

# LEAVE NO CHILD BEHIND IN UGANDA

## The State of Childhood in Uganda, 2018



### Introduction

In commemoration of Day of the African Child and this year's theme of "Leave no child behind for Africa's development," Save the Children releases its annual global *End of Childhood Index*, taking a hard look at the events that rob children of their childhoods and prevent them reaching their full potential.

Every child in Uganda has the right to survival, food and nutrition, health and shelter; to be educated; and to live safe from violence and protected from abuse and exploitation. This report shows Uganda has made some significant improvements in ensuring children's rights, but that much more needs to be done to ensure *all* children are included. Millions of Ugandan children are still being left behind.

The *End of Childhood Index* ranks countries by a set of indicators that disrupt or 'end' childhood: poor health, malnutrition, exclusion from education, child labour, child marriage, early pregnancy and extreme violence. Globally it finds over half of children – 1.2 billion – are threatened by poverty, conflict and discrimination against girls.

This year Uganda has moved up two places, ranking 130<sup>th</sup> out of 175 countries, compared to 132<sup>nd</sup> in 2017. Uganda ranks third of 10 countries in East and Central Africa<sup>i</sup> (behind

Rwanda and Kenya) and managed to improve its score by 20 points (from 681 to 701) – one of the biggest increases of all African countries. At the same time, all of the countries sharing a border with Uganda went down in score this year.

This year's improvement is largely due to better child nutrition, on top of recent years' commitment to increase access to essential services such as healthcare, immunisation and basic education. While these are welcome and important steps, they are still not available to all children in Uganda. Millions of children are still out of school, dying before their fifth birthday, showing stunted growth, and at risk of violence or harmful practices such as child marriage or child labour.

Lost childhoods are increasingly concentrated among the poorest children and the parts of the country where poverty is highest and access to services is lowest. A child has no say in where she or he is born, or into what circumstances, but that has a defining impact on their experience of childhood and their future. Many of these children are missing out on childhood because they are denied a fair start in life. Children from the poorest households experience the worst health, struggle to access decent education, and are more likely to have to work or be married young.

Nearly half of Uganda's population is now under 15 years old. A prosperous future for Uganda will not be possible without greater investment in *all* of its children's development and wellbeing, so they can fulfil their potential. Together we can, and must, ensure that no child is left behind.

### About the report

*The End of Childhood Index uses the most recently available data from international sources and Save the Children's own research. The Uganda report looks at three key sectors focused on fundamental rights: Children's right to survive and be healthy; children's right to learn; and children's right to be safe and protected. The grades given in the report are an informal marking based on Save the Children's own situation assessment.*



## 1. Children's right to survive and be healthy



### Childhood mortality (Grade: C+)

Improved access to healthcare and widespread immunisation campaigns have contributed to **a steady decrease in under-5 mortality in Uganda over the past two decades**, falling to 64 deaths per 1,000 live births, compared to 147 per 1,000 in 1995 and 90 per 1,000 in 2011<sup>ii</sup>. Maternal mortality has also fallen by almost 50% in the past 20 years – due in part to an increase in visits to antenatal care and more deliveries taking place in health facilities rather than at home.

However, the under-5 mortality rate still falls short of old MDG targets and is a long way off the new Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) target of 25 deaths per 1,000 births. The maternal mortality rate of 336 per 100,000 live births remains very high and 2.5 times the national target of 131 per 100,000<sup>iii</sup>.

Despite the overall improvement, many children still do not have adequate access to healthcare. Nationally, one in four families cannot afford to visit a health facility or buy medication for sick children. In West Nile, where there has been a massive influx of refugees, 80% of children do not have appropriate access to healthcare.

**Neonatal mortality (the probability of death within the first 28 days of life) has shown no progress at all**, with 27 deaths per 1,000 live births, exactly the same rate as

in 1995. There remain serious issues around the availability of services for newborns born prematurely or with complications. Nearly 75% of neonatal deaths in Uganda are caused by three factors: birth asphyxia (28.6%), premature birth (27.9%) and sepsis (18.2%). While almost all regions have been able to immunize more than 80% of newborns with BCG, DPT1 and tetanus vaccines, the level of post-natal care within two days of birth is still shockingly low. Less than 15% of newborns receive post-natal care – a figure that falls to fewer than 5% in Western district.

### Helping Babies Breathe

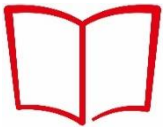
Asphyxia, or inability to breathe at birth, is the biggest killer of newborn babies in Uganda. Yet many of these lives could be saved if the right action is taken within 60 seconds of birth – the so-called “Golden Minute” where we can still help a newborn to breathe. Save the Children, in partnership with Johnson & Johnson, has been implementing the *Helping Babies Breathe* project, training nurses and midwives in 92 health facilities across Uganda on the basic skills to resuscitate babies immediately after birth. One hospital in Entebbe reported neonatal deaths dropped from 40% to 5% as a result.

