

Poverty as seen from the eyes of a Refugee Host Community

The Real Life Story

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Mr. Yasin Asumani 95 years old, his visually impaired wife Theresa Anyako 73 years old, their son Mr. Agele James 48 years old and Yasin's younger brother Mr. Alayi Asuman 85 years old belong to the Nyangui Clan in Odruaku village, Kwili Parish, Rigbo Sub County in Madi Okollo district. The only younger and more energetic person in this family is James who spends most of his time at the shores of River Nile to try and catch fish as the only source of livelihood for the family.

When able bodied, Yasin was a farmer because they have over 20 acres of cultivable land and he had 2 boats which he rented out and sometimes used them for fishing himself. Life was good from his youthful days up to the time he reached about 70 years. He had five (5) children including his only son James but two (2) of his daughters died leaving him with three children. The two (2) daughters are alive and married but live far (over 20 Kms) away from their father's home with their husbands and children.

Despite this fairly good background, Yasin and his family can hardly afford the luxury of a one decent meal per week. Their biggest challenge for now is hunger. According to Yasin, the family largely depends on food stuffs that they earn through begging from the community members. The only person who can move from home to home to beg for food is his younger brother (Alayi 85 years old) however, it is not every day that a community member or two can sacrifice to share the little they have with Alayi.

Water is another basic need this family lacks access to. Seeing their level of vulnerability, Water Mission, an International Non-Governmental Organization (INGO) connected a water tap for this family. However, when their project ended in 2021, they handed over the water project

“Sometimes I am chased away like a dog when I approach some homes because they know all I want is food”, **said Alayi.**



to the GoU. In turn, the government handed the project to be managed by Umbrella (a government limited company).

To aid effective maintenance of the water resource, the water users are now compelled to pay water bills on monthly basis. For about 3 months, Yasin's family could not pay an accumulated bill of Ugx.38,000 so this prompted the government to disconnect the water since they were unable to offset the water bill. As a result, the family members can only have access to water when a well wisher gives them money to purchase a jerrycan of water or two which costs Ugx.200 per jerrycan.

To address the problem of hunger, Yasin requests that UNHCR and OPM should come to their aid and include them among their beneficiaries like the Persons of Concern (refugees) who receive food/cash assistance on monthly basis.

They have arable land which they acknowledge is a big resource but revealed that since the refugees were settled in their land in 2012, they came with animals which they do not take care of and as a result, all their crops or crops of the refugees who hired their land for farming could not yield any results so people were no longer bringing money for them to rent their lands for farming.

Above Left: RMA interacts with Yasin and his family to document their life story and Below: The youth help Theresa to come out side to get fresh air



“We can no longer bathe regularly, I bathe after three days because I can still bath myself but I can not bath everyday because it will waste water which we cannot afford everyday. My brother Yasin can bathe once in a week if his son James is around because he can no longer bathe himself and I have no strength to bathe him. The problem is Theresa who can neither bathe herself nor be bathed by any of us because she is a woman. She last bathed in the beginning of November (more than a month ago) because it is only her daughters who can come and bathe her”, **said Alayi.**

The senior citizens like Yasin and his brother Alayi are qualified to receive the SAGE grants that the Government of Uganda (GoU) gives out inform of a monthly stipend of Ugx.25,000 to persons aged above 80 years in different parts of the country including Madi Okollo district where this family resides.

Mr. Agele James said that, his only livelihood option is fishing however, the season for catching enough fish for sale is over and his returns from fishing will only increase in 3-5 months from now (December 2022). He revealed that after staying at the banks of River Nile for a week, he only returns home with Ugx.15,000 - Ugx.20,000 which cannot sustain the family. He mainly uses the money for buying medicines for his sick parents, use some for buying water and food which can hardly be enough for 2-3 days before he can go back to the river to look for more fish. He confirmed that when he was away, the only survival option left for his elderly family members was begging.

resides. However, although Yasin and Alayi are registered to receive this financial assistance for older persons, their efforts to follow the processes have not yielded positive results because the paying officers at Rigbo Sub County Local Government keep saying that their names are not yet included in the list for payment.

This lack of water has led to other health problems. “We scratch our itching bodies the whole night and sometimes fail to sleep”, ... “I always feel weak if my son does not bath me for a long time so I do not even know how my wife Theresa feels because she has not bathed for over a month now. Whenever I ask how she is feeling, all she wants to know is if somebody brought for us what to eat”, revealed Yasin. “We do not have clothing to cover our bodies but we are not asking for that. All we ask for is food to keep us alive”, added Alayi.



Left: The youth help carry Mr. Yasin to sit up in the chair and Right: The youth and Ms. Christine Olery (CEPAD-WN) staff take a group photo after presenting their gifts and money they collected to Mr. Yasin and his family.



1. more than half of the room is occupied by the household items like jerrycans, saucepans, a water tank and chairs donated by one off visitors and,
2. they cannot afford to find another place to accommodate Mr. Alayi on whom they largely depend for their daily feeding since he is the one that goes out begging for food and at the same time prepares it for

According to James, he has tried to construct a pit latrine for the family four times but he could not afford a concrete slab for the latrines. As a result, the termites destroyed the wooden slabs he improvised within a year and all the latrines collapsed as soon as the termites destroyed the woods. Since August 2021, the family resorted to using the nearby bushes to defecate including Yasin and his wife Theresa who crawl into the bushes on their knees. “The situation is more difficult for Theresa who is blind and can not see where to touch when crawling to the bush to defecate. We always fear because she can meet dangerous animals like snakes when in the bush since she cannot see because she has been stung by scorpions three times when she went to help herself in the bush”, said Yasin. James has promised to dig another pit for another latrine and mold the bricks for constructing the

latrine but he requests well wishers to support him with the building materials like iron sheets, timber, concrete slab and money for paying the labour charges for constructing the toilet.

Yasin is grateful to some individual staff of Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) who supported his son to construct the only one-roomed house they sleep in. “They gave us iron sheets, timber and Ugx.150,000 to pay for labour for constructing the house”, he revealed.

However, the three elderly people (Yasin, his wife Theresa and his brother Alayi) sleep together on the same small mat donated to Theresa by a well wisher because

them to eat and he only takes rest when James returns from the river.

Please Join me to help in the smallest way possible to put a pit latrine to save Theresa from entering the bushes again, pay their water bills, provide food or construct a better house to provide a separate space for Mr. Alayi to sleep in other than sharing the same mat with the couple.

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