



“I’M GOING TO CHANGE THE WORLD!”

GETTING CHILD REFUGEES IN UGANDA THE EDUCATION THEY DESERVE



Save the Children

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Front cover photo: 14 year old Harriet* at school in Bidi Bidi refugee settlement, northern Uganda. Louis Leeson / Save the Children

Back cover photo: Best friends Peter and David at an Early Childhood Development (ECD) centre in West Nile. Louis Leeson / Save the Children

- Children's names have been changed to protect identities

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THE POWER OF EDUCATION



When we ask families affected by conflict what their biggest priorities are, most say education. Across Uganda, mothers and fathers go hungry and sacrifice themselves to try and put their children through school. Education is every child's right, but it also protects, enlightens and empowers.

Uganda hosts nearly 1.4 million refugees—by far the most in Africa and the third most worldwide. The Government of Uganda has one of the most

progressive refugee policies in the world, and local communities have shown enormous generosity, welcoming refugees into some of the poorest areas of the country.

In 2018, Uganda launched the Education Response Plan for refugees and host communities—the first of its kind globally, setting out exactly how we can provide children with the education they deserve. However, the response remains critically underfunded and education in Uganda's refugee-hosting districts is facing a crisis. Hundreds of thousands of children are out of school. Classrooms are dangerously overcrowded and in desperate need of repair. Teachers are overwhelmed.

This book aims to show the power of education, but also the challenges in delivering it. The children we work with are our inspiration. Many of them have survived terrible experiences, yet they remain passionate about learning and hopeful for their future. I have no doubt that many of the children we work with will go on to achieve great things—if they get the right support.

We owe it to the children in this book to make that a reality. But what happens in the refugee response in Uganda will also have global implications. The international community has committed to a new way of working and sharing responsibility in the Global Compact on Refugees. A failure to support Uganda now will jeopardize the credibility and success of this commitment worldwide. Uganda is the test case which must succeed.

Brechtje van Lith

Country Director, Save the Children Uganda



Right: Children are so desperate to learn that classrooms burst out of the doors

HARRIET*, 14

When Harriet* fled the war in South Sudan, her school uniform was one of the few things she grabbed. "I was crying, I didn't know what to do. I thought I will lose my life." She walked for three days to the safety of Uganda. **"I thought I'd never go to school again** because of the war."

But in Uganda she was able to enrol in school. **"I started learning so many things"**—leadership skills, reading, writing. I think education is important. It makes people bright, and you'll get a lot of knowledge—things you did not know before you get them!"

Despite everything that Harriet's been through, she wants an education so she can make other people's lives better. "I want to be a lawyer because I don't want to see my people suffering. **Someone can call me a refugee, but myself, I say that I'm a human being again.** The students chose me to be the head girl. I feel so happy. I'm going to change the world!"

Harriet writes songs and drama about girls' education and gender equality. **"When a girl is given a chance, she can do whatever a boy can do!"** Mostly, I like to sing about education—girls' education. If girls were to rule, maybe there will not be some problems and conflicts." She sings: "Our girls are driving, our girls get salaries. Society benefits, our nation benefits."



PETER*, 14

A year ago Peter* was a child soldier.

Peter had a happy early childhood in South Sudan, and loved school—especially mathematics, drama and drawing. But when war broke out, he had to run for his life. He lost his family in the chaos. “I was afraid, so I ran,” he says.

Alone and struggling to find food, Peter was recruited by an armed group. “They gave us weapons for shooting. They trained us how to load a gun, how to put in the bullet and release the trigger for the gun to shoot.”

But Peter's dream of going back to school gave him the strength to escape. “I picked up my clothes and I ran. My heart was happy when I arrived in Uganda and saw schools.”

The few belongings he had were stolen when he reached the border. He was left with just a few shillings, which he used to buy two pigeons. He named one 'A m', meaning alone.

When Peter reached safety, our case workers provided psychosocial support so he felt able to return to school and benefit from the education he so desperately dreamed of.

Peter still misses his family, and he fears the armed group he ran from. But he has big plans for both himself and his country: “When I finish my studies and graduate, I want to become the President of the Republic of South Sudan. I want to focus on the future and not turn backwards.”

