

By Jacky Achan

DUTCH SUPPORT BOOSTS REFUGEE-HOST COEXISTENCE

For decades, Uganda has welcomed refugees fleeing violence, war, famine and political instability from countries such as South Sudan, Sudan, the DR Congo, Somalia, Eritrea, Burundi, Rwanda and Ethiopia.

By April this year, over two million refugees had found shelter in Uganda. But the arrival of refugees usually brings significant changes to host communities.

"The first thing refugees do is change the makeup of the community," says Pius Ojara, the director of the Refugee Law Project at Makerere University School of Law.

"When that happens, people react in different ways. Some with fear, others with curiosity, and some with conflict."

As the population grows, so does the demand for

services. "Water, health services, schools, even roads all need to serve more people, which leads to tensions," Ojara explains.

DUTCH SUPPORT

In 2020, the Kingdom of the Netherlands, a European Union (EU) member country committed euro 12.39m

(over sh52.4b) to the project to strengthen refugee-host relations in northern Uganda. This funding, now in its third phase, aims to foster peaceful

coexistence between refugees and locals.

"The goal is to help people who have lost



The Refugee Law Project is strengthening refugee-host relations in northern Uganda

everything rebuild their lives and support vulnerable communities," Ojara says.

The Refugee Law Project works to integrate refugees with their hosts, building resilience on both sides. This includes providing legal support, peace-building

and livelihood programmes, as well as addressing the mental health impacts of trauma.

They also focus on young refugees, offering skills training and advocacy to amplify their voices. For refugee children, the

project runs peace clubs and educates the youth on sexual and reproductive health rights.

"Involving host communities is also key," Ojara says.

"We ensure that locals are part of our

programmes, and we work with authorities like immigration officers, police, prison officers, as well as community, women, youth, traditional and local leaders to raise awareness of refugees' vulnerabilities."

However, many refugees arrive with devastating injuries, both physical and emotional, due to the violence they have experienced.

"The Refugee Law Project offers safe spaces for survivors of sexual and gender-based violence [SGBV], where they can confidentially disclose their experiences and begin to heal," says Associate Arineitwe, an SGBV prevention officer.

With continued support from the Kingdom of the Netherlands and stakeholders, the Refugee Law Project is helping refugees and host communities to build stable and meaningful lives.

**OVER SH52.4B
WAS INJECTED
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LAW PROJECT TO
HELP REFUGEES
IN 2020.**