

A photograph of a woman and two children in a rural setting. The woman, on the left, is smiling broadly and looking upwards. She is wearing a blue and orange patterned top. A young girl is hugging her from the side, also smiling. The girl is wearing a brown patterned top and blue sleeves. In the background, another young child is sitting on the ground, smiling. The setting appears to be a village with a thatched roof and a mud-brick wall.

WAR
child

ORPHAN AND SEPARATED CHILDREN IN UGANDA

A VoiceMore Report

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Cover Image: Mother with children, Uganda. Credit: War Child UK / Marcia Chandra Duckrabbit.

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OVERVIEW

This report presents research and advocacy activity undertaken by a group of young people living in Yumbe in Northern Uganda, supported by War Child UK. It details their concerns regarding separated and orphaned children living in their community, the causes and consequences from a youth perspective, the research they designed and conducted, their advocacy ideas and a set of recommendations for what they feel could help combat the issue. It also compares their findings to existing data and support offered.

VOICEMORE AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

VoiceMore is War Child's youth advocates development programme which empowers young people affected by armed conflict to share their experiences and act to combat issues impacting them.

VoiceMore Groups in our programme countries discuss and debate how conflict affects children and youth in their area and what they feel could be done to help improve their lives. They are then supported to design and run their own advocacy projects themselves in their local community, with War Child helping them elevate these concerns onto national and international platforms.

Objectives of the Programme

- Ensure that War Child supports children to identify the challenges they face in the communities, regions and countries in which they live, and to advocate at those levels to ensure that these challenges are addressed
- Raise the confidence and empowerment of young people in expressing their honest views and opinions to a wide range of audiences, and to bring these into debates with decision-makers on issues that impact their lives
- Promote the participation of children and youth in decision-making

VOICEMORE IN UGANDA

In summer 2018 War Child UK collaborated with our sister organisations War Child Holland to set-up our first joint VoiceMore project together. War Child Holland has worked in Uganda since 2004 initially focussing on children and young people affected by the 20-year long conflict between the government and Lord's Resistance Army (LRA), providing protection, education and Psychosocial support to children and families. WCH shifted its focus to respond to the influx of South Sudanese refugee children and youth in 2017.

Young people living in Bidi Bidi refugee settlement in the Yumbe district of northern Uganda were invited to join the VoiceMore programme in August. Youth who expressed interest from the South Sudanese refugee community and the Uganda host community were brought together into two groups to complete their spokesperson and advocacy training. A total of 30 young people aged between 15-25 of mixed gender took part.

Context of Yumbe Region

Since December 2013, brutal conflict in South Sudan has claimed thousands of lives and driven nearly four million people from their homes¹. While many remain displaced inside the country, more than two million have fled to neighbouring countries in a desperate bid to reach safety. Most South Sudan refugees have been settled in Bidi Bidi refugee camp in Yumbe district. Bidi Bidi is Uganda's largest refugee camp, home to over 227,600 people of which 227,586 are refugees².

While the Ugandan government and local people have made positive efforts to host refugees, the people in Yumbe district are still suffering from the effects of the civil war, which lasted about twenty years (1980–2000).

The government of Uganda has a progressive refugee policy, and the Ugandan population is largely hospitable to refugees, but there has been incidence of tensions due to access to natural resources. People in the area survive on subsistence farming and there is a significant lack of services such as schools and medical facilities. When aid was also first distributed it was done so directly to South Sudanese refugees only, creating tension in communities, and some



Photos of Yumbe district. Credit: War Child UK

¹ UNHCR (2019) Uganda Comprehensive Refugee Response Portal – May 2019. <https://ugandarefugees.org/en/country/uga>

² UNHCR (2018) Uganda Refugee Response Monitoring Settlement Fact Sheet: Bidi Bidi (June 2018). <https://reliefweb.int/report/uganda/uganda-refugee-response-monitoring-settlement-fact-sheet-bidi-bidi-june-2018>

