

VOICEMORE REPORT

SCHOOL DROPOUT SITUATION IN UGANDA

similar GROUND Advocate Educate Transform

WAR child ALLIANCE

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OVERVIEW

This report presents findings from a youth led research and advocacy activity carried out in Yumbe District, Northern Uganda, and led by Similar Ground. The study focuses on the growing problem of school dropout among children and young people in both refugee and host communities.

The research highlights the experiences and concerns of children who are at high risk of dropping out of school, including separated and orphaned children, learners from very poor households, and those affected by displacement. From a youth perspective, the report explores the main causes of school dropout such as poverty, lack of school materials, child labour, early marriage, psychosocial distress, and limited parental or community support.

The report also examines the consequences of school dropout, including increased child labour, early marriage, unemployment, and reduced future opportunities. These challenges not only affect individual children but also weaken community development and long-term social stability.
In addition, the report compares the youth findings with existing education data and reviews the support systems currently available in Yumbe District. Based on this analysis, young researchers propose practical advocacy ideas and recommendations to reduce school dropout and promote access to safe, inclusive, and quality education for all children.

VOICEMORE AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

About VoiceMore

VoiceMore is a youth advocacy development programme originally developed by War Child. It empowers young people affected by armed conflict to speak about their lived experiences and advocate for positive change in their communities.

Through VoiceMore, youth groups across programme countries come together to discuss how conflict, displacement, and social challenges affect children and young people. They identify key issues, explore possible solutions, and take action to improve their lives and the lives of others. Young people are supported to design and implement their own advocacy initiatives at community level, while their voices are elevated to national and international platforms.

VoiceMore is a War Child innovation and is currently being implemented in Uganda by Similar Ground.

Objectives of the Programme

The objectives of the VoiceMore programme are:

- To support children and young people to identify the challenges they face in their communities, regions, and countries, and to advocate at different levels to ensure these challenges are addressed.
- To build the confidence and empowerment of young people to freely express their views and opinions to diverse audiences, including community leaders and decision makers.
- To promote the meaningful participation of children and youth in decision making processes that affect their lives.

ABOUT SIMILAR GROUND

Similar Ground is a refugee-led organization founded and led by youth, dedicated to empowering refugee children and young people. Established in late 2020, it was inspired by a group of youth who had participated in a Youth Advocacy project in Bidibidi. We design and run programs that create safe and supportive spaces where children and youth can learn, grow, and thrive regardless of their circumstances. Our work focuses on building resilience, nurturing potential, and fostering positive change in their lives. By providing children, adolescents, and youth with an environment of safety, stability, and opportunities,

Similar Ground was founded as a result of the founders' own participation in the VoiceMore programme. Through this experience, they saw first-hand how youth voices can influence change when young people are trusted, supported, and given space to lead. This inspired them to create an organization that places youth leadership and lived experience at the centre of community action.
As the implementing partner of VoiceMore, Similar Ground works closely with young people to strengthen their advocacy skills, amplify their voices, and connect community level issues to national and global discussions. Through this approach, Similar Ground ensures that youth voices are not only heard but also contribute to real action and policy change.



CONTEXT OF YUMBE REGION

Background and Displacement

Since [1]2016, many people have fled conflict in South Sudan and other neighbouring countries, seeking safety in Uganda under its progressive refugee policy that allows freedom of movement, access to land, and the right to work. Uganda hosts one of the largest refugee populations in Africa, including many from South Sudan and the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Yumbe District in Northern Uganda hosts Bidibidi Refugee Settlement, one of the largest refugee settlements in Africa. As of recent estimates, Bidibidi is home to around 230,000–270,000 refugees fleeing violence and instability in neighbouring countries. According to the 2024 National Census (UBOS), the total population of Yumbe District has grown to approximately 945,100 people, inclusive of both host communities and refugees.

Refugee Settlements and Population

Bidibidi Refugee Settlement is divided into five zones spread across sub-counties in Yumbe (Romogi, Kochi, Kululu, Odravu, Ariwa), and accommodates the majority of refugees in the district.