### Child stunting (Grade B)

More than a quarter of Ugandan children under five (29%) suffer from chronic malnutrition, also known as stunting, and 11% are underweight. This shows an improvement since the turn of the century, when nearly half of children showed stunted growth, but is still far too high and above the national target of getting the rate below 25%<sup>iv</sup>.

Stunting prevents children from developing to their full potential mentally and physically, and its effects are largely irreversible. Much of this damage happens in pregnancy and the first two years of a child's life, and children from poor families who cannot access nutritious food are most at risk. Across Eastern and Southern Africa, the poorest children are 2.2 times as likely to be stunted as the richest.

The average Ugandan consumes 1,464 kilocalories per day, well below the recommended 2,100 kcals per day<sup>v</sup> - but this varies enormously depending on location and income. In Bugisu sub-region, the average daily consumption is only 1,051 kcals/day, just half of what is needed. The poorest quintile of families averages 1,134 kcals/day, compared to 1,858 among the wealthiest quintile.



## 2. Children's right to learn



### Children out of school (Grade: C-)

Uganda has made strides towards achieving universal primary education, **however, one in five primary-age children are still not enrolled in or attending primary school<sup>vi</sup>** - and enrolment has been declining in recent years. The majority of children in the country do not complete pre-primary or secondary education. While steps have been made at the policy level, practice lags behind. Public current expenditure on primary education as a percentage of GDP decreased from 1.17% in 2015 to 1.02% in 2016.

Whether a child is enrolled in and attends school depends primarily on family income and where they live. In the capital Kampala, 87.8% of children are enrolled in primary education – the highest in the country. In Acholi and Lango regions in the north of the country the figure drops to 77%, and in Tooro in the west to 73.4%. In Karamoja, in the east of the country, just 35.5% of children are enrolled in formal primary schools.<sup>vii</sup>

Pre-primary Early Childhood Education is vital for a child's future, providing cognitive and social development at a time when the brain is still forming. It gives children a head start in life, yet **only 13.4% of Ugandan children are enrolled in pre-primary education**. In the highest income bracket, 53.2% of children attend – a figure that drops as families become poorer, with 21.6% of children from middle-income families and only 6.7% of children from the poorest families attending. There is also a significant urban-rural divide, with

52.8% of children in urban areas enrolled, compared to only 19.5% in rural areas<sup>viii</sup>.

**Only 28% of children go on to attend secondary school<sup>ix</sup>**, meaning most children leave school underqualified. There are also still too few vocational and technical training opportunities for youth, with 71% of young people under-educated for skilled agriculture, forestry and fishery work, plant and machine operators, and craft and other trades<sup>x</sup>.

While national enrolment is roughly equal between girls and boys – and positive policy steps have been taken, such as the Education Gender Policy – in some areas there remain marked gender disparities. In Karamoja, only 33.7% of girls attend school compared to 37.4% of boys, and girls commonly achieve far lower levels of formal education achievement than boys, as their duties in the house mean less time to study. Many girls are forced to drop out due to early marriage and pregnancy. In some areas perceptions persist that educated girls are less valuable in marriage than uneducated ones.

Refugees are another sector of society missing out on education. The Government of Uganda has responded to the influx of more than 1.4 million refugees with extraordinary generosity, however lack of international funding has impacted on getting refugee children back into school. 59% - nearly 300,000 children – are out of school<sup>xi</sup>. Most drop out because they cannot afford uniforms and other materials and because schools are too far away to walk<sup>xii</sup>.

### Children with disabilities

Children with disabilities and special needs are particularly at risk of being denied an education. There are more than 2.5 million children with disabilities, making up 13% of the young population, yet they account for only 2% of total school enrolment and are more likely to drop out. Uganda ratified the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in 2008, yet today few schools have the infrastructure, equipment or training to deal with special needs, and teachers have limited capacity in inclusive teaching. Children with disabilities also face stigma and discrimination from their peers and the community. As a result, just 9% of boys and girls with disabilities attend primary school, and even fewer continue to secondary school. Save the Children is working with schools and local authorities to try and adapt infrastructure and promote inclusive learning methods to make schools more accessible to all children.



***“I like maths and English. I want to be a doctor because I want to help people who are sick. But my mother cannot afford to pay for school. I feel bad because the other kids go to school. I read books I get from my neighbours who go to school.”***

– James, age 12, Uganda

### **Quality of education (Grade: D)**

Even for many of those children who are in school, the quality of education remains low, particularly in rural areas and the north and east of the country. Only 20% of children in primary level 3 can achieve primary level 2 proficiency in English reading and comprehension, and just 30% in numeracy and basic addition and subtraction. Only 16% have full competence in reading or comprehension of their local languages, with 58.6% unable to read at all in these languages.<sup>xiii</sup>

In some areas, standards are going backwards. Overall literacy rates in Northern region declined from 67.7% five years ago to 59.2% in 2017<sup>xiv</sup>, while the same trend is seen in Karamoja where literacy rates have declined from 31.6% to 26.8% in recent years.

