Bidibidi Refugee Settlement, Yumbe District, Uganda

September 12, 2016

By Naku Charles Lwanga and Alphonse Mwanamwolho

Background
In early July 2016, in the midst of South Sudan’s efforts to rebuild after decades of civil war and the last conflict of mid-December 2013, fighting broke out again in the capital city of Juba. Due to the increasing violence, scarcity of food, and financial instability caused by the renewed fighting (as of August 2016, inflation reached 660%), many South Sudanese have been fleeing their country. Between July 1, 2016 and August 29, 2016, 90,983 of these refugees arrived in Uganda. Existing transit centers, reception centers, and refugee camps were overwhelmed with numbers exceeding their capacity. Hundreds and thousands of refugees arrived each day, and this trend continues in September 2016. In response to the growing need, Uganda’s Office of the Prime Minister (OPM) and the UNHCR chose several locations for additional refugee camps. Among these locations was Bidibidi in the Yumbe district of northern Uganda.

RMF’s Presence
Since 2009, RMF has been working to strengthen the South Sudanese healthcare system. RMF initiated, co-founded, and continues to support the Juba College of Nursing and Midwifery, supports the Juba Teaching Hospital, and in December 2014, became the UNICEF implementing partner for malnutrition treatment and prevention in Jonglei State and the greater Pibor Administrative Area. Even after fighting broke out in July 2016, RMF’s in-country teams have continued these programs. RMF has also been providing health services, school support for children, and vocational training to South Sudanese refugees in Uganda’s Kiryandongo Refugee Settlement since 2008 and was appointed UNHCR Implementing Partner for health care in 2014.

Based on RMF’s work and our long-term partnerships with Uganda’s Office of the Prime Minister (OPM) and the UN, RMF was chosen as one of the partner organizations to be involved in the selection and building of new refugee settlements. More specifically, RMF has been chosen as the UNHCR Health Implementing Partner for the new Bidibidi Refugee Settlement in the Yumbe district.

Progress in Bidibidi Refugee Settlement: Narrative Update from RMF Uganda’s Team, August 4 – August 31, 2016

Opening Days of Bidibidi: August 4 – August 8, 2016
On August 4, 2016, the Ugandan Office of the Prime Minister’s Commissioner for Refugees, David Apollo Kazungu, arrived at Bidibidi Refugee Settlement to conduct its official opening. The Commissioner announced that refugees should begin arriving in Bidibidi on August 5, 2016. They would be transported from dangerously overcrowded transit centers in Adjuman; Bidibidi Refugee Settlement would immediately host over 20,000 refugees. The settlement has the capacity to support 100,000 refugees, but it is being built from the ground up.
The Commissioner talks with RMF Uganda’s Country Director, the OPM Field Leader, and a Yumbe district MP.

The OPM’s Commissioner for Refugees officially opens Bidibidi Refugee Settlement with partner organizations.

Refugees are transported from Adjumani Transit Centre to Bidibidi in trucks and buses.

Refugees arrive in Bidibidi Refugee Settlement.
800 new refugees arrive at Bidibidi Refugee Settlement every day; thus, each day services must increase to match with the population. The procedure for new arrivals at Bidibidi Refugee Camp is as follows:

- New arrivals are verified and served a hot meal.
- Refugees are hosted at the Bidibidi Reception Centre for 24 hours, and then moved to their own plots of land to create room for the next arrivals.
- Basic building materials are provided.

The settlement is being built from the ground up, and refugees are responsible for constructing their homes. This is difficult for most, since 89% of new arrivals are women and children. Some of the population is also elderly or has special needs.

A road is opened up in the savanna grasslands, where refugees will set up their homes.

Thickets give way to human settlements.

The area pictured above is 8 km away from the reception center. RMF conducts a medical outreach program in this area, and we will eventually establish a permanent health facility here. In Bidibidi Refugee Settlement, refugees are settled far from the reception center to avoid congestion and minimize the risk of a disease outbreak.
Inside RMF’s Reception Centre Health Clinic.

RMF’s medical team receives and treats refugees.

3-month-old twins Akelo and Odongo are being treated by RMF for malaria and malnourishment.

2 children in the IDP – this child arrived very sick, but is gradually improving.

Distribution center for non-food items.

We end each day with a coordination meeting to recount the day’s successes and challenges, and plan for the following day.
In the case of most patients RMF sees at Bidibidi Refugee Settlement, referral is not the best option because the region’s existing health center III, health center IV, and hospital are very ill-equipped in terms of facilities, manpower, and supplies.