According to local government data, Total refugee population in Bidibidi is approximately [2]232,719 people, including women and children and the refugee settlement covers a large area and is integrated with host communities rather than being isolated, which helps social interaction but increases pressure on local services.

Both refugees and host populations rely mainly on farming, small trade, informal jobs, and humanitarian support. Rapid population increases have strained schools, health centres, water sources, food supplies, and natural resources.



[1] https://www.wvi.org/uganda/gallery/west-nile-refugee-response-glance-world-vision-uganda?utm
[2] Yumbe.go.ug

Youth Situation in Yumbe District

Young people constitute a significant proportion of both refugee and host community populations in Yumbe District (UNHCR, 2024; UBOS, 2023). Despite their numbers and potential, many young people face persistent barriers that limit their ability to access education, employment, and meaningful participation in society. Key challenges include limited access to quality education and vocational training, high youth unemployment, and scarce livelihood opportunities (Ministry of Education and Sports [MoES], 2022; UNICEF, 2023).

These challenges place young people at heightened risk of negative outcomes such as school dropout, child labour, early marriage, and psychosocial distress, particularly among adolescents affected by displacement and poverty (UNICEF, 2023; War Child, 2022). Refugee youth often experience additional obstacles, including interrupted education pathways, language barriers, and limited recognition of previous learning, which further constrain their opportunities (UNHCR, 2024).

At the same time, young people in Yumbe demonstrate strong resilience and a clear willingness to contribute to positive change. Youth are actively engaged in community groups, peer networks, school clubs, and advocacy initiatives supported by civil society organizations (War Child, 2022). However, these efforts are rarely matched by formal and sustained inclusion in decision making structures. Participation opportunities remain limited, particularly for girls and young people with disabilities, whose voices are often excluded due to social norms, accessibility challenges, and lack of targeted support (UNICEF, 2023).

Culture and Social Context

Yumbe District is characterized by cultural diversity, with host communities from the Aringa ethnic group living alongside South Sudanese refugee populations and other groups (Office of the Prime Minister [OPM], 2023). Cultural norms and traditions strongly influence community life, including attitudes toward education, gender roles, family responsibilities, and marriage.

Cultural practices such as storytelling, music, community dialogue, and traditional gatherings play a positive role in promoting social cohesion, peacebuilding, and intergenerational learning (UNESCO, 2022). These cultural spaces provide important entry points for youth engagement and community led advocacy.

However, when combined with economic hardship and displacement, certain cultural norms can contribute to harmful practices such as early marriage and the de-prioritization of education, particularly for girls (UNICEF, 2023; UNFPA, 2022). Advocacy efforts must therefore work with communities to promote positive cultural values while addressing norms that undermine children's rights and educational outcomes.

Government Response, Progress, and Remaining Gaps

The Government of Uganda has demonstrated strong leadership through its progressive refugee policy, which grants refugees freedom of movement, access to land, and the right to work (OPM, 2023; World Bank, 2022). In Yumbe District, the government, in collaboration with humanitarian and development partners, has expanded access to education, health, and protection services for both refugee and host communities.

Notable progress includes the construction of schools, the integration of refugee learners into the national education system, and the establishment of local governance and youth structures (MoES, 2022; UNHCR, 2024). These efforts have contributed to improved service access and peaceful coexistence between communities.

TRAINING AND RESEARCH PHASES

Before beginning the research, both groups participated in the VoiceMore training programme, an intensive 11 days course designed to strengthen their knowledge, confidence, and practical skills as youth advocates and spokespersons. The training included key topics such as the role of a spokesperson, understanding children's rights, advocacy methods, public speaking, active listening, and body language, helping participants communicate clearly and effectively.

During the training, the groups explored the purpose and principles of advocacy, learning how to influence decisions and bring attention to issues affecting children and youth. They reflected on challenges in their communities, discussing the causes and consequences of these problems, identifying key stakeholders, and examining existing initiatives and responses. This helped them understand gaps and opportunities for action





ISSUES FACED IN THEIR COMMUNITIES-BIDIBIDI

Young people in Bidibidi from both refugee and host communities identified several challenges affecting children and youth during the VoiceMore Advocacy training. A major issue was the lack of economic opportunities, which leaves many young people idle and exposed to risks such as crime, substance use, and stress.

