

Sango Bay – The forgotten refugee-camp

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Sango Bay is one of Uganda's refugee camps. It is located in Kakuuto Sub-County, Rakai District, Central Uganda, close to the border with Tanzania. The camp hosts around 4000 people who originate from western Uganda, Rwanda and Burundi. 1802 of them are children. Those people have lived in Tanzania for generations but were chased from there in September 2013 as they were seen as illegal immigrants and therefore had to be banished. The people are now not able to locate their homelands and they were refused to go back to Tanzania- that is the reason why they find themselves in Sango Bay.

I visited this camp on 16th October 2015 as part of my Internship with the Development organization of Masaka Diocese (Caritas MADDO) in order to bring clothes, shoes and few other items there which were collected in the Diocese. Reaching there our group found people living in terrifying conditions and I discovered that the clothes we brought were needed but the people there have other much more serious basic needs of food and primary health care.



The Group from Caritas MADDO distributing relief items to the elderly

- The 900 families and 200 singles, who are mainly elderly and youth, live in small huts made by the people themselves from soil and covered with grass. Every single one of them looks like collapsing immediately. Most of the huts are covered with polythene sheets distributed by UNHCR in order to protect them from being destroyed by water. But still – as soon as it starts raining the housings are flooded completely.



Caption of the huts where the families stay in

- The latrines in the camp are in a very sorry sight. Built poorly from soil and sticks, they are filled up to the top and located very close to the people's huts. The sub-county chief Ssebunnya Steven mentioned that his biggest fear are diseases that might spread in the camp if the faeces are flooding into the compounds and housings due to rains.



The latrines at Sango Bay

- UNICEF has put up 2 classroom tents in the camp, but the classrooms are empty with no chairs, no blackboards and few scholastic materials. I have been told that the school has 5 teachers for 1800 children, which means one teacher has to teach 360 at a time.

- The ditch, which is the source of drinking-, cooking-, cleaning-, and washing water for the people is at the same time used by the cattle. The water is not clean and transmitter of various diseases.



The water source- shared by animals and people

- Another problem are teenage pregnancies. I myself saw 5 young pregnant girls in the age between 12 to 15 years while I was there. Expecting there are many more. The girls explained they have not been raped but they had sex in common consent with the boys, often in order to get money or food in their poor economic situation. Bad enough that these girls grow up in a surrounding where they are exposed to sexuality everyday- everywhere. The emotions in the camp are high the inhibition level is low.

- The main problem, above all is that the people there are starving. The Ugandan government made them to stay there in 2013 but the camp, in comparison to other camps is not officially registered and therefore not targeted and budgeted. The people are supposed to only stay there temporarily and according to the Camps Superintendent Wotoro Joseph they will be settled in other camps by the middle of 2016. The Prime minister's office of the Ugandan government is supposed to supplement those people with food and water but the last time they received anything from the government was in May 2015, and by then only elderly and sick were targeted. The land where the camp is located belongs to Sango Bay Estates Limited a sugar manufacturer in Uganda. As the land is private the refugees are not allowed to cultivate anything there because they are not supposed to develop ownership of the land. Therefore the people are not growing a single plant of corn, banana, cassava or any other kind of vegetable which would be essential for their survival- especially as they are not supported by the government.

The only possibility to get food is to go to nearby villages (25-30 km away) to help villagers on their farms, but I was told that many women face rape and abuse on the way as villagers might take advantage of their situation. And still pregnant women, sick, elderly and small children don't have that possibility as they are not able to walk long distances to work hard or even to find health services at the sub-county health centres.

People are requesting for support, as they feel they have been forgotten. The government does not keep its promises and responsibilities. Few international organizations are giving support but what is done is still too little. It can be assumed that the refugees are kept in that temporary shelter till the presidential elections in February 2016 are over, as every single one of them is registered for the elections. I guess that most of the people there will vote for NRM to support the current President Museveni as they lack political awareness about multipartiality in the country. And still - no one can predict if the situation there will really be solved in 2016.

Food and clean drinking water are necessarily needed. Recently 2 men died out of hunger and 5 drowned themselves out of frustration about their situation. Besides that it is important to give Primary Health Care services and counselling on issues like family planning, HIV/ AIDS and teenage pregnancies.