THE EDUCATION RESPONSE PLAN (ERP)

In September 2018 the Government of Uganda launched the multi-year Education Response Plan (ERP) for refugees and host communities, in recognition of the huge needs. The first of its kind worldwide, it sets out exactly how to provide a quality education for 567,500 learners—but only if it is funded.

It was developed closely with NGOs, UN agencies, donors, communities and other partners, and focuses on three key priorities:

1. **Improve equitable access** by constructing classrooms and other facilities; equipping schools with essentials such as books and desks; expanding vocational skills opportunities; and making schools safer and more accessible for *all* children
2. **Improve quality** by training teachers and improving pedagogy; piloting innovations; providing teachers' salaries; setting up school clubs; and strengthening school governance
3. **Strengthen systems** at both national and district level through policy and advocacy work; institutional development; supporting district-level coordination and planning, enhancing community engagement; and better data and information management.

The ERP represents a new way of working—shifting from a humanitarian focus to developing long-term services that are integrated into national systems. It is a concrete embodiment of the Global Compact on Refugees and its Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF).

Since the launch there have been signs of progress. Primary school enrolment has increased from 58 percent to 73 percent. But more funding is urgently needed to make the Plan's ambition a reality.



Uganda hosts nearly 1.4 million refugees and 61 percent are children. Many schools are dangerously overcrowded. The average class has 161 pupils and in some schools more than 200 children squeeze into one dilapidated classroom, spilling out of the door or peering in through the windows.

Other schools do not have enough classrooms so have to teach outside under the blazing sun. Heavy rain leaves them with nowhere to go. In such conditions it is hard for children to learn effectively.

With support from donors like Education Cannot Wait and the European Union's humanitarian funding (ECHO), Save the Children is constructing safe new classrooms. At Mahega primary school in Rwamwanja refugee settlement in western Uganda, 2,173 children are enrolled in just 10 classrooms. These new structures will help to ease the overcrowding. More than 4,000 new classrooms are still needed across the refugee response.



ACCELERATED EDUCATION PROGRAMME (AEP)

Many refugee children drop out of school early. Their education is disrupted when they flee their homes; poverty leaves families unable to afford even small school fees; and pregnant girls and child mothers are often discouraged from attending class, despite their legal right to do so.

As a result, children miss years of schooling.

But encouraging older children to return to the formal schooling system can create challenges. These classes are already hugely overcrowded, and mixing a wide range of age groups in one class makes teaching difficult and can create protection risks for the younger children.

Instead, Save the Children's **Accelerated Education Programmes (AEP)** are specially designed to help older children return to learning and complete their primary education.

The AEPs are free of charge and uses a condensed, government-approved version of the Ugandan primary curriculum to speed up learning—covering two to three grades of primary education in one year, including all core subjects. It targets children aged 10-18, divided into three levels depending on what stage they dropped out, and teaching methods are adapted to match older learners' cognitive maturity.

As many of the learners are now parents themselves, or have more family responsibilities, AEP offers a more flexible and appropriate way for them to go back to school.

At the end, learners sit the Primary Leaving Exam (PLE) to obtain the nationally recognised certification. AEP then helps them transition back into the formal system and join secondary school where appropriate, or to go on to vocational skills training.



JULIET, 18

“Marriage isn’t easy. It wasn’t as nice as I thought it would be,” says Juliet. She was just 12 when she had to get married, and only 14 when she gave birth to twins. “Lots of my friends also got married very young. The poverty made us get married. We thought it would make life better,” she says of her childhood in rural South Sudan.

One of the things she missed most was school. She excelled at primary school but had to drop out before completing it.

When war broke out in her village, she and her twins—Pious and Gerard—walked for four days to reach Uganda.

Being in Uganda has given her another chance to get an education.

“I was told that I could join (the Accelerated Education Programme) even though I had a baby. I’m so happy to be back in school. Education gives me hope for the future. It helps you to provide for yourself.”

Juliet’s hope is to complete her Primary Leaving Exam (PLE) and train to be a nurse “to help protect people from sickness and stop people dying.”