They also reported serious protection concerns, including violence and abuse, especially against girls and women, with cases of sexual abuse and early marriage. Mental health challenges were common, linked to trauma, loss, and displacement, alongside family separation, neglect, and child labour. Access to basic services remains limited, with inadequate healthcare, medicine shortages, and difficulties for some children to receive treatment. Education barriers such as few schools, distance, costs, lack of materials, and missing documentation contribute to high dropout rates.

Other challenges include food insecurity, unsafe water and poor sanitation, discrimination and bullying, early pregnancies, substance abuse, and a lack of safe spaces for play and learning, all of which negatively affect children's safety, wellbeing, and development.



ARRIVING AT THE THEME

After discussing many problems affecting their communities especially children and Youth, the group decided to focus on school dropout as the main issue to understand why it is happening.
They arrived at this decision because they noticed that many children and young people in their communities were not attending school or were leaving school early.

The groups reflected on several reasons behind this:

- Many children could not afford school fees, uniforms, or learning materials.
- Some children had to work or take care of younger siblings, which made it hard to attend school.
- Early pregnancies and child marriages forced girls to leave school.
- Children without proper documents or from refugee families faced difficulties enrolling in schools.
- Long distances to schools and overcrowded classrooms made learning challenging.

> **“Before VoiceMore, I was shy and afraid to speak in public. I thought leaders would not take young people seriously. After the training, I found my confidence. Now I can stand and speak without fear.”**
> **VoiceMore Participant**



Children and Youth Education Situation in Bidibidi

[1]The refugee settlement known as Bidibidi has a large population of school-aged children and youth, but access to quality education remains limited. There are primary and some secondary schools in the settlement, yet a shortage of classrooms, teachers, and learning materials means that many children study in overcrowded conditions and teacher-to-student ratios are very high. Temporary school structures and a lack of textbooks and equipment make learning difficult for many learners.

[2]Despite formal schools being present, many children do not attend regularly. Factors such as long distances to schools, lack of meals, and the need to support household income or chores pull children out of class or prevent them from enrolling at all. Studies have also highlighted that language barriers and inadequate infrastructure further limit the ability of children to benefit fully from available education services.

[3]Early childhood education is largely underdeveloped in Bidibidi. Before primary school, few formal early learning centres exist or they are found at a distant, and many young children begin formal schooling without foundational preparation. This impacts their readiness to learn and can affect long-term academic progress. Temporary classrooms often lack sanitation and safety, especially in poor weather, further undermining early learning efforts.



[1] https://everything.explained.today/Bidi_Bidi_Refugee_Settlement
[2] https://makir.mak.ac.ug/items/2b040417-32a1-459f-8086-3d2788d83a13
[3] https://www.vsousa.org/our-work/education/bidibidi?utm

[1]Girls and other vulnerable groups face additional obstacles. High dropout rates among girls are linked to cultural expectations, domestic duties, early marriage, and pregnancy, which reduce their chances of staying in school. Language differences between refugee children's native dialects and English the official language of instruction in Ugandan schools also limit learning for many learners.

[2]Efforts to improve education include building more permanent classrooms, increasing teacher accommodation, and seeking community-led solutions. Recent infrastructure projects have constructed new classrooms and teacher housing to reduce overcrowding and improve learning environments. Partnerships between NGOs, the government, and community organisations aim to expand access, improve quality, and support children to remain in school.