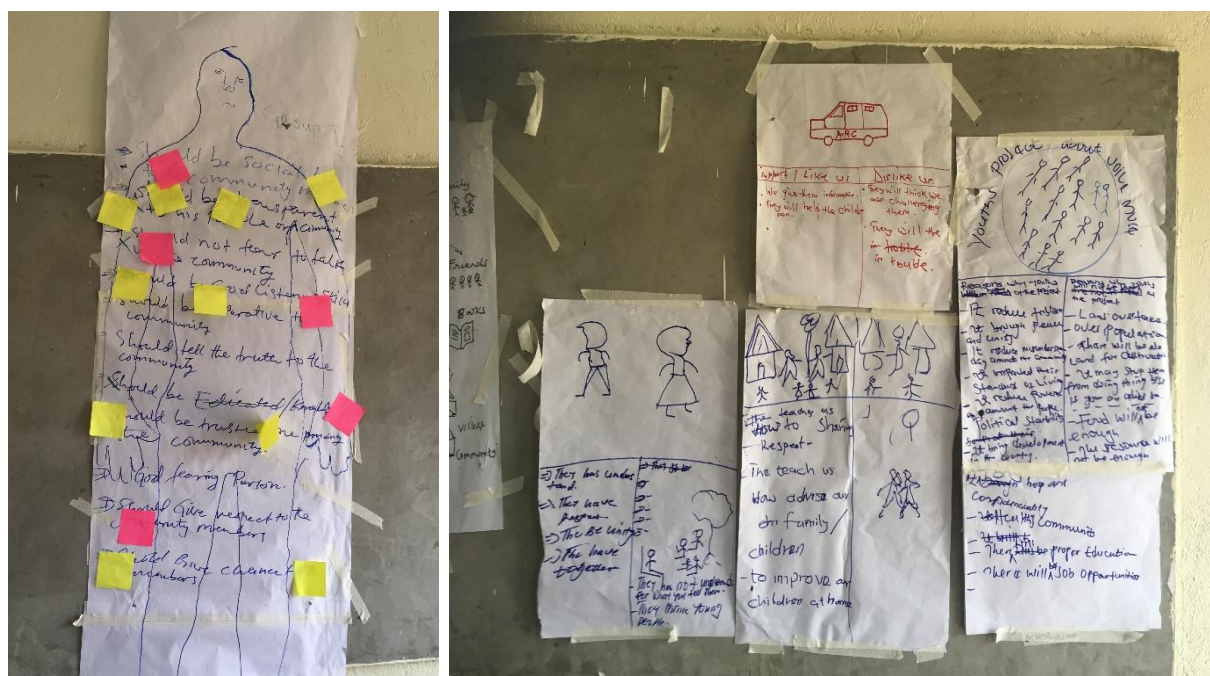
conflict between host communities and INGOs. Greater efforts are now made to ensure both groups are in receipt of necessary aid and access to programmes, and any activity delivered by the UN or international agencies in the area needs to consider wider community needs. The Ugandan Government has also now introduced a policy of 70:30 in aid distribution (70% to refugees and 30% to host community)³.

An important part of the VoiceMore programme in Yumbe was therefore ensuring a mixed group of youth were supported to work together on a shared advocacy initiative. Young people in the area are keen to integrate and reduce conflict between communities. They embraced the opportunity to work together on a joint VoiceMore initiative with enthusiasm, and the collaboration between young people of both groups has become an important aspect to the success of the initiative outlined in this report.

Training and Research Phases

Before starting their project both groups first received the VoiceMore training programme, a six-day intensive training package to help build understanding, confidence and skills in acting as a spokesperson and undertaking advocacy. Young people covered topics such as the role of a spokesperson, understanding children's rights, body language and non-verbal communication, active listening, public speaking, understanding people's perspectives, interviewing skills and keeping safe.

Then then looked at the purpose and principles of advocacy action, before working together to identify the major issues affecting children and youth in their community. Once they had agreed on one theme they wished to address, they then analysed what they felt were the causes and impacts of this, who key stakeholders are, and what kind of responses were already being offered. After this training the group then moved on to start planning and conducting their research. The following chapters outline discussions, methods and findings of this phase.



Photos from the VoiceMore training workshops. Credit: War Child

³ UNHCR (2019) Uganda Fact Sheet – February 2019.

