

## Dignity restored for a young refugee adolescent.

Poni Viola is one of the participants in faith bonga center aged 19years old, a first-born child to *Mr. Bojo Alfred* and *Mrs. Modong Mary*, they are five (05) children in a family of 02 boys and 03 girls living in Village E, Zone 3 of Palorinya refugee in Obongi district.

Back in South Sudan she used to be in school and had completed her primary eight (P8) in 2016 but when the civil war broke out in 2017, they had to come to seek for refuge in Uganda where the family was forced to start a new life. A life with no single material to fall back to.

She dropped out of school due to school fees problems and providing for her basic needs and those of her siblings was not easy for the parents who could hardly get five hundred shillings (Ugshs. 500) in a week. The hard traumatizing life continued till 2019 when *Duku Anthony* came her way and promised to marry her unfortunately when she conceived for him, he disappeared to an unknown destination. After she gave birth to a baby boy, she named *Savior* who now is one (01) year old, life got harder. No job, the baby is demanding in all aspects from health care, nutrition and other basic needs.

Raising a child as a single parent at her age is horrifying, she became too stressed because she was failing to provide for her child and herself at one point, she felt it was better to die than to suffer, she could not even associate with her age mates to share her problems because of the stigma of being rejected by someone who made you pregnant, she was so stressed with the fact that she no longer goes to school however most of her age mates are attending school.

***“Not going to school is the hardest thing for me, I know my future is messed now...”*** says Poni

In May, 2021 Poni Viola joined the bonga program under Faith bonga center. Bonga is a program among the five programs of ‘Programme for Adolescents and Children’s Education and Social Empowerment’ (PACES) implemented by Rural Initiative for Community Empowerment West Nile with support from Stromme Foundation in Zone 3, of Palorinya refugee settlement for a period of three (3) years aimed at ensuring *‘Children in primary school and out of school adolescents in Uganda have access to formal and non-formal education’*.

Through the life skills sessions conducted with the adolescents she was able to get rid of many of her stressful moments after the animator teaching them about stress and how dangerous it can be. She found this as an opportunity to share her experiences/problems with the other adolescents who are from her walk of life. She realized that she was not alone in such problems so this helped her to reorganize her life further.



Photo showing Poni Viola sharing her story with the PO Bonga in her refugee homestead.

Poni understood that body changes were normal as you pass through adolescence not that when you experience such changes your ready of marriage as the culture pronounces. Coupled to that she is able to maintain good personal hygiene which helps

prevent some diseases affecting children's skin through the knowledge given during hygiene and sanitation from the bonga center. The bonga centers introduced savings as a mechanism for economically empowering the adolescents, this to Viola was incredible news – she joined the group at her center and has been able to save Ugshs. 30,000 and borrowed a loan of Ugshs. 20,000 which she used for buying silverfish, tomatoes that she is selling to generate income of at least Ugshs. 5,000 on daily basis. She plans to pay back the loan in their next siting so that she can get more to invest in her business which will help her provide for her and her baby. And she believes after them getting some skill in income generating activity with startup she may do better and expand.

She remains grateful to RICE West Nile for the opportunity granted to empower her.

***“When I first heard about this RICE program, I thought it was a joke ... then I started attending and I can't wait for next sessions...”*** says Poni Viola.