Over Ten refugee Children rescued, reunited with their families

More stories inside......
Dear friends,

I thank you for being a part of the Red Cross extended family. We value your support and dedication to our quarterly newsletter.

This publication is one of the ways through which we have kept our partners, donors, volunteers and members engaged. The shared updates here are part of what Uganda Red Cross has endeavored to do as part of fulfilling our mandate of saving lives of the most vulnerable.

The second quarter of the year is down, and we will continue prioritizing the capacity building of the National Society, growing the finances and strengthening the ability of staff and volunteers to continue responding to the increasing humanitarian needs in the country.

Uganda Red Cross has been and remains an active responder in the South Sudan Refugee response with a unique mandate given by the Office of the Prime Minister and UNHCR to carry out the following functions:

- Reception Management
- Water production in Obongi - 1,500m³ of water per day
- Enyu - 1,000m³ of Water per day, Kochi - 1,200m³ of Water per day & Kamukamu - 900m³/Day.
- Integrated health services
- Tracing and restoration of family links
- Empowering livelihoods through Agriculture
- Hygiene promotion at reception and settlement sites
- Disease monitoring and surveillance, among others.

All the above directly fit into our strategic focus of Saving lives, Supporting Livelihoods and Promoting human dignity for the most vulnerable people.

Important to note, Uganda Red Cross was part of the recently concluded Solidarity Summit on refugees which took place on June 22 and 23, 2017. We were the lead agency that organized the side event on “the role of Humanitarian, Development NGOs and Civil society in addressing the humanitarian development nexus in supporting refugees and host communities.”

We were joined by Oxfam International and Save the Children who supported the mobilization and collation of local and International NGOs respectively. Sub-theme discussions were around the Grand bargain- a May 2016 World Humanitarian Summit commitment to address the humanitarian gaps, and the localization agenda focusing on the engagement of local actors.

The side event also focused on the growing support for reform of the humanitarian system to include predictable, multiyear financing and capacity to cope with any surge in population movement.

I therefore take this opportunity to thank the government of Uganda, Office of the Prime Minister, IFRC, UNHCR, and partners for the teamwork spirit exhibited during this collective effort towards raising support for the refugees and members of the host communities. I also thank the donors who committed funds towards this special cause. Our commitment is transparency and dedicated service to the vulnerable people as we strive to give them dignity while under our care.

Other highlights and details will be found in the detailed stories highlighted in the Newsletter. I encourage you to read on and get yourself abreast with Uganda Red Cross operations.

Robert Kwegisha
SECRETARY GENERAL
Dear esteemed reader,

I welcome you to yet another remarkable edition of the Humanitarian.

We appreciate your interest in this quarterly Newsletter. We are grateful for the time you spare to read, appreciate and more so, share compliments and comments with us. We keep improving our services through your kind observations.

This is the second edition of the year. It is well packaged to educate, inform and remind you of the Red Cross cause in Uganda.

In this issue, we bring you highlights of the major events and activities we undertook since May 2017. These among others include the Red Cross Day celebrations, the Refugee Solidarity Summit (June 22-23), our emergency preparedness and response exhibited through a number of activities done through the branch networks, as well as other highlights of on-going activities in the country.

We appreciate our partners, donors, volunteers and members for your continued support to Uganda Red Cross. We would not have done much without your support. We encourage you to keep up the spirit. “HINIVUU!” I take this opportunity to invite the general public to associate with the Uganda Red Cross. It is service for the wellbeing of others and especially improving lives of the vulnerable. Join today as a member, volunteer, good will ambassador and we will together make a contribution to saving lives and giving people a chance to live with dignity.

I also invite you to read on and acquaint yourself with what Red Cross does and become a part of us today.

Enjoy!

Irene Nakasiita - PR & Communications Coordinator
The role of the Red Cross as a local actor in the humanitarian response cannot be underrated while discussing the localization agenda in responding to issues of refugees and the host communities. This is because Red Cross has local structures and volunteers who are community based, who receive refugees when they arrive before even government or any other actors come on board. We are always the first to respond, and the last to leave because of our unique mandate.”