> **"When we learned about children's rights, I began to understand that our voices matter. I used to complain quietly with friends. Now I know how to speak in the right way and push for change."**
> **VoiceMore Participant**



> **"When we started the research, some community members did not expect a young girl to ask serious questions. But I stayed confident and respectful. After the interview, some even thanked me."**
> **Girl Youth Researcher**

[1] https://scholar.ucu.ac.ug/server/api/core/bitstreams/7ea680ee-9e67-42ff-a861-a83bcc063f0f/content
[2] https://www.niras.com/projects/refugee-response-fund-rrf-in-uganda/?utm

CAUSES AND CONSEQUENCES OF SCHOOL DROPOUT

School dropout is a significant challenge in refugee settlements like Bidibidi and other under-resourced areas in Uganda. Children and young people leave school for a variety of reasons, often linked to economic, social, and environmental pressures. Dropping out not only affects individual education but also has broader social consequences, contributing to cycles of poverty and vulnerability in the community. The table below summarizes the main causes and the resulting consequences of school dropout. This was discussed by the group before their community-based research.

Causes of school dropout:

- Poverty and inability to afford school fees or materials
- Hunger and food insecurity
- Long distances to schools and lack of transport
- Family responsibilities, including caregiving and domestic chores
- Displacement due to war or conflict
- Disease outbreaks and poor health
- Lack of parental or caregiver support
- Cultural norms prioritizing boys' education over girls'

Consequences of school dropout:

- Child labour to support family income
- Poor physical and cognitive development
- Increased vulnerability to exploitation and abuse
- Early marriage, especially among girls
- Exposure to sexual abuse and exploitation
- Increased likelihood of substance abuse
- Social exclusion and reduced future opportunities
- Reduced community development and intergenerational poverty

A local leader in Zone 4 describes dropout as no longer an individual issue, but a community crisis.

"When one child drops out, we may not notice. But when many leave schools, we start seeing crime, early marriage, and hopelessness increasing. "He notes that before funding reductions, community outreach and school follow-ups were stronger. Teachers, parents, and leaders coordinated more closely. "Now the follow-up is weak. Some children disappear from school and no one checks immediately."

He believes that at least half of the dropout causes can be addressed locally through dialogue, shared responsibility, and monitoring without waiting for external funding.
"We cannot blame poverty for everything. Some change must begin with us."

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Before the research began, youth researchers underwent a three-day training on child protection and safeguarding. This training covered understanding the principles of child protection, recognizing risks, and learning why and how to report concerns to ensure the safety and well-being of children and youth during the study.

The research project was carried out for 10 days in Bidibidi Refugee Settlement and nearby host communities. The main purpose was to understand why children and youth drop out of school. A mixed-methods approach was used to collect both numbers and personal experiences.
Youth researchers interviewed 800 respondents to gather information about school attendance, challenges in staying in school, and related issues. Data collection included, Questionnaires with youth, parents, and community leaders to hear personal stories and opinions, focus group discussions (FGDs) with children, Case studies highlighting experiences of children who had left school or were at risk of dropping out.

The research followed ethical standards and child protection principles, ensuring that participation was voluntary, informed consent was given, and data was kept confidential. Special care was taken to create a safe environment for children and youth to share their experiences.
This method provided a clear picture of the main reasons for school dropout in the communities, combining both statistics and personal experiences to guide interventions and support programs.



> **"During the research, I listened to many painful stories from children and parents. Some of them were suffering in silence. I felt proud that we created a safe space for them to open up."**
> **VoiceMore Youth Researcher**

RESEARCH RESULTS

The study used a mixed-methods approach and reached 800 respondents from both refugee and host communities in Zones 4 and 5 of Bidibidi Refugee Settlement. Participants included children and youth, parents and caregivers, teachers, community leaders, and child protection actors, with representation from refugee (73%) and host (27%) communities. The sample included 500 young people (10–24 years) and 300 adults (25+ years), with 53% female and 47% male participants. Data was collected through structured questionnaires, focus group discussions, key informant interviews, and case studies of affected children. The research was designed and led by young people with support from Similar Ground.

KEY DRIVERS OF SCHOOL DROPOUT

Education Status of Respondents

- 44% are currently attending school
- 36% have dropped out of school
- 14% have completed school
- 6% have never enrolled in school

Respondents identified multiple reasons why children leave school:

- 64% due to inability to meet education-related costs such as uniforms, scholastic materials, examination fees, and other school requirements.
- 49% due to early marriage or teenage pregnancy
- 37% due to family responsibilities and household labour

Most Affected Groups

- Girls (45%)
- Children from poor households (30%)
- Orphans and separated children (15%)

> **Girls were reported to be particularly vulnerable because of early marriage, teenage pregnancy, domestic responsibilities, and limited access to menstrual hygiene support.**

Orphans and separated children often lacked parental guidance and financial support needed to remain in school.