Schools have limited facilities, teachers and supplies. In the north of the country there are 105.2 pupils for every classroom and in Karamoja there are 103.9, nearly double the government target of 56 children per class<sup>xv</sup>. There are too few textbooks to meet the target of one book for every five children. Teachers are few in number, with one teacher for every 60 students, and often receive little training or support. Only 19% of teachers have the minimum acceptable knowledge on Senior 4 English and Mathematics tests.

Other services provided in schools are also often poor and limited. 35% of schools do not have safe drinking water, and 67% do not have handwashing facilities, putting children at risk of illnesses. More than half of schools do not have a first aid kit or a single teacher who is trained in first aid.<sup>xvi</sup>

### **Violence in schools (Grade: C)**

Schools should be a safe place where children can learn and socialise; children should never feel at risk while attending school.

However, the use of corporal punishment is rife in schools in Uganda, despite evidence that it negatively impacts learning

and development. Around 75% of children in school have experienced corporal punishment and been beaten or humiliated in class<sup>xvii</sup>. 43% have also experienced bullying, especially in primary school, with children from poor families or with disabilities frequently targeted.

In 2017, there were 92,138 cases of violence against children reported in Ugandan schools, including 441 critical cases<sup>xviii</sup>. The majority of violence against children in school is perpetrated by teachers. The lack of capacity to report, track, refer and respond to the needs and interests of children in schools and among institutions that are mandated to address cases of violence against children undermines children’s access to appropriate prevention and protection services, affecting their wellbeing and development.

### **Literacy Boost**

With literacy rates declining in some areas of Uganda, Save the Children’s *Literacy Boost* programme helps to create a culture of reading both inside and outside the classroom that dramatically improves children’s literacy development. It measures children’s reading skills, trains teachers on engaging lessons, and gets communities and parents involved in learning by providing books and supplies. A 2017 assessment showed that participants in Save the Children-supported schools in Central Uganda showed an improvement of 46.7% in literacy levels since beginning the programme.





### 3. Children's right to be safe and protected



Efforts to protect children in Uganda continue to be undermined by weak implementation, awareness and enforcement of existing policies and laws. In many cases the laws are in place, but in reality they are not put into practice.

#### Child marriage (Grade C)

Child marriage is illegal in Uganda, where the legal age to get married is 18 years old. However, in practice this is often ignored, especially in rural areas and among poor families, for whom marrying children off can be a source of income or ease the strain on feeding the family.

One in five Ugandan girls aged 15-19 are currently married, with the figures highest in the north, east and Karamoja, where one in three are married. The rates are lowest in the southwest of the country, where 14.6% of girls of that age are married.<sup>xix</sup>

Some 10% of girls are reportedly married before they even reach 15 years old<sup>xx</sup>. Girls with no or little education are far more likely to get married as a teenager than those who have gone to school.

#### Adolescent pregnancy (Grade C)

Nearly one in five 16 year olds across the country have already given birth or are pregnant. In the Northern part of the country, more than one in three girls aged 15-19 (34%) have already given birth. Karamoja (23.6%) and West Nile (22.4%) also show high rates of teenage pregnancy.

Giving birth young makes it more likely that girls drop out of education, limiting their future options in life and making it harder to get out of poverty.

It also puts both the child and mother's lives at risk. The neonatal mortality rate for teenage mothers in Uganda (43 per 1,000 births) is 1.6 times higher than for mothers aged 20-29 (27 per 1,000). Young teenagers' bodies are not physically ready for giving birth, putting the mother's life in danger.

#### Child labour (Grade C)

In 2016 the Government approved the Children (Amendment) Act, which criminalizes the use of children for commercial sexual exploitation, bans engagement of children in harmful or hazardous employment, and asserts the minimum age for employment as 16. It also launched a National Social Protection Policy that targets child labourers.

However, more than 2 million children in Uganda are still involved in exploitative and harmful forms of child labour. Some of these are as young as five years old – in Eastern Uganda more than 30% of children aged under 11 are working, and nearly 18% in Northern Uganda.

Financial pressure on impoverished families means many send children out to work. Boys sometimes find work in gold mines, while girls often find work as housemaids. Parents also keep children out of school and at home to help work on farms. Children from Karamoja are reported to be at particular risk of being trafficked to Kampala to work and beg on the streets.