<http://reporting.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/UNHCR%20Uganda%20Factsheet%20-%20February%202019.pdf>

Issues faced in their communities

During the training a variety of issues affecting children and youth in the area from both communities were raised. These included:

- High rates of unemployment and livelihood options, particularly for young people, which was resulting in increases in crime, drug taking and depression among youth.
- Sexual and gender-based violence towards females is also a serious issue, with girls often sexually assaulted and raped when looking for firewood. A lack of medical facilities means girls struggle or are unable to receive treatment. Single windowed females from South Sudan who have lost their husbands in the war were also reported to struggle significantly in communities, with many resulting to survival sex to feed their families.
- A lack of medical facilities means children and adults becomes progressively ill or die because of an inability to reach medical facilities in time. Treatments for even minor illnesses are very limited. Children are also often turned away from medical facilities if they are alone, resulting in more severe illnesses and, according to young people in the group, occasionally death.
- Education provision in the district is low, with a limited number of schools, long-distances to travel, and a lack of support for children to attend. Barriers to education include lack of money for fees, uniforms and for young South Sudanese, an inability to get hold of the necessary documentation from their home country to prove completion of primary level and certificates in order to progress to secondary school.

"There is a real problem for Sudanese women, some of them as they crossed the border, they were given a gun (by militia) and told to shoot their husband. If you failed to shoot your husband, they would shoot all of you, so you have to kill him in public to save your family. These women reflect on how their life used to be all the time they are in the camp and now they have to live without their husband."

South Sudanese Female VoiceMore Participant

Choosing a Theme

Despite there being a high number of serious issues affecting their local community, both groups (independently of each other in their separate VoiceMore trainings) identified the same problem they wished to dedicate their time to trying to alleviate: the neglect and abuse of separated and orphan children within the communities. Their reasoning relating to the high numbers they were seeing in their villages, the severity of their situation and the children's powerlessness to advocate for themselves.

The groups felt numbers of separated and orphan children are high in the area due to several varied and compounding factors:

- When war broke out in South Sudan many children lost their parents, either in the chaos of fleeing or because one or both has been killed. Some families picked up smaller children and took them with them. Other older children might have joined other groups of people at the boarder or crossed alone. When in Uganda, informal adoption became a

common localised coping strategy, with families continuing to look after these non-biological children as they moved to the settlements.

- Northern Uganda also already had high numbers of orphans who had lost their primary caregivers in the war there, in accidents or to the HIV/Aids endemic. Communities were already struggling to cope with children who needed care prior to the influx of children from South Sudan who also had no close relative or extended family.

A Note on Terminology

There are important differences between descriptions of orphan, separated or unaccompanied children:

- **'Orphan children'** are those that have lost one or both parents. In Western cultures 'orphans' is a term commonly used to describe those who have lost both parents, however in many African cultures an orphan is a child who has lost just one (often the father).
- **'Separated children'** are those who have lost both their parents and close relatives and their whereabouts are unknown. They could have been killed and this is unconfirmed, or they may have lost them and their whereabouts are unknown (and uneasily traced).
- **'Unaccompanied Children'** are children who have been sent somewhere else by family, or have chosen to travel themselves on their own, often looking for safety or work. They know where their family are and often maintain contact.

Within this report the group researched the situation of 'double-orphans' - i.e. those who have lost both parents - and separated children, as they felt these were the ones most at risk and vulnerable.

SITUATION OF SEPARATED AND ORPHANED CHILDREN

The young people's concern stems from the situation separated and orphan children are finding themselves in. While many caregivers had good intentions in trying to support these children, extremely high levels of poverty mean they are unable to cope. Even with the best intentions they simply cannot provide adequate food, clothing or care. In such circumstances biological children are commonly prioritised. Other families they feel regard these children as a source of labour, burdening them with high levels of domestic chores or forcing them into work. As a result, the young people reported these children were experiencing high levels of abuse and neglect, much of which is visible within communities, for example:

- Many orphan children resort to spending their time outside the home on the streets around the villages looking for food or engaging in petty theft. (One participant reported a child in a local village has been sent to the police recently for stealing a bar of soap.)
- Children are beaten and forced to work long hours in unsuitable work in order to keep the home or contribute to household income. Children can be seen undertaking unsuitable and dangerous jobs in the community or - for female children - spending large numbers of hours dedicated to domestic chores within the home.
- These children often don't have any clothes and can be seen in communities wearing little more than rags or partially naked with an inability to cover themselves. They are also unable to wash themselves or keep clean.
- Some female children are now engaging in survival sex for money or food to support themselves. Girls as young as 12 are now resorting to this out of desperation. As a coping mechanism, families are also marrying off girls at a very young age in order to receive dowry's and try and secure some form support for them.
- Few orphan children are attending school due to associated costs. If money is available for education this is more likely to be prioritised for biological children and male children.