One of her teachers, Mr Leke Emmanuel, says Juliet is a model student. “Her work is good, she’s very active in class. Children in AEP tend to be very interested in learning—often more interested than those in the normal primary schools. They’re very easy to teach because they really want to learn!”

The twins are now four years old and Juliet is keen to ensure they also get the best education they can. Every morning Juliet walks them to an Early Childhood Development (ECD) centre, also supported by Save the Children, where they learn basic literacy and numeracy.



A woman wearing a red headscarf and a patterned top is standing and pointing at a chalkboard with the number '2' written on it. She is holding a stick. In the foreground, several children are sitting at a wooden table, looking towards the teacher. One child is holding a red pencil. On the table are some yellow and blue objects. The background shows a chalkboard and some colorful posters on the wall, including one that says 'book area' and another that says 'no'.

EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT (ECD)

90 percent of a child's brain development takes place before their fifth birthday. Children who do not receive adequate health, nutrition, protection, care and stimulation in their early years are more likely to do poorly in school and earn less income, entrenching a lifetime of unfairness and poverty.

We support more than 40 ECD centres across the refugee response, providing children aged 3-6 with critical development, psychosocial support, play-based learning and protection.

While the young children are cared for at ECD, it also gives older siblings the opportunity to go to school instead of having the responsibility of child-care. Young mothers also have the opportunity to keep their child in a safe place while they attend school.

OUR COMMON APPROACHES

Save the Children is a global leader in cutting-edge, evidence-based approaches to ensure learning and child well-being, across all age groups. These “common approaches” are implemented with communities, children, parents and local government. They are tried and tested globally and contextualised for use in Uganda.

1

Our **BOOST FOR THE YOUNGEST**

approach promotes responsive parenting and stimulation for optimum growth and brain development from pregnancy to three years. Led by community health workers or other professionals, it helps parents build on positive practices such as singing, storytelling and playing, and lays the foundation for future learning. It also engages fathers and male caregivers to get them more involved in the early years, and promotes positive discipline techniques.

2

READY TO LEARN is our play-based

approach that helps children aged 3-6 gain the foundational skills they need to learn. It is a scalable Emergent Literacy and Maths (ELM) approach that teaches children about books, the alphabet, sounds and words, numbers and counting, geometry, comparisons and measurement. It supports pre-school teachers to integrate play-based activities into their daily schedules, and equips parents and caregivers with simple games to do at home. It integrates psychosocial support activities and child protection mechanisms, and trains teachers on the easy-to-use yet rigorous International Development and Early Learning Assessment (IDELA).





3

Our **LITERACY BOOST** approach supports teachers, parents and communities to develop the literacy skills of primary school children, both inside and outside the classroom. It gets the community engaged in activities such as reading clubs and literacy festivals, encouraging a culture where reading is a fun part of daily life. Teachers are trained on incorporating literacy skills into existing curricula and children are provided with books, newspapers and other materials to practice reading. In rural Uganda the approach has doubled literacy rates.

4

The **SAFE SCHOOLS** approach ensures that children are safe and protected from violence or other hazards in and around schools. It engages and mobilizes the whole school community—leadership, teachers, parents, children and community leaders—to identify risks and develop solutions to improve safety, end violence against children in schools and ensure children's wellbeing and learning. In Uganda, the approach has mobilised *Boda-boda* (motorbike taxi) drivers to keep girls safe on their way to school; supported authorities to develop and strengthen policies and systems; and increased knowledge of child rights, self-protection, anonymous incident reporting and positive discipline among teachers and children.



HARNESSING TECHNOLOGY

In such a challenging context, technology can help provide solutions. With humanitarian funding from the European Union, and in partnership with War Child Holland, we are piloting the use of customised gaming technology to improve the quality of learning. We use solar-powered tablets loaded with two games—one to promote literacy and one for numeracy—which were co-created by a Ugandan software company in close collaboration with children themselves to make them as engaging and relevant as possible. For most of the children and teachers, it is the first time they've seen or used such technology. The tablets also mean that children in the same class can learn at their own pace, as they can only move to the next level when they pick up the skills that are needed to advance. In the overcrowded schools, 18 year-old Muja says the tablets are like having his own personal teacher. "They are better as they give one-to-one interaction. When you fail you get instructions and taken back to do it again."