#### The global findings

The 2018 *End of Childhood Index* finds that more than 1.2 billion children – over half of children worldwide – are threatened by poverty, conflict and discrimination against girls. 23 of the bottom 25 countries are in Africa, with Niger, Mali, Central African Republic, Chad and South Sudan making up the bottom five. Singapore and Slovenia rank joint first, with Norway, Sweden and Finland making up the top five.



## Conclusions and recommendations

In 2015, world leaders gathered at the United Nations to make a bold commitment – to end poverty in all its forms by 2030. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) paint a vision of a future in which all children enjoy their rights to health, education and protection – in short, their right to childhood. Crucially, signatories promised to ensure this would happen for all segments of society – regardless of income, geography, gender or identity. And they promised that those who are furthest behind would be reached first. This pledge to leave no one behind must be upheld.

To ensure this happens in Uganda, Save the Children calls on the Government of Uganda and international donors to:

### Prioritise children who are being left behind:

- **Invest in children**, by ensuring that resources reach excluded children, in keeping with the focus on public investment in children outlined by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child. Improved public investment in excluded children must go hand in hand with the removal of cost barriers to services and measures to ensure minimum financial security for all children through child-sensitive social protection.
- **Ensure child participation**, by enabling excluded children – girls and boys – to meaningfully participate in policy-making and budgeting discussions that affect their lives. Children should be supported to monitor progress and hold governments to account. The National Strategy for Child Participation in Uganda should be rolled out at the regional level.
- **Increase international funding for the refugee response in Uganda.** Uganda's policy and welcome towards refugees is helping to lead the way. The international community must share the responsibility, in line with the New York Declaration agreed in 2016 and the forthcoming Global Compact for Refugees.

- Implement the Ministry of Health plan and pledge by the President in his 2016 manifesto to build a health centre in every sub-county, to ensure that more mothers and children have access to health services
- In the next financial year, increase the health budget to allow for allocating resources to train nurses and midwives in health facilities across the country, including in basic skills to resuscitate babies immediately after birth

### Ensure the right to education:

- Finalise, adequately resource and implement the Inclusive Education Policy to ensure that children with special needs are planned for and receive an education
- Commit funding and ensure implementation of the new multi-year Education Response Plan (ERP) for refugees and host communities, which is launching in mid-2018
- In the next budget framework (FY/2019 - 2020), increase public expenditure on primary education as a percentage of GDP and ensure that at least 20% of state spending is allocated to education, in line with standards proposed by the Global Partnership for Education, in order to cater for education for refugee children, host communities and monitoring of schools
- Increase budget allocation to refugee-hosting districts, to match their increased population of school-age children

### Ensure the right to protection:

- Prioritise and allocate adequate resources to ensure implementation of the existing laws and policies against child marriage and other harmful practices, including child abuse and exploitation.
- Finalise, adequately resource and implement the National Child Policy to ensure that all children are protected from harm, including refugees.

### Ensure the right to survival and healthcare:

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- <sup>i</sup> For this report, East and Central Africa includes: Burundi, Central African Republic, DR Congo, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania, Somalia and South Sudan
- <sup>ii</sup> Demographic and Health Survey (DHS), 2016
- <sup>iii</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>iv</sup> Investment Plan for Reproductive, Maternal, Newborn, Child and Adolescent Health (RMNCAH) plan 2016/17-2019/20
- <sup>v</sup> Uganda National Household Survey (UNHS). Uganda Bureau of Statistics (UBOS), 2016/17, Final Presentation
- <sup>vi</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>vii</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>viii</sup> UBOS 2012
- <sup>ix</sup> UNHS, UBOS, 2016-17
- <sup>x</sup> Labour market transition of young people in Uganda. UBOS, 2016
- <sup>xi</sup> Uganda Refugee Response Monitoring Sector Fact Sheet: Education. UNHCR. January 2018.
- <sup>xii</sup> Joint Education Needs Assessment Report, West Nile, Uganda. Save the Children, Finn Church Aid, Norwegian Refugee Council, December 2017
- <sup>xiii</sup> *Are Our Children Learning?* Uganda Sixth Learning Assessment Report. Uwezo, December 2016.
- <sup>xiv</sup> UNHS, UBOS, 2016/17
- <sup>xv</sup> *Are Our Children Learning?* Uganda Sixth Learning Assessment Report. Uwezo, December 2016.
- <sup>xvi</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>xvii</sup> National Strategic Plan on Violence Against Children in Schools, 2015-2020. Ministry of Education and Sports
- <sup>xviii</sup> Statistical summary report by Uganda Child Helpline report 2017
- <sup>xix</sup> For more details on child marriage in Uganda, see the *National Strategy to End Child Marriage and Teenage Pregnancy, 2014-15-2019/20*, the Government of Uganda and UNICEF
- <sup>xx</sup> Demographic and Health Survey (DHS), 2011