



Until we are all equal



Girls' Education in Crisis Project

This project, based in Uganda, is giving girls and young mothers the foundation and support to pursue life-changing educational opportunities.

Project facts

WHO: The Girls' Education in Crisis project is giving girls and young mothers the foundation and support to pursue life-changing educational opportunities.

WHAT: The project aims to increase access to and completion of quality and inclusive primary and secondary education for adolescents and to provide an opportunity for out-of-school and overage youth (especially girls and young women) to access and complete their primary education.

HOW:

- Provide educational opportunities, resources and supplies for girls displaced by conflict that support their transition into mainstream primary and post-primary education.
- Train teachers on delivering an adapted "accelerated" curriculum and in teaching and learning methods that promote inclusion and gender equality.
- Develop accessible, weatherproof classrooms to fit the needs of learners.
- Positively influence norms surrounding the education of girls and their capacity for community leadership.

WHERE: West Nile, Uganda

WHEN: January 2021–December 2023. This report covers activities in the third year of the project.



A teen receives a menstrual kit and health information.

In 2021, an estimated 4.5 million children in Uganda were expected not to return to school due to pregnancy or forced marriage.

ON THE COVER: Teen girls receive menstrual kits, which include soap to launder their clothes, so they can stay in school during their periods.

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Thank you for your continued support.

Thank you to the McLean Smits Family Foundation for your generosity in helping bring the third year of this program to life.

The First Word

For girls and young moms living in refugee communities, dropping out of school isn't a choice – it's a lack of choice.

With 1.5 million refugees, 81% of whom are women and children, Uganda is the largest refugee host country in Africa. While Uganda's approach to refugee management is relatively progressive, tensions among host communities, long-term refugees and new arrivals are quick to bubble to the surface. Everyone is competing for access to the same necessities: food, health services and education.

According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, over 80% of refugees in Uganda live below the international poverty line of US\$1.90 per day. The country's education system is similarly stretched, with recent statistics citing numbers as high as 85 pupils for every one teacher.

The situation is taking its toll on all refugees, and especially girls and young women, who face added risks of teenage pregnancy, early marriage and gender-based violence. To this, add social norms that prioritize the education of boys, and the picture becomes clear: For girls, dropping out of school isn't a choice – it's a lack of choice. By supporting the Girls' Education in Crisis project, you are making it possible for girls to choose education.



Teachers have received additional training to enable students to catch up in class.

The Situation

When life interrupts girls' studies, this project helps them get back into class with their peers.

How can a girl keep coming to school every day, and be on time, when she has to travel long, unsafe distances to get there?

If a young mother returns to school, who will look after her child while she's in class? What about breastfeeding?

If an adolescent girl has been out of school for years, how can she catch up without the stigma and shame of having to learn alongside young children?

The **Girls' Education in Crisis project** is an accelerated education program (AEP) developed with all of these questions in mind. Its goal: to work with host communities to help young women (particularly young mothers) and children (especially girls) displaced by conflict, crisis and COVID-19 get back to the classroom and thrive.

Beyond building safe, accessible and inclusive learning spaces, the project works with parents and teachers to address the social and cultural norms and safety and accessibility issues that keep girls out of school. For a girl to succeed in the classroom and keep up her studies, her community must recognize and support her right to be there.



Walking long distances to school often prevents girls from getting to class.

Read on to discover how your generosity is helping children and young mothers who have been displaced return to learning and access the options and opportunities that education brings. And do it with the understanding and support of their family and community.

THE LONG ROAD BACK TO SCHOOL

For girls and women living as refugees in Uganda, the fear of gender-based violence is a significant barrier to education. Sexual violence is often used as a weapon of war, and many refugees arrive carrying that trauma. It remains a risk even after they arrive and settle. The often long and arduous commute to school can be hazardous, even without the threat of violence.

When COVID-19 struck in 2020, it made a challenging situation worse. Uganda mandated what became the longest school closure in the world: 86 weeks. "With COVID, many girls were forced to drop school," says Maddison Van Balkom, a gender equality and inclusion advisor at Plan International Canada. "When the opportunity for education is taken away, early marriage

“When the only opportunity for education is taken away, early marriage and motherhood is often the only option left.”

– Maddison Van Balkom
gender equality and inclusion advisor,
Plan International Canada

and motherhood is often the only option left.” In 2021, Uganda's National Planning Authority projected that 30% of learners (about 4.5 million children) were likely not to return to school due to teenage pregnancies, early marriages or child labour.

And yet, meaningful progress has been made. In 2022, the Ugandan government revoked a law that had banned pregnant girls and young mothers from attending class. The revised guidelines uphold education as a right and acknowledge that attitudes prohibiting pregnant girls from returning to school are gender-biased and violate this right.

Activities that build consensus among teachers and parents about the importance of educating girls – like the community education sessions and “back to school” awareness campaigns Plan facilitates – also have a role to play. They help young mothers return to their studies by making it more socially acceptable.

Day by day, one initiative at a time, important work is happening to make the dream of education a reality for girls and young women who are determined to take – or reclaim – their place in the classroom, no matter what.