EDUCATION HEALS

Many refugee children in Uganda have experienced horrific violence or traumatic events, such as fleeing their homes or losing friends and relatives to the war. Extreme stress can affect boys' and girls' behaviour in many ways, from being aggressive to becoming withdrawn with peers and family members. It can have a lasting impact on children's long-term cognitive and emotional development. Improving access to education has been shown to have a significant positive impact on children's mental health, and can provide stability and a sense of normality. **"TeamUp"** is a specially designed set of structured activities and fun games that provide war-affected children with psychosocial support, boosting teamwork skills and self-confidence. One of the girls, Victoria, says "It helps you forget your problems". It is run in collaboration with War Child Holland and UNICEF.

MENSTRUATION MATTERS

Adolescent girls tell us that one of the main reasons for dropping out of school is the lack of sanitary materials and facilities, and the stigma and bullying they face when they start menstruating.

In collaboration with a local partner, ELECU, we are training girls, boys and teachers on menstrual hygiene management and ensuring that they have options. We provide reusable menstrual cups, emergency supplies of disposable pads, and help them make their own affordable and reusable sanitary pads from locally available materials. This means girls can stay in school and keep learning alongside their male classmates instead of going home when their periods come.





OVERCOMING LANGUAGE BARRIERS

Learning outcomes in Uganda are among the poorest in the region and assessments show they are even worse among refugee populations. More than 90 percent of children in lower primary grades are unable to read, comprehend and divide. One of the reasons refugee children are not learning effectively is the language barrier. Children have fled to Uganda from different parts of South Sudan and DR Congo, so in one class it is not unusual for a dozen or more languages to be spoken, meaning that children and teachers find it difficult to understand each other. In some classes Save the Children employs Assistant Teachers (pictured) who support with translation and make sure that all children in the class can understand. Save the Children is working with the National Curriculum Development Centre (NCDC) to develop a Bridging Programme to re-orient refugee learners into the Ugandan education system and in particular language of instruction.



SUPPORTING TEACHERS

A good teacher can make the difference. Teachers in the refugee response in Uganda are dedicated and passionate about learning, but they are also overwhelmed, dealing with huge classes and poor facilities, often with little training.

Save the Children trains teachers on a range of issues, including:

- The most effective learning techniques to use with large class sizes
- Positive discipline approaches—corporal punishment is illegal in Uganda but is still widely practiced
- Participatory methods to engage and interact with learners
- Inclusive education, making sure that children with learning disabilities are included in class
- Mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) so that teachers can recognise symptoms and behaviour changes in children and respond appropriately

Eguma Cosmas (left), a teacher in a refugee settlement in West Nile: “I love teaching. It helps you to learn more—learning is a gradual process, it doesn’t stop. You have to learn how to handle different types of behaviour—some children are slow learners, some are quick. You have to learn how to adapt. Save the Children trained us on how to help children through psychosocial support. Many children from South Sudan are traumatised and psychologically tortured. They don’t participate fully in lessons. They are often quiet in class and seem absent minded. We have to help bring them out of their trauma.”

BUILDING CONFIDENCE THROUGH DEBATES

Save the Children organises debating competitions between schools to help raise awareness of children's rights and increase children's confidence. Meet some of the debate team...



Annet*, 15

"In the debates I learned how to speak English. One topic was that the coming of refugees has done more good than bad to the environment. I said when the refugees were not there, there were no roads constructed."



John*, 14

"When someone defeats me I will say, 'never give up'. Next time I will win. Debating trains me not to fear speaking in public and not to fear people's faces. I will be a member of Parliament. I will develop my area in South Sudan. South Sudan is not developed. Debating is good for being an MP. I would love to finish school."



Grace*, 15

"I came to Uganda last year, with my aunt. I want to be a person who works in an office. A person who builds an orphanage for people who lost their families. The home would look beautiful and there would be children playing in the compound. There will be swings and beautiful flowers and even some balloons around. I will build schools for the children and I will buy them clothes."



Simon*, 13

"In South Sudan many people are killed, including my father... so we ran to Uganda. I learned English through debating. I have a hearing disability so I cannot hear everything. I want to become the President of South Sudan. I will promote children's rights and I will help those who are disabled. And I will help our mothers who have given birth to us."