"There are children in our community who do not even go to play with other children due to lack of clothing, because they feel ashamed and fearful of being laughed at and abused by other children who are dressed."

VoiceMore Participant.

"This practice is becoming common in our area. You now see these young girls going to the men and boys and some of these men target homes headed either by a fellow child, older person or household headed by a woman with no men because they know they are more likely to agree to taking money for the girls. The community seems to be uninformed about this practice."

Female VoiceMore Participant

"Some care givers, whenever these children are sick, they don't take them to hospital because they feel ashamed accompanying a child who has dressed in very dirty old cloth to hospital with fear that health personnel will quarrel on them for dressing a child poorly. They often send the children alone, unfortunately when the child reaches the hospital, they are then just send back to their care givers and do not receive any treatment at all."

VoiceMore participant.

Focus Group Discussion

Facilitator: *"Are the children registered in some way? How do people know who the separated or orphan children are?"*

Male participant: *"When they were escaping from the country there was a UNHCR checkpoint. Because people were many, they didn't ask too many questions. It depends on the person who brought the children. They needed to explain that the children were not theirs, otherwise they just counted them as one family, so if the person failed to explain, they would just combine all of them."*

Facilitator: *"So now do the authorities know who the children are who came unaccompanied or who are with their biological families?"*

Male participant: *"A complaint (by the community) was raised about the orphans, asking them (the authorities) to come and find out who they are. They said they are coming, but up to now no one came."*

Case study: refugee caregiver Miriam*

46-year-old single mother Miriam lives in a settlement in Yumbe. She lives with her six biological children and has also taken on the care of two South Sudanese orphan children.

"I have two orphans living with me, one of the child's parents went missing during the war in South Sudan and the second child's father was kidnapped from South Sudan, and the whereabouts of their mother is unknown. I face a lot of challenges in providing soap, food, medication and clothing for these children. I have no latrine, no proper shelter for these children. I sometimes borrow food from well-wishers to feed the children. I have to sell some of the food aid given to us to buy soap, clothing and hire people to make for us small hut for us to live in. We are using the food aid money to acquire other basic needs, but that also makes the food too small for our survival."

*not real name.

Causes and Consequences

During the training both groups discussed what they felt were the causes and impacts of the issue in both communities. Below is a summary of both groups felt were major contributing factors.

What Causes the Issue?

Poverty

Outbreaks of diseases causes death of parents and family

War in South Sudan means parents killed

HIV / Aids endemic in area

Overpopulation

Abandonment. Parents leave children because they cannot cope or do not want them.

War in South Sudan means children lost while fleeing. Do not know where family are and no possibility to trace.

Accidents cause death of parents e.g. road accidents

Very small children wander off and are lost. Too young to speak and no way to trace parents or family.

Children are orphaned or separated

Children turn to crime and steal

Children are neglected and do not have their basic needs met.

Children don't have clothes to protect and cover them

Children are physically abused within the home or outside the home, for example beaten.

Forced early marriage, particularly for girls.

Child labour; children are put to work in the home or outside the home

Children are raped and sexually abused

Girls turn to survival sex

Children are out of school and have no education

Loss of culture and heritage

Children grow into bad citizens

Country does not develop well

Children take up drugs and alcohol

Children and community suffer

The Impacts of the Issue

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

After selecting the focus of the advocacy project both groups participated in a two-day workshop to understand the basic principles of research practice, such as the different between quantitative and qualitative data gathering, research ethics and keeping safe. The groups then devised a research plan for their project together.

The young people felt the most effective piece of evidence necessary for their advocacy would be a more accurate count of orphan children, their assertion being previous attempts to understand numbers had not been accurate and the scale and severity of the issue was not well understood. The groups therefore decided on a questionnaire format which would gather data on numbers of separated and orphan children, in addition to type and level of support potentially being received.

Young people agreed to work together across both groups to conduct the work. They jointly devised a set of questions to pose to families in a questionnaire. Before conducting the research, they ran a pre-test role play among themselves in local languages to ensure they felt confident in how they would introduce themselves and ask the questions. They then also organised a two-day field test in each location to see if families understood questions in practice, followed by an evaluation and necessary adjustments in order to finalise the questionnaire and method.