Protective Factors

Respondents identified factors that help children stay in school:

- Parental encouragement and support.
- School feeding programmes
- NGO and humanitarian assistance
- Safe and supportive school environments
- Positive peer support and role models

EXISTING DATA ON SCHOOL DROPOUT IN BIDIBIDI & YUMBE DISTRICT

There have been several education studies and assessments conducted in Bidibidi Refugee Settlement and Yumbe District since 2018 that relate to school attendance, access, retention, utilisation and out-of-school status. Although many do not explicitly label "school dropout" as a separate indicator, the available data clearly shows high numbers of children not in school or with disrupted education, which is consistent with dropout trends in similar contexts.

1. Out-of-School Children (OOSC) & Dropout Estimates

[1]30 % of households had at least one out-of-school child (Oct 2021 assessment)

A rapid assessment by Finn Church Aid (FCA) found that about 30 % of households in one area of the settlement reported at least one child out of school in October 2021.

Approx. 15 % of school-aged children were not attending school in Bidibidi (end of 2020)

This figure comes from field reporting that highlights many children not in school or not attending regularly in the settlement at the end of 2020.

64 % of out-of-school children were girls

In the same FCA assessment, of the children not in school, 64 % were girls, highlighting a gendered dimension to dropout and OOSC figures.

2. Specific Dropout / School Discontinuation Numbers

[2]UNICEF adolescent programme figures (Bidibidi)

- In one UNICEF-supported initiative, out of 448 adolescent girls (10–19 yrs) being supported:
- 172 were identified as school dropouts
- 146 were in school
- 130 were child mothers (not in school because of early motherhood)

These figures give a quantified snapshot of dropout among refugee adolescent girls participating in targeted programmes.

3. Attendance & School Loading Context

[3]These are not dropout rates per se, but they help paint the picture of education strain and risks that correlate to dropout:

93 % attendance rate among enrolled primary pupils in Bidibidi

A recent operational update reported 93 % weekly attendance among enrolled primary children (16 312 out of 17 629), but this does not capture those who never enroll or who permanently stop coming.

[1] https://www.kirkonulkomaanapu.fi/en/latest-news/articles/education-goes-on-the-road-to-reach-refugees-in-bidibidi-uganda
[2] https://www.unicef.org/uganda/stories/unicef-adolescent-programme-provides-hope-adolescent-girls-south-sudan
[3] https://www.unicef.org/uganda/stories/unicef-adolescent-programme-provides-hope-adolescent-girls-south-sudan

COMPARISON OF SCHOOL DROPOUT RESEARCH

Existing Education Research in Bidibidi / Yumbe	VoiceMore Youth-Led School Dropout Research
Scope & Data Focus: Primarily examines school enrolment, access, and attendance. Dropout is inferred through proxy indicators such as out-of-school children and irregular attendance. Data is often collected through adult-led household or institutional surveys, with limited tracking of children who have permanently left school.	**Scope & Data Focus:** Explicitly measures school dropout and school completion status. Confirms that **36% of respondents have dropped out, 44% are currently in school, 14% completed,** and **6% never enrolled,** providing a full picture of education pathways.
Depth & Usefulness: Identifies general barriers such as poverty, distance, and overcrowding but rarely ranks them or links them to lived experiences. Limited disaggregation by gender or vulnerability, and minimal insight into what helps children stay or return to school.	**Depth & Usefulness:** Combines quantitative data **(800 respondents)** with FGDs and case studies to explain **why children drop out** (fees/materials 64%, pregnancy/marriage 49%, family responsibilities 37%). Clearly identifies **most affected groups** (girls 45%, orphans 15%) and **protective factors** (parental encouragement 56%, school meals 42%), directly informing targeted interventions.



Registered charity in Uganda No. ARW/000474.