This was revealed by Robert Kwesiga, Secretary General Uganda Red Cross in his opening remarks as he made a presentation to participants during the side event organized and led by Red Cross on 22nd June 2016 at the Shena hall in Munyonyo. This side event included all NGOs, INGOs and CSOs where Localization of the humanitarian response was a major highlight. It tackled “the role of humanitarian and development NGOs and the civil society in addressing the humanitarian development nexus in supporting refugees and host communities”. This was moderated by Dr. Fatoumata Troure, the IFRC Director for Africa region.

Uganda is the second largest refugee hosting country globally after Turkey with over 1.3 million refugees (UHCR Report, June 2017). Uganda also has an open door policy on refugee reception and settlement, a model described as the best in the world. This inclusive refugee policy empowers refugees to become economically self-reliant and grants them many privileges enjoyed by the country’s nationals who also share their community resources with them. In a bid to solicit for funds to meet the over growing needs of these many refugees in Uganda, Uganda hosted the solidarity summit where the international community was invited to participate and support Uganda on this noble cause. The

Uganda Red Cross is one of the lead actors in the refugee response / operation through supporting refugee reception and settlement process. The Red Cross family under the International Red Cross and Red Crescent umbrella have joined efforts in supporting the operation. Some of the National Societies on board include the German Red Cross, Swedish Red Cross, Austrian Red Cross, Icelandic Red Cross, British Red Cross, Belgian Red Cross, Netherlands Red Cross among others. These have offered technical skills in emergency preparedness and response as a way of supporting Uganda Red Cross to respond in a number of interventions.

“We register new arrivals, restoration of family links, transfer of refugees from boarder points to reception and settlement camps, provision of safe and clean water, hygiene promotion at reception and refugee camps, distribution of Nonfood items, provision of community first aid and among others. All these we do to ensure the safety and dignity of refugees.” Mr. Kwesiga – URCS Secretary General.
The Uganda Red Cross Society (URCS), national disaster response team, has received expert training in disaster management. The nine-day training in Arua district commenced on May 15, 2017 and ended on May 23, 2017. The training funded by the Belgian Red cross aimed at equipping the team with disaster management skills needed to implement WASH efforts as part of capacity building for the National Society.

The team visited Enyau, Imvepi and Kamukamu refugee camps in west Nile, Northern Uganda – Arua district where activities like constructing pit latrines, training communities in personal hygiene and sanitation, water treatment, pumping and trucking, among others were carried out. The Uganda Red Cross WASH Volunteers and staff were given emergency WASH skills needed to support refugee settlements and host communities in Uganda.

The training comes at a time when Uganda is receiving many refugees from South Sudan and the Uganda Red Cross is at the forefront of offering emergency response which includes provision of safe and clean water to refugees and members of the host communities. 

“We are lucky to have international trainers coming in to offer their skills and experiences. This has been effectively transferred to the URCS staff who have been given a chance to operate with global tools.” said Grace Kyagabathe Uganda Red Cross - WASH Coordinator.

As part of skills testing, a team of over 30 members constructed / installed 10 water tanks in which clean and safe water would be stored after treatment. In addition, members of the communities were highly involved in the activities and were sensitised on good hygiene and sanitation practices like hand washing.

“We have undergone a consultative and holistic training in terms of managing disasters with regard to water, hygiene and sanitation promotion in emergencies. The local community has learned as much we have,” said Bernard Manishime, a Red Cross WASH staff from Kisoro, Western Uganda.

The chairman Arua branch governing board, also community member from West Nile region, Mr. Aniku Sunday, said such trainings and projects are crucial in sensitising people on emergency response. “If funds allowed, Red cross would train many more other community members in emergence skills. Good practices keep communities safe from disease outbreaks. I commend the Belgian Red Cross for the support in building capacity. The refugees will be safer after this training,” Aniku added.

