



Pat Robert Larubi rode over 800kms to deliver sunscreens to people with

Albinism

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Unfortunate as the coronavirus pandemic understandably is – killing over 380,000 people globally in a space of 5 months and leaving the global economy badly hit -, many will argue it has also brought out the goodness in humanity more than ever.

Humanity has come together to devise quick solutions to the socioeconomic impact that the global halt has left in its wake. But while there are many (including individuals, corporate entities and organizations) to thank for the acts of kindness and generosity, there are those that have gone to great lengths to make a change.



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Like Pat Robert Larubi, a journalist and activist, who chose to ride over 820 kilometers from Central to Northern Uganda, in a bid to deliver critical health supplies – sunscreens – to people living with Albinism.

Through an initiative 'Action for Albinism', Larubi sought to help people with Albinism access the sunscreens so as to avert the threat of skin cancer. The Covid-19 preventive measures, notably the 2-month lockdown, have inhibited movement, leaving thousands of People with Albinism (PWA) exposed to health risks like cancer.

"We know that because of the lack of pigmentation, PWA may develop sores on their skin that could develop into skin cancer. I saw provision of high-factor sun screen as the most immediate need for all persons with albinism," Larubi told SoftPower News.

Also Read: [Personal Stories: The Covid Lockdown Has Been Challenging for People with Albinism](#)

He said his long ride was also an opportunity to create awareness on the needs, the potential of people with albinism and helping them overcome abuses, break stigma and chain of vulnerability.

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“As an activist, I have been popularizing UN Sustainable Development Goal 10 which talks about Inequality. Target No 2, states that the need to empower and promote the social, economic and political inclusion of all, irrespective of their age, sex, disability, race, ethnicity, origin, religion or economic or other status,” he adds.

Using a motorbike, Larubi set off from Jinja, through Lugazi, Kayunga, Mukono and Kampala, Wakiso and rode through Luwero northwards to Gulu.

He made stopovers in Lugazi, Mukono, Kayunga, Kampala, Wakiso, Luwero, Kigumba (Kiryandongo district) and then Gulu. He later proceeded to make other deliveries in Omoro, Oyam, Kole, Lira and Apac districts.

He says he chose to use a motorbike due to the prohibition of public transport due to Covid-19.

“I thought of an innovative way in which I could bring services close to PWA with specific regard to action for access to healthcare. Most PWA are in remote villages and private cars that we could hire were not allowed to move. So, I opted for my motorbike to deliver the sunscreens”.

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He delivered the sunscreens at strategic locations – offices, health care facilities and to the different disabled persons' unions where the beneficiaries can then pick them. Larubi says that by delivering these supplies to the countryside, it eliminates transport costs and makes the sunscreens cheaper to the last beneficiary.

Were the sunscreens adequate? He says the target was to reach out to 500 people both directly and indirectly. He estimates that 200 PWA were reached directly and the rest secondary beneficiaries including parents and guardian of children with albinism. Of the 200, each got 3 tins of sunscreens.

The sunscreens were donated to Source of the Nile Union of Persons with Albinism (SNUPA) by Advantage Africa, a U.K charity that supports vulnerable children and adults in East Africa to reach their potential, overcome prejudice, work their way out of poverty and become self-reliant.

According to Larubi, the need for sunscreens is immense. Uganda has an estimated 5,000 persons with albinism. With just 500 served during his recent outreach, "the number reached is just a drop in an ocean".

Nateete

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“It was the best we could offer and carry through this mission trip. The need is overwhelming because they (PWA) need it to aid their survival. It’s an essential product that they need to live with”.

“The government through URA had helped us with a tax waiver on a case-by-case basis, but our prayer is for the country to start local production and to work with the government in giving out free sunscreens to all these PWA as part of our advocacy for minimum health care pack,” he says.

There is need to stock sunscreens in all regional health centers like any other critical medical supplies provided for by the government to its citizens, he says.

On his delivery outreach, he says some of the issues currently affecting PWA due to the Covid lockdown were evident.

“I encountered the daily life struggles of two PWA who were busy digging (for money) to earn daily meal with their mom in Amuru district. For them, putting food on the table means sacrificing their lives in the hot sun. But this is risky because it can damage their skin. With the lack of sunscreens, the whole body wrought with sun burn”.

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Due to the high costs involved in treating cancer, if their skin condition progressed to Cancer, it would result into possible death.

Larubi cites a story of Anyinge Barbra, who prior to Covid was a shoe vendor in Lira town. Her business has been badly affected by government's measures to prevent the spread of Covid. She has already blown all her savings from the small business, to fend for the family during the two-month lockdown.

"The demand for food for her and her family is her daily worry. She is not certain where to begin from when life/business returns to normal. She won't have a penny to start over".

Anyinge's condition is not different from that of Awori Martha who disclosed to Larubi that she has not managed to get out of her home since the lockdown began, because boda bodas have been prohibited from carrying passengers. She says using a boda boda reduces the time she would have spent walking and also reduces the risk of getting exposed to the sun. At the same time, the boda boda makes it convenient to reach her business clients whom she supplies locally produced liquid soap.

“These are just a handful of the over 30 stories heart breaking stories I listened to from the different families. My arrival seemed to them like a ray of hope, yet I barely had any money to offer them for their additional needs. All the money I had was to fuel my bike”.

At a personal level, Larubi says the ride was a new and exciting experience.

“It was the first time in five years that I was taking on such a long journey after getting involved in a nasty motor accident. This time round, I was better prepared and more cautious”.

“What I know is – Love has the power to change the world, for example, the Uganda we build today is that we will admire tomorrow. It all starts with your action and doing what you love most for humanity as a whole,” he says.





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