**RMF’s achievements during the opening days of Bidibidi Refugee Settlement:**

- RMF’s medical team is stationed full-time at the Reception Centre Health Clinic to provide medical services to the people of concern.
- RMF’s medical team is running an inpatient department and an outpatient department.
- From August 6 to August 8, 2016, the facility has treated 865 patients. The most common diseases are malaria and respiratory tract infections.
- A standby ambulance from the Arua Rhino camp was transferred to Bidibidi, strengthening the referral mechanism.
- RMF stocked the Reception Centre Health Clinic with enough medicine to treat patients until UNHCR medicine arrived.
- RMF’s medical team has established 2 outreach clinics in areas where refugees have been settled. This is to ensure that people of concern have quick access to health services.
- RMF’s presence is being felt.
- RMF continues to establish and maintain a good rapport with the DHO and the district health leadership.

**Challenges:**

- The number of workers in Bidibidi Refugee Settlement is small compared to the number of refugees requiring help; the number of refugees keeps increasing since a new convoy arrives every day.
- RMF will open new health clinics in the locations where refugees are being settled. Our medical team will be stretched thin when team members are deployed to those points.

**Appreciation:**

- RMF Uganda’s team appreciates every support that RMF USA’s leadership provides to help establish RMF’s presence in Yumbe. We pledge to do the best possible.
- Thanks to UNHCR for providing family tents that are hosting our team.

**Continued Growth and Challenges in Bidibidi: August 9 – August 14, 2016**

Each day, the population of Bidibidi Refugee Settlement grows by at least 1,000, with refugees transported in busses and trucks from Adjumani transit centers. Thus far, we have settled over 7,500 people. Unfortunately, although the population grows each day, facilities at Bidibidi Refugee Settlement are not increasing at a sufficient rate to meet the population’s needs and demands.

Within 24 hours of refugees’ arrival at Bidibidi, they are moved to plots of land where they are supposed to build their homes. Because of limited resources, refugees are being settled in areas before water sources and pit latrines are established. This has resulted in open defecation. We are concerned that there could be a cholera outbreak at any time. Yesterday, August 13, 2016, RMF’s team treated two children with cases of acute diarrhea. Stool samples have been taken to confirm whether the children have cholera.

As the UNHCR Health Implementing Partner, RMF’s medical team is working hard to provide medical treatment, education, and prevention in Bidibidi Refugee Settlement, but the population is growing very quickly, and the WASH sector is moving very slowly. RMF’s team is concerned that the slow progress of infrastructure, especially in providing basic needs like water and latrines, may result in serious health problems. Yesterday, August 13, 2016, we had a meeting with the UNHCR emergency team from Geneva, which had come to hear partners’ challenges in the field. RMF’s team was encouraged that the Geneva UNHCR team wanted to listen and to understand the gaps.
Challenges:

- Roads are not being opened very quickly, so trucks cannot access all the areas where refugees are being settled. Only one grader and one bulldozer are available – these are not nearly enough to do the work.
- There are currently no culverts to bridge valleys and wet areas.
- There are very few pit latrines, and the refugees have not yet settled to dig their own – open defecation is likely to continue.
- Water coverage is still far below standard – 15 liters are not available for every person.

These challenges are caused mainly by lack of funds. When Bidibidi Refugee Settlement was planned and opened, the UNHCR insisted that partner organizations intervene with their own resources and manpower. RMF, with the generous support of our funders, has done so, and other partners have as well, but the influx of refugees has been unrelenting and exhausting. Now all partners are under strain. This is the message we gave to the UNHCR Geneva team: If UNHCR funding does not arrive soon, we may lose lives.

RMF’s planning and direction as UNHCR Health Implementing Partner in Bidibidi Refugee Settlement:

- Open 3 additional stationary health clinics, for a total of 6. RMF is currently running 3 health clinics: 1 in the reception center and 2 in the community.
- Employ 2 additional doctors and support them with small cadres. Our medical team is still too small, and they are working for long periods with no rest. Unless reinforcements arrive, our team will soon be exhausted.
- Create a larger health education team to travel the settlement teaching people about health habits. One of RMF’s clinical officers, Moses, and 4 volunteers are doing this, but they cannot sufficiently cover the growing settlement, and the volunteers lack facilitation and motivation.
- Stock more essential medicines.
- Procure additional beds, stretchers, examination couches, drip stands, and other medical equipment.
- Redirect funds to construct temporary shelters for health facilities until permanent structures can be constructed.
- Repair broken boreholes (as resources allow). Some of these boreholes are already mapped.
- Deploy the mobile clinic van to Bidibidi if possible. The mobile clinic van would be very relevant in Bidibidi Refugee Settlement, and would further help RMF provide superior medical services.
- Strengthen the referral mechanism by providing Bidibidi Health Centre III and Yumbe Hospital with additional staff, medicine, and other supplies.
- Deploy RMF’s ambulance from Kiryandongo to provide additional support. Currently, Bidibidi has only one ambulance (relocated from Arua) with one driver working day and night.

Additional Project Photos
Inpatient ward at Bidibidi Reception Centre Health Clinic

Work in the dispensary

Provisional shelters and little infrastructure make for a tough beginning.

A road inside Bidibidi Refugee Settlement

These trees will be cut for firewood and building; reforestation and environmental organization are needed.
One of RMF’s outreach points that needs to be developed into a static point.