Mr Francis Kadaplackal, the Regional DP Program Coordinator Belgian Red cross appreciated everyone’s effort and expressed the need to always partner with Uganda Red Cross in projects like these. “This is an initiative of the Belgian Red Cross with support from the Belgian government across the Great Lakes region. We are always looking forward to working with the Uganda Red Cross in supplying hygiene material, water equipment and conducting trainings. This training is quite handy as we support the emergency response to the South Sudan refugees,” Mr Kadaplackal noted.

Mr. Patrick Geria, the Arua branch manager thanked the participants and encouraged them to put the acquired skills into practice in their respective regions.
Only a fraction of total international aid expenditure is funneled into risk reduction, with up to two-thirds of disaster spending occurring after a disaster happens. This was revealed during the launch of the World Disaster Report 2016 by the Uganda Red Cross Society at Makerere University, Kampala. The report was based on the theme: Saving Lives Today Investing for Tomorrow. Featuring articles by leading experts, the report calls for increased investment in building community resilience both before the disaster occurs and during the recovery period.

In a bid to strengthen the humanitarian efforts aimed at saving lives in Uganda, Uganda Red Cross seeks to empower communities with emergence preparedness and response skills, knowledge and resources. Uganda Red Cross is part of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent family, a large humanitarian organization that saves the lives of the most vulnerable. Every year, the IFRC produces a World Disaster Report, an annual independent publication researched by a body of IFRC experts, who examine challenges, trends and innovations around a specific humanitarian theme.

Last year’s theme focused on saving lives while investing for tomorrow. The report was launched on 24th May, 2017 at the Makerere University Main Hall by Prof. Apollo Nsibambi during the MUPOSA re-union.

While addressing the audience at the launch of the report, Robert Kwesiga, the Uganda Red Cross Secretary General noted that there is need to work with the academic institutions which are the leading entities in research who make outreaches to communities where disasters affect lives and cause human suffering. Mr. Kwesiga informed the academia that the report is an academic document whose input is got from academic institutions and Makerere University can use it as a tool to empower students and other stakeholders.

“We need to partner with academic institutions to find ways of addressing the causes of the problem rather than responding to disasters. We have local and international experiences, so, Red Cross needs to partner with Makerere in research and we are ready to work with you,” Mr. Kwesiga added.

Mr. Kwesiga noted with concern that forced migration is at its highest level since the World War II and the number and scale of disasters triggered by natural hazards are increasing. He explained that globalization and urbanization mean outbreaks and other health crises are harder to contain, and the impact of climate change is taking its toll.

The hottest year on record was 2015 with 32 major droughts, double the ten-year average. Red Cross has strong structures in the Mt Elgon and Teso regions in Eastern Uganda. These are some of the areas prone to natural disasters and therefore need more empowerment for resilience.

Prof Nsibambi appreciated the Red Cross for this meaningful partnership which empowers universities that train people who eventually serve communities.

“Being a political scientist, I will add my voice to the Red Cross contribution by saying that good political leadership can bring an end to human suffering and may result in unity of purpose and sustained leadership. Investment in peaceful and inclusive societies builds their resilience to withstand disasters. Thank you Red Cross.”

Uganda Red Cross officially started a relationship with Makerere University School of Political Science and will keep sharing the annual publication of the World Disaster Report as part of IFRC contribution to building resilience in Africa. Twenty books were handled to Dr. Nansozi Suzie Muwanga, head of the Department, Political Science – Makerere University Kampala.
Uganda Red Cross Society recently held a four days Psychosocial Support Training session for its staff and volunteers to empower them with skills on how to deal with psycho-social issues.

The training was conducted from May 8 to May 12, 2017 in Arua, West Nile. The training was conducted by experts (psychologists) from the Icelandic Red cross. One of the psychologists, Elin Jonasdottir, the Psychosocial Support Training (PST) is intended to prepare staff in handling victims with numerous psychological disorders like trauma, shock, stress, mental illness among others.

