers Women's group activities share their stories during the visit at the Overcomers office in Adjumani on 3rd March 2023. Photo Credit: UN Women / Allen Ankunda

Overcomers Women Activists, a community-based organisation based in Adjumani has been commended by the UN Women Country Representative, Paulina Chiwangu for its role in peace building and raising awareness on gender-based violence.

Paulina made the remarks during her interaction with beneficiaries and members of Overcomers Women Activists association on March 3, 2023. Through this collaboration with Overcomers, UN Women has been able to build the capacity of 20 women led CBOs in West Nile enabling them to mobilise communities and duty bearers on their roles in prevention and response to Gender Based Violence and economic empowerment of women including women with disabilities.

“We did not have policies, our organisational structures were weak but through this partnership with UN Women, we now have clear policies, our capacity to advance gender equality and empowerment of women has been strengthened” remarked Olga Lindrio, the Executive Director Overcomers Women Activists.

Through UN Women support, Overcomers Women Activists built the capacity of 140 peace mediators and rallied 53 cultural, religious leaders and clan elders in Adjumani and Yumbe to participate in peace building initiatives and to address negative cultural norms.

“As cultural leaders after the training we are now speaking against negative cultural practices and sensitising communities on the issue of land rights. Culturally women are not allowed to inherit land but we are sensitising communities about this”, a representative of the cultural leaders who attended the meeting commented.

Women Empowerment Centre at Nyumanzi Refugee Settlement furnished with ICT equipment

Refugee women in Nyumanzi Refugee Settlement in Adjumani district now have access to ICT facilities after the Women Empowerment Center was equipped with computers and a printer. Through funding from the Government of Japan, the Center was equipped with 10 computers and solar panels.

During her mission to West Nile, Paulina Chiwangu, visited the centre and handed over certificates to the first batch of refugee and host community women who have been trained in basic computing skills from this empowerment centre. A total of 167 women were trained in 2022 by Peace Winds Japan, an implementing partner of UN Women.

Speaking to the women who had just successfully completed their basic computing training, Paulina emphasized the importance of ICT in the empowerment process of women and noted that while women still face multiple challenges and barriers to their full

empowerment, gaining ICT skills can be an important means to overcome these barriers.

“Some of the women who participated in the computer training are running businesses but did not know how to connect to the internet to access market. With this training they have gained some knowledge and they hope to use it to access market outside their community” remarked Isabella, the group leader.

On his part, the Assistant Commandant for Nyumazi Settlement appreciated the computer training and called for more training sessions and equipment to make the Empowerment Center self-sustaining.



One of the participants in the Basic Computer Training class displays her certificate at Nyumanzi Refugee Settlement Adjumani. Photo Credit: UN Women / Allen Ankunda



Dr. Paulina Chiwangu joins the refugee women in Zone 2 Bidi Bidi in a dance. These are some of the beneficiaries of the Mental Health Psychosocial Support services



Beneficiaries of the mental health psychosocial support services in Bidi Bidi Settlement Yumbe district share a photo moment with UN Women country Representative after the meeting on 1st March 2023.



Dr. Paulina Chiwangu congratulating a refugee woman in Nyumazi Settlement Adjumani upon completing the basic computingskills course



UN Women Country Rep touring the Women Empowerment Center in Nyumazi Settlement that was equipped with computers courtesy of support from the Government of Japan.



Dr. Paulina Chiwangu shares a photo moment with staff and members of Overcomers Women Group



Beautiful smiles. Dr. Paulina Chiwangu shares smiles with a baby of one of the women beneficiaries under Overcomers Women's Group