A child with acute diarrhea is assisted by RMF’s medical outreach team, while transport to a health facility is arranged.

RMF’s team provides health education to refugees; we are doing everything in our power to prevent diseases like cholera.

Outside Barakala Health Centre III, which needs strengthening.

Inside the Barakala Health Centre III.
Overview of RMF’s Healthcare Progress in Bidibidi: July 29 – August 31, 2016

As the month of August comes to an end, RMF Uganda’s team wishes to report key achievements that we have made in providing healthcare services to refugees in Bidibidi Refugee Settlement. The end of August marks the end of the first month that Bidibidi Refugee Settlement has been open in the Yumbe district of West Nile. The settlement was opened to accommodate large numbers of South Sudanese refugees that have fled to Uganda as a result of renewed fighting in South Sudan. As of today, August 31, 2016, Bidibidi Refugee Settlement has a population of 36,173 persons, and its capacity is more than 100,000 persons.

- On July 29, 2016, RMF was asked by the Office the Prime Minister (OPM) to provide medical support to the South Sudanese refugees in Uganda. Swiftly, an RMF team of medical officers with a consignment of medicines and other essential items was arranged and sent to the Yumbe district. They arrived July 30, 2016.
- The RMF team set up a health facility that is still in use. As of today, Aug 31, 2016, 5,331 people have been treated at our facility. One patient has died at this health facility within this period.

### RMF Team Members in Bidibidi Refugee Settlement

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<tr>
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<th>Number</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>4</td>
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<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>22</strong></td>
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### Other partners in the health sector:

- Yumbe District Local Government
- International Rescue Committee (reproductive health)
- Concern Worldwide and ACF (nutrition)

### Mode of providing healthcare services in Bidibidi Refugee Settlement:

3 stationary clinics:

1. **Reception Centre Health Clinic**
   
   RMF’s main health clinic is open 24/7, and functions as the referral facility for Bidibidi Refugee Settlement. When needed, the Reception Centre Health Clinic also refers patients to Yumbe Hospital or other health facilities.

2. **Bidibidi Health Clinic**
   
   This clinic currently operates as an outreach post. The Bidibidi Health Clinic is housed in a tent, and it is open during the day. When resources are available, this clinic will operate 24/7.

3. **Iyete Health Clinic**
   
   This clinic is also operating as an outreach post. Iyete Health Clinic is conducted at a designated meeting place, but there is no tent in this location yet.

###Community health outreach program:

RMF’s integrated health outreach program educates Bidibidi community members about healthy living as part of our disease prevention strategy. Our health outreach team also identifies refugees who require long-term treatment, such as ARVs or TB treatment, and brings them to Barakala Health Centre III (the nearest health facility to the settlement) to be enrolled in a treatment program.

### RMF’s achievements:

- A full-time medical team is available and committed to providing consistent, high-quality medical care.
• 5,331 patients have been treated at RMF’s health clinic.
• When there was an outbreak of acute diarrhea, RMF’s team worked hard and contained the outbreak. All the patients have recovered and been discharged.
• Medical supplies provided by RMF kept the facility effectively operating until UNHCR brought its own consignment. Even after UNHCR supplies arrived, RMF has continuously provided supplementary essential medicines and cleaning supplies, making sure they are available.
• RMF has hired cleaners, who keep the health facility clean.
• RMF has provided patients beds, delivery beds, examination couches, bed screens, drip stands, bed sheets, and blankets for patients at our health clinic.
• RMF has provided plastic chairs and benches, and tables to support our health clinics, especially the outreach program.
• RMF provided two tents, which are being used at the health facility.
• RMF provided laboratory reagents and other essential supplies.
• RMF Uganda head office is providing overhead management for our medical program in Bidibidi Refugee Settlement.
• RMF provided additional medical doctors to support Yumbe Hospital.
• RMF has supplied all the stationery being used at Bidibidi health facilities.

Urgent need:
• A tent is needed to set up a fully equipped pediatric ward. Children are currently sharing a ward with adults, which is not recommended.

Yumbe District Local Government’s support to RMF:
• After seeing the magnitude of RMF’s task in providing health care to the rapidly growing population of Bidibidi Refugee Settlement, Yumbe district’s facilities sent some of their medical team to support RMF until we can hire more team members to cover all of the work.
• The Yumbe District Health Officer attends our health coordination meetings at Bidibidi Refugee Settlement to listen to our challenges. This has promoted a good working relationship between RMF and the Yumbe district, which we will continue to nurture.

Praise for RMF’s current team in Bidibidi:
RMF’s Bidibidi team is hardworking, professional, and united. This team has held the RMF flag high in these difficult living and working conditions. RMF Uganda’s leadership recommends that we retain current Bidibidi team members and reinforce their hard work with additional, well-seasoned professionals.
Items purchased by RMF are unloaded from a truck