CASE STUDY

James lives in Bidibidi. He dropped out of Senior Two when his father fell sick and could no longer provide for the family.

“When my father became weak, I was told to stay home and help. We needed food before we needed school.” James began doing small casual jobs digging, carrying water, and selling firewood. At first, he thought it would be temporary. But weeks turned into months. Soon, he felt ashamed to return.

He admits that without school, he felt idle and frustrated. Some of his friends who also dropped out became involved in alcohol use and petty theft.“When you are not in school, your mind is not settled. You start thinking too much.”

James says if there had been school materials support or flexible payment options, he would still be studying. Today, he participates in youth dialogues and advocates for peer mentorship to prevent others from dropping out. His story reflects the 64% who leave school due to fees and materials and the 37% who drop out due to family responsibilities

CASE STUDY 1: YOUTH PARTICIPANT “JAMES”, 17 YEARS OLD



Amina cares for five children, including two orphaned relatives. She depends on small-scale farming and occasional food aid.

“Sometimes I have to choose do we eat today, or do I send the child to school with nothing?”

Two of her children dropped out because they lacked uniforms and books. One daughter became pregnant shortly after leaving school. When she stopped going, she was always at home. People started talking to her. Now she is a mother.”

Amina believes education protects children from early marriage and risky behaviour, but poverty limits her choices. “If there was even small help for books or exams, I would fight for all my children to finish.” **CAREGIVER “AMINA”, 42 YEARS OLD**

TYPES OF EXISTING SUPPORT OFFERED

Education has always been one of the strongest protective tools for children and youth living in refugee settlements. Before the funding crisis, refugee education programs were able to provide a wide range of support that helped children enrol in school, attend regularly, and complete their studies. These supports reduced dropout rates, improved learning outcomes, and gave families hope for the future.

However, over the past three years, funding for refugee education has significantly reduced. As a result, many of the support systems that once kept children and youth in school have been scaled down or discontinued. This has led to increased absenteeism, early dropouts, child labour, early marriage, and growing frustration among youth who see limited pathways forward. Reinvesting in these support areas is critical to keep children and young people learning and protected.

School Fees and Education Costs Support; Support for fees, uniforms, and examinations helped families keep children enrolled without making painful choices to a few learners.

Provision of Learning Materials; Books, stationery, and school supplies improved participation and learning confidence are being provided to a few learners.

Psychosocial and Mental Health Support; Counseling and safe spaces helped children cope with trauma and stay motivated. Limited resources now leave many learners without emotional support.

Teacher Support and Incentives; Training and incentives improved teacher motivation and classroom quality. Funding reductions have increased class sizes and weakened learning outcomes.

Community and Parental Engagement; Community involvement strengthened follow up on attendance and reduced dropouts. Reduced outreach has weakened accountability and support for learners.

Support for Adolescent Girls and At-Risk Youth; Targeted interventions reduced early marriage and school dropouts. Scaling back these programs has increased protection risks for vulnerable youth.

Vocational Training and Alternative Learning Pathways; Skills training kept older youth engaged and future focused. Many programs have been suspended, leaving youth with limited options.

> **Support remains insufficient and unevenly distributed across refugee settlements. While some children and young people continue to benefit from existing interventions, many others are left out due to limited funding, reduced coverage, and targeting constraints, increasing the risk of exclusion from education and widening inequality in access and retention.**



“Listening to other girls talk about early marriage and school dropout touched my heart. I saw myself in their stories. It made me more determined to speak strongly during the advocacy meeting.”

Girl VoiceMore Participant

Registered charity in Uganda No. ARW/000474.

POST RESEARCH ACTION PLAN

1. Community awareness, dialogue, and caregiver engagement

The young people plan to do community meetings and radio sessions that focus on practical actions parents and leaders can take to reduce school dropout, including sharing household responsibilities, discouraging early marriage, supporting school re-entry, and monitoring attendance. These sessions will go beyond awareness to agreed community responsibilities.

The young people also plan to do regular caregiver dialogues at village level, bringing together refugee and host community families to share experiences, discuss challenges, and identify local solutions for keeping children in school.