AKULE*, 12

“You cannot get anything easily.

“Our home is far from the school. It takes one hour if you rush and slowly it takes two hours, so I walk fast. I want to come early because I am the head boy.

“As head boy I wash the latrines so they are clean. I help other children. If they walk barefoot and they are absent I tell management. I did this and they distributed shoes! It makes me feel good to help others, and I’m proud of myself.

“I want to become a journalist. I would write about things that are happening in the community and in the country—bad and good. I would like to take photos of children playing.

“I must work hard in my exams and pass in a good way and obey my teacher and my parents. If they tell me to do something I do it in good time.

“If I was in charge I would develop countries. I will bring people to dig a place, the biggest place ever for farming, and I would gather all the people and feed them.

“I like playing football. It’s exciting! If you play football you can be famous. If I was famous I would have a big shop for free. Everyone must come and get what they need for free. Many people will come and know me.

“When we left our country, I brought only the clothes that I was wearing and my footwear. I decided to run. I ran alone but I came and found my relative here. I was 10 years old. My mum is still in South Sudan. I will go back and look for my family.”





A COMMUNITY-BASED APPROACH

Engaging the whole community is vital to promote a wider culture of education. We accompany and train School Management Committees (SMCs)—made up of parents, teachers, other community members and children themselves—who can advise on and support the running of the school. The SMCs not only work to improve the quality of learning, but also mobilise parents to provide school meals so that children do not go hungry throughout the school day. We work with parents to set up reading clubs that engage the whole community on improving literacy.

Another approach to improve community participation is “Improving Learning Environments Together (ILET)”. This gets parents, teachers, children and community members together around a Quality Learning Framework that breaks down what components are required across physical and emotional protection, school administration, teaching and learning. ILET uses a unique digital data input and management platform that can automatically generate school support cards providing real-time feedback on children and parents’ perception of school quality, and then develops holistic school improvement plans.

PARTNERSHIPS

We work in close coordination with the Ministry of Education & Sports and with local government and district education offices in the refugee-hosting districts.

We also work closely with other NGOs. Save the Children leads the Uganda Education Consortium, an innovative model for Education in Emergencies (EiE) programming. The Education Consortium aims to coordinate and harmonise civil society and NGO support to the government-led Education Response Plan. It manages grants from Education Cannot Wait and ECHO and coordinates programmes of 16 different NGOs.

The consortium approach maximises the strength of each individual partner—for example supporting children with disabilities or training teachers—and achieves a synergy between them. Working together allows the education programme to be more effective and more coordinated.

A young boy in West Nile peers through a hole in the wall between classrooms. School infrastructure is in desperate need of repair and investment. The NGO Education Consortium built more than 140 new classrooms in 2019.

GRACE*, 16

Grace* often stays behind after class for extra work.

Grace was 11 years old when her family fled the war in eastern DR Congo. She had already missed three years of school due to the conflict, and when she got to Uganda her parents needed her to work. As a poor family uprooted to a refugee settlement, they struggled to get enough food. Grace had to spend her days digging the land instead of going to class.

By the time she was 13 she had not attended school for five years.

One day she heard her friends talking about Save the Children's new Accelerated Education Programme (AEP), funded by Education Cannot Wait. Her parents did not see the value in education, so she started attending in secret. "I had no money to buy a pencil and a book," she says, but the programme provided them free of charge.

Gradually, Grace learned how to read and write, and to understand English. According to her teacher she has made great progress: "She was a bit slow at first but quickly picked up and now she's very active."

Grace says, "I like maths. But in the AEP we also learn how to be disciplined and about everyday things like good hygiene."

Her mother found out where she was going but noticed how much happier she seemed. After a long discussion she gave her blessing for Grace to continue.

Now she has joined the mainstream primary school and her teachers say she is thriving and rising towards the top of the class.

"I want to pass my primary exam and go to secondary school. My parents now say it's important for me to get an education!"