In 2022, the Ugandan government revoked a law that had banned pregnant girls and young mothers from attending class.





The Rundown

While the project was forced to scale down activities in Year 3 due to financial constraints, we were still able to make life-changing difference with your generous support. Here are some highlights.

➤ **418** learners enrolled in accelerated education programs (January–June), including nine young mothers and five children living with a disability. Of these, 70 learners registered for the Primary Leaving Examination, which allows them to continue to secondary education. It is anticipated that three-quarters of the learners will join secondary or vocational institutions.

➤ **66** girls who reside in the dormitory of the Adjumani Secondary School can now bathe privately and safely in the newly built bathing shelter.

➤ **20** teachers were trained on the AEP curriculum, providing psychosocial support, and inclusive teaching and learning methodologies. The outcome: an increase in teachers' knowledge, skills and ability to deliver the curriculum, which has led to an improvement in learner performance. At the mid-term assessment, 70% of learners had scored below the pass mark; by the end of the term, 70% had scored above the pass mark.

➤ **51** members of education institutions were trained on sustaining AEP gains in school. The committees agreed to closely monitor and assess the teaching and learning progress at learning centers and monitor the attendance of teachers there.

➤ **12** AEP teachers received kits to support their teaching and enhance learning outcomes. Your support also covered the AEP teacher salaries for the school year.



Click or scan here to meet some of the participants.

SPOTLIGHT

With the construction of a girls' dormitory to house 66 boarders, the Adjumani Secondary School took a leap forward in making education safer and more accessible for girls. The facility was built to eliminate the long, dangerous commute to and from school – and the risk of sexual and gender-based violence that came with it, especially for girls who stayed late to do homework.

The caveat: The building had no shower facilities.

“Having this dormitory at the school was supposed to overcome a barrier to girls' education. But if they don't have somewhere to bathe, they're either putting their hygiene at risk or they're travelling back home to go shower, which kind of defeats the purpose,” says Maddison Van Balkom, a gender equality and inclusion advisor at Plan International Canada.

With your generous support, Plan International has constructed a bathing shelter where female students can bathe privately. For each girl, it had made all the difference: Education no longer comes at the cost of their safety and hygiene.



Adding a shower to the dorm means girls don't have to travel home to bathe.

STORIES OF CHANGE

Room to Grow

Menstrual kits and classrooms with students their own age were game changers for two teens.

JOYCE came to Uganda at age seven as a refugee from South Sudan. She is the second-oldest of six children and lives with her mother and siblings. Upon arriving in Uganda, Joyce joined primary school. She showed promise in her schooling, but she faced bullying from her classmates, who were all younger. She eventually dropped out due to the stigma and shame.

When her family relocated, Joyce joined school again, reaching Grade 4 before her education was interrupted by COVID-19. At a community meeting hosted by Plan Uganda, Joyce's brother heard about the accelerated education program. With her family's encouragement, Joyce enrolled in the program. She is now in secondary school and is one of the top students.

Joyce's dream is to become a nurse, just like the nurses who saved her mother from a severe illness. “When I went to school, I found some of my age mates, including those who are older than me. I gained confidence and built trust in myself,” she says. “This time the school was totally free from abuse. Teachers and learners welcomed me with a lot of respect, something I didn't expect. Overage girls like me are treated with respect, by both learners and teachers. ... I have my age mates with similar problems. This has given me an opportunity to share experiences, and I feel very comfortable.”



SOPHIE is a 13-year-old South Sudanese refugee who fled to Uganda in 2016, when armed conflict destabilized South Sudan. Sophie lives with her parents in a refugee settlement in the Adjumani district. Like many other girls, Sophie lacked access to clean menstrual hygiene supplies, which had resulted in her missing school three or four days every month.

“When I had my first period, I had no idea what was happening and hid from people for fear of them laughing at me,” says Sophie, who resorted to using pieces of cloth, which sometimes stained her clothes. She had no soap to wash up and would hang her clothes in the house so no one would see.

To address this all-too-common situation, Sophie and 194 other girls received menstrual-health hygiene kits. Each kit includes reusable sanitary pads, underwear, a bucket for washing, a kitenge (cloth wrap), Vaseline and soap. Sophie now attends school happily – and regularly – without worry during her period. “No one in class, including the boys, can tell when I'm having my period. I concentrate and I participate actively in class.”

Access to information and menstrual supplies is key to keeping girls in class.



Until we are all equal



Thank you for investing in education for girls in Uganda.

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Maureen says that now, she doesn't miss class during her periods. She feels comfortable "doing many activities like running and playing football."

For more information, please contact: philanthropy@plancanada.ca

About Plan International Canada

Plan International Canada is a member of a global organization dedicated to advancing children's rights and equality for girls. Plan International has been building powerful partnerships with and for children for over 85 years and is now active in more than 80 countries. We stand with children, especially girls, wherever they are oppressed, exploited, left behind or not equally valued. We're determined optimists, and we will continue to persevere until we are all equal.