This comes at a time when Uganda Red Cross staff and volunteers are receiving a number of refugees from South Sudan. As staff and volunteers handle these refugees, there are chances that they get burnouts due to a lot of work. The Refugees too come with a number of challenges which are likely to cause them a lot of psycho-social disorders. The training was as such tailored to equip the staff and volunteers who on a daily basis meet refugees and need their support.

"As humanitarian agencies go about supporting these people, they need psychosocial support skills to help them respond to psychosocial needs of the refugees," Mr. Jonasdottir – physiologist – Icelandic red cross.

Mandu Sadam, a URCS Staff and beneficiary of the training, noted that the exercise has come in handy because the Uganda Red Cross is at the forefront of the South Sudan refugee response in Northern Uganda.

Mandu is among the trained groups of “Trainers of trainees” and now a member of the Emergency Response Team. “This training is good for us as staff and very important for Red Cross. The staff and volunteers can be able to detect symptoms of trauma, post-trauma, stress and mental illness quickly and figure out the best and most effective remedies for the refugees. We needed it and we will ably use the skills got to support ourselves as well as our direct clients, the refugees,” Ms Orwin Tumuhirwe, the Coordinator Human Resources and Administration noted that the training benefited the staff who may not necessarily be part of the refugee operation but who through their work support people in one way or the other. “The Uganda Red Cross Red Society staff and volunteers often come across people faced with crisis events like deaths, accidents, disasters, chronic illnesses, Sexual-Gender Based Violence, rape, suicide, as well as stress and burnout from humanitarian responders themselves as they do their daily work. If staff and volunteers are trained, they can easily support through early detection and referral interventions before the situation goes out of hand.

This justifies the need for capacity building of URCS staff and volunteers to be able to effectively provide holistic emergency response programing that can save the lives of the victims,” Ms Tumuhirwe added.

The training benefited 30 staff from Uganda Red Cross, UNHCR, Office of the Prime Minister (Settlement commandants), Peter C. Aldeman’s (PCA) Foundation, Trans-cultural Psychosocial Organization (TPO) and Red Cross volunteers. The trained staff works directly with refugees.
The project is a move to see education and health services boosted in these communities. Six study centres were opened in Kaabong and four in Abim, to support education for children in the local communities.

“This is a remarkable initiative towards improving access to basic and formal education for the vulnerable children in the resettling communities. The initiative has been highly appreciated by the communities and the local government together with other partners. We will keep encouraging more children to join school as part of the Red Cross contribution to development in the rural areas in Uganda,” said Simon Eyoku, URCS Project officer.

Uganda Red Cross has been implementing the project for over five years and has supported many children in Karamoja. The boards help children to quickly learn how to write, they are durable.

“The boards are durable compared to exercise books and are more suitable for the Karamoja region because of the set up of the settlement. Boards unlike exercise books don’t soak with water, are easy to manage and store. The boards last two years before we replace, yet exercise books get torn and are used up very fast,” noted Moses Akol, a member of the community and implementation partner.

Karamoja is one of the areas of North and North Eastern Uganda that suffered political instability in the 1980s. Health facilities, roads and Schools were destroyed leading to children struggling to access social services like education.
Have you been away from your close family for a day, a week, a month or even a year? How did it feel?

If well planned, it could be non-eventful. On the other hand, it can be one of the most disheartening situations one can ever go through. Imagine thousands of people fleeing insecurity, disasters, wars, famine, injustices, and other atrocities against humanity!

Many lose touch and contact with their families because they may not get a chance to escape together.

The conflict in Southern Sudan has caused thousands of people to flee to neighboring countries like Uganda for refuge. Among the refugees are children who cross borders unaccompanied but find their way with help of fellow children, neighbors or a Good Samaritan. Uganda Red Cross in partnership with ICRC, OPM and UNHCR supports the protection of separated and unaccompanied children to ensure their safety and dignity.

Thirteen-year-old Miriam Atto was at school when the war in South Sudan forced her out of class together with other children. They rambled with no sense of direction until they joined a group people who were moving to a direction she didn’t know. At the border point in Lamwo, they learnt that they were in Uganda. Since then, they have camped at a Good Samaritan’s home. This kind stranger has been their foster mother until Red Cross met them.

