

Sh2.4b refugee vocational centre opens

By Taddeo Bwambale

The UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has opened a vocational training centre in Kyaka II Refugee Settlement in Kyegegwa district.

The facility that was established with funding from Australia will train more than 2,000 refugees and Ugandan youth in various skills over the next three years.

Australian deputy High Commissioner to Uganda, Jonathan Ball and the UNHCR country representative, Joel Boutroux, inaugurated the facility on Thursday.

The new facility is in line with the refugee agency's resolve to support the social and economic inclusion of refugees through education, vocational training, livelihoods promotion and self-reliance initiatives.

"Investing in skills development programmes for refugees and their local hosts helps to reduce aid-dependency and negative coping mechanisms while contributing to the local economy," Boutroux said.

Australia for UNHCR, one of the bodies which have been



A student training at the centre. Courtesy photo

raising funds for UNHCR globally, provided \$661,000 (sh2.4b) for construction of the centre.

The vocational training centre will be handed over to district authorities in five years.

Refugees and the native community will have access to a range of vocational courses including catering, hairdressing, agriculture and motorcycle repair.

Fin Church Aid, one of UNHCR's partners in Uganda, will oversee the implementation

of these programmes in Kyaka II Refugee Settlement, which is home to more than 106,000 refugees.

Speaking during the launching ceremony, Ball praised Uganda's progressive refugee policies and stressed the need for collective responsibility-sharing.

"It makes more sense to help refugees become self-reliant right from the start. I have no doubt that investments in education, skills training and livelihoods opportunities

can contribute to improving the lives of refugees and the communities who welcome them," he said.

Uganda hosts more than 1.53 million refugees and continues to receive new arrivals fleeing insecurity and human rights violations in neighbouring countries.

Since January 2019, more than 72,000 people have crossed to Uganda from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, South Sudan and Burundi.

The new centre already has 250 students and can host 100 additional trainees. Nearly one-third of the present students are Ugandans.

The programmes are designed for young women and men between the ages of 15-25.

As part of the package, students who successfully complete their training will receive a start-up kit to help them set up their business.

Those who have already completed their primary or secondary education will be enrolled in formal institutions accredited by the education ministry to pursue diplomas and degrees.