HEAR IT FROM THE TEACHERS

Teachers give their opinions on some of the challenges they face in delivering quality education for all



David Wani Elias

“There are many reasons why children drop out but most common are early marriage and pregnancy—mostly girls but boys as well. It’s supposed to be free education but in reality there are other costs. Families are supposed to contribute money to the school, but they can’t afford it. Boys learn to ride a *boda-boda* (motorbike taxi) and then go and earn money working rather than coming to school—especially those children who are on their own.”



Lilian Bako

“Language is a big issue. Some of the children don’t understand English, and we don’t know Arabic. Some of the refugees help us translate and know local languages. Some pupils got pregnant unexpectedly—girls of 13 or 14 having babies. They lost hope for getting an education. The traumatised children isolate themselves in class, stay very quiet and don’t follow instructions. They cry for no reason and don’t have an appetite to eat.”



Mutabazi Lawrence

“The school is congested—there are very many children and it means that learning is not effective. There are not enough classrooms and too few teachers. We have 135 pupils for every teacher. We have seven children per desk—the desks are supposed to be for three. Children have to sit on the floor.”



Taban John

“I love teaching—I enjoy preparing lesson plans and it makes me proud to help people learn. But the salary is paid irregularly and it’s not adequate to support a family. Refugees in Uganda have lots of barriers to education. Education is free, but it’s not really free, there are some costs. There is a compulsory PTA fund, an exam fee, books to buy. If you have multiple children it adds up. And if you are a child living alone they can’t afford it.”



FURAHA*, 12

12 year old Furaha* fled the violence in eastern DR Congo with her mother and sister. She is one of the hundreds of thousands of refugee and host community children who are out of school—but she dreams that one day she will be able to attend. “I would like to study and learn English,” she says. “When I grow up I want to be a doctor. Then I can give medicines to people and they will get well.” Every afternoon Furaha goes to a Child Friendly Space (above) run by Save the Children, where she has a safe space to draw, play and learn basic literacy and numeracy. But most of all she wants to go to school.



ERITIER*, 7

Seven year old Eritier* loves to dance.

“When I dance, people feel happy,” he says.

“When I grow up I want to be a teacher and help the people in need.”

Eritier now attends primary school in Rwamwanja refugee settlement, where he lives with his mother and 19 other children—four siblings and 15 foster children who his mother has taken in and cared for when they lost their families. There are more than 38,000 children who arrived in Uganda unaccompanied or separated from their parents.

“If a child doesn't have a family, especially parents, that child will not be happy, will not have food,” says Eritier. “When I play with others all we will think about is family. When I am at home I have access to food and I am protected by my mother, my brothers and my sisters. If there's any problem, they can rescue you and look after you.”

“The things that I like most at school are English, my teachers and my fellow students. I like learning English. My favourite English words are broom, house and checkboards!”

THE WAY FORWARD: RECOMMENDATIONS

WE CALL ON INTERNATIONAL DONORS TO...

- Urgently provide funding to ensure that education activities can continue and expand to reach those children who are still not receiving an education
- Pledge multi-year funding, aligned to the academic school year, towards the implementation of the Education Response Plan for refugees and host communities (ERP), in the spirit of the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF)
- Provide technical support to line ministries and district education offices
- Support the development of a teacher accreditation model so that teachers from South Sudan can convert their qualifications so they are eligible to teach in Uganda
- Ensure that core costs such as teacher salaries and construction are funded as well as projects to improve quality

WE CALL ON THE GOVERNMENT OF UGANDA TO...

- Continue to support the roll-out of the Education Response Plan for refugees and host communities (ERP)
- Ensure genuine inclusion of refugees into national education systems, through inclusion in the Ministry of Education & Sports' Sector Strategic Plan, the National Inclusive Education Policy, and through coding and budget support to informal refugee schools
- Increase the current ceiling for recruitment and employment of teachers. At the moment districts in Uganda have a budgetary limit on how many teachers they can employ, which does not reflect the recent increase in needs due to the refugee influx.
- Include refugee children and youth in planning and budgeting of sub-county and district development plans
- Include Early Childhood Development (ECD) in the ERP's costed activity plan
- Put a policy in place and formally communicate to schools that child mothers and pregnant girls must be allowed to return to class. This is current government advice but is not legally binding and many schools are either unaware or do not practice it.