Atto is one of the 10 children that

Uganda Red Cross restoration of family links program has supported to trace their close relatives and united them.

At the end of June 2017, 10 children in Lamwo camp had been successfully traced, close families identified and ready for unification. Mariam anxiously packed her bag a day before her scheduled journey to reunite with her family. She just could not wait to meet her mother.

With support from UNHCR Child protection office, Office of the Prime Minister
Camp Commander in Uganda, Uganda Red Cross visited the foster home in Agojo to pick the 10 children and take each one to their close relative in the different camps in Northern Uganda. Atto joined the other nine children and was taken to meet her mother. It was quite an emotional moment as parents and children excitedly met after a long period of separation.

“I thank God; I give Him the glory. I did not sleep the whole night because I was praying. The joy I got when I was told my daughter was coming couldn’t allow me to sleep. I wish I could slaughter a goat, chicken or rabbit for you but they all died in Sudan. I would have done so as my token of appreciation. Red cross has resurrected my child. I thought she had died and had given up on her. Ooooooh, God is worthy of my praise. To Him be the glory!” said Atto’s mother, 51-year-old Rebecca Pita, while raising her hands and weeping in joy.

Pita thought death had robbed her of her daughter in the South Sudan war. Atto too could not control her tears. Sharing her life aspirations, Atto said she wants to become the Minister for Education. She starts school next term and looks forward to living a better life with her mother. “I am so happy to meet my mother. My father died before the war and I thought my mother too had died. But now I am happy to see her. I will help her with housework and also help out with other home chores. I also can’t wait to start school because I want to make my mom happy someday,” Atto adds.

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) supports Uganda Red Cross to implement the restoration of family links program (RFL) in refugee settlement camps. The families exchange messages, make phone calls and clarify the fate of missing persons. Children without biological parents are given a chance to live with close relatives if identified.
Young people in Eastern Uganda organised a youth camp to commemorate the Red Cross day. The event was hosted at Light Secondary School Busia from May 5 - 9.

The camp whose theme was: Environmental management, our role as young people, attracted over 100 youths. The young people purposed to revamp the degrading environment through tree planting. This they believe will save the community and protect lives.

With support from the Integrated Climate Change Adaptation project, funded by the German federal government through the German Red Cross, the youth were able to plant over 1500 trees as a move to strengthen and build resilient communities that can withstand the effects of climate change.

“Environmental change is a global issue today which affects many communities and even claims lives. In Mbale for example (part of Eastern Uganda) landslides and mudslides happen all the time it rains. These claim many lives. If we plant enough trees, we will have contributed to environmental protection,” said Joseph Omilmot, the chairman CGB.

The youth make up about 60% of the Uganda Red Cross membership and they also form the biggest part of the Uganda Red Cross Volunteer body that makes service to the vulnerable possible. Every year, Uganda Red Cross joins the rest of the world to celebrate the International Red cross and Red Crescent day on the 8th of May. This year’s theme was “Everywhere for Everyone.” This implies that the Red Cross is everywhere to serve everybody who needs our services.

At the end of the camp, the youth appreciated the Red Cross efforts in bringing them together to acquaint themselves with core activities of the National Society where building the capacity of branches and all youth groups is paramount.

The youths among other activities learnt about First Aid, simulations and sexual reproductive health. “The learnt skills will help us as we grow into this profession,” Jonah Wesonge, participant.

Among other activities the Red Cross week included a blood donation drive, painting of Zebra crossings, doing community cleaning, visiting needy orphans and the elderly and washing clothes for the disabled. Among other advantages, these activities created a bond among the youths of the National Society and they pledged to continue working together. “This year the camp was in Eastern [Uganda]. Next year, we will take it to another region and all the youths in the country must benefit through the youth initiatives,” said John Atugonza, the URCS National Youth chairman.
How to Support

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Enter Merchant code: redcross  
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Enter Amount/Reason for Payment  
Confirm Pay, Enter PIN