2. Advocacy with government, schools, and NGOs

The young people plan to do advocacy meetings with government, schools, and NGOs focusing on clear, time-bound commitments rather than general support. This includes temporary assistance for the most vulnerable learners, stronger inclusive school practices, flexible learning arrangements, and clearer re-entry pathways for young mothers. Where possible, these commitments will be followed up and reviewed on a quarterly basis.

The young people also plan to engage local government leaders, including sub-county councillors, to raise school dropout as a formal agenda item and push for local action plans based on evidence from the research.

3. Strengthening school-based support systems

The young people plan to do engagement with schools to strengthen their role in identifying and supporting learners at risk of dropping out. This includes maintaining records of vulnerable learners, monitoring attendance, and linking children to available support services.
Schools will also be encouraged to adopt more flexible approaches, including allowing learners time to meet requirements and providing additional support for essential school materials where possible.

4. Mentorship and flexible learning for young mothers

The young people plan to do advocacy with schools to introduce flexible timetables, mentorship, and follow-up systems to support girls returning to school after pregnancy. This approach focuses on re-integration and retention, not only financial assistance.

5. Youth engagement to reduce dropout risks

The young people plan to do strengthening of youth clubs and activities to keep children and young people connected to education or skills development. These initiatives will use existing community spaces and volunteer facilitators to ensure accessibility and continuity.

6. Community-led monitoring and early response

The young people plan to do advocacy with community school structures to monitor attendance and dropout tracking through collaboration between schools and community education committees. Regular updates will be shared with education authorities and partners to support early identification of at-risk learners and enable timely intervention before dropout occurs.

VOICEMORE RECOMMEDATIONS

Based on school data, community discussions, and direct engagement led by young people with children, parents, teachers, and school leaders, the following recommendations reflect youth driven solutions to address the main causes of school dropout.

Promote flexible and inclusive education:

- Allow vulnerable learners to attend school even when they cannot immediately meet all requirements
- Provide structured catch-up learning for children who miss school
- Strengthen re-entry pathways for adolescent mothers and other vulnerable learners

Strengthen community ownership:

- Establish parent-led attendance monitoring systems
- Hold regular community dialogues on early marriage, child labour, and the importance of education
- Increase home visits for learners at risk of chronic absenteeism

Improve coordination and early identification:

- Strengthen collaboration between schools, communities, NGOs, and child protection actors
- Establish ways to identify and support learners at risk of dropping out
- Develop clear referral pathways for vulnerable children requiring education and protection support

Increase targeted support for vulnerable learners:

- Provide emergency education assistance for vulnerable households
- Ensure access to essential learning materials for at-risk learners
- Link education support to attendance tracking and child protection services
- Expand school feeding programmes to improve attendance, retention, and learning outcomes

> **Sarah is a 16-year-old who left school in Primary Five after becoming pregnant. She stopped attending due to shame and negative reactions from others. After giving birth, she wanted to return but struggled with childcare.**
>
> **She still hopes to continue her education and believes flexible learning and mentorship for young mothers would help girls like her return to school.**

RESEARCH CONCLUSIONS

The findings show that school dropout among children in Yumbe District is driven by deep and overlapping challenges. The number of children out of school is likely higher than available records suggest, with many learners falling outside formal monitoring and support systems.

Existing education and protection support is not sufficient to meet the needs of vulnerable children, especially those from poor households, orphans, and separated children. Many caregivers are struggling to meet basic needs and receive limited or no external assistance, making it difficult to support children's education.

As a result, many children are at increased risk of dropping out of school due to poverty, food insecurity, child labour, early marriage, teenage pregnancy, and household responsibilities. Children living in non-biological care arrangements are particularly vulnerable, as they are often given lower priority when resources are limited.

Overall, the research shows that poverty, displacement, and reduced support systems are pushing many children out of school, while others remain at risk but unseen. This highlights the urgent need for stronger, coordinated efforts to identify, support, and keep vulnerable children in school.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

For a copy of the full report or more information about Similar Ground & War Child's VoiceMore Programme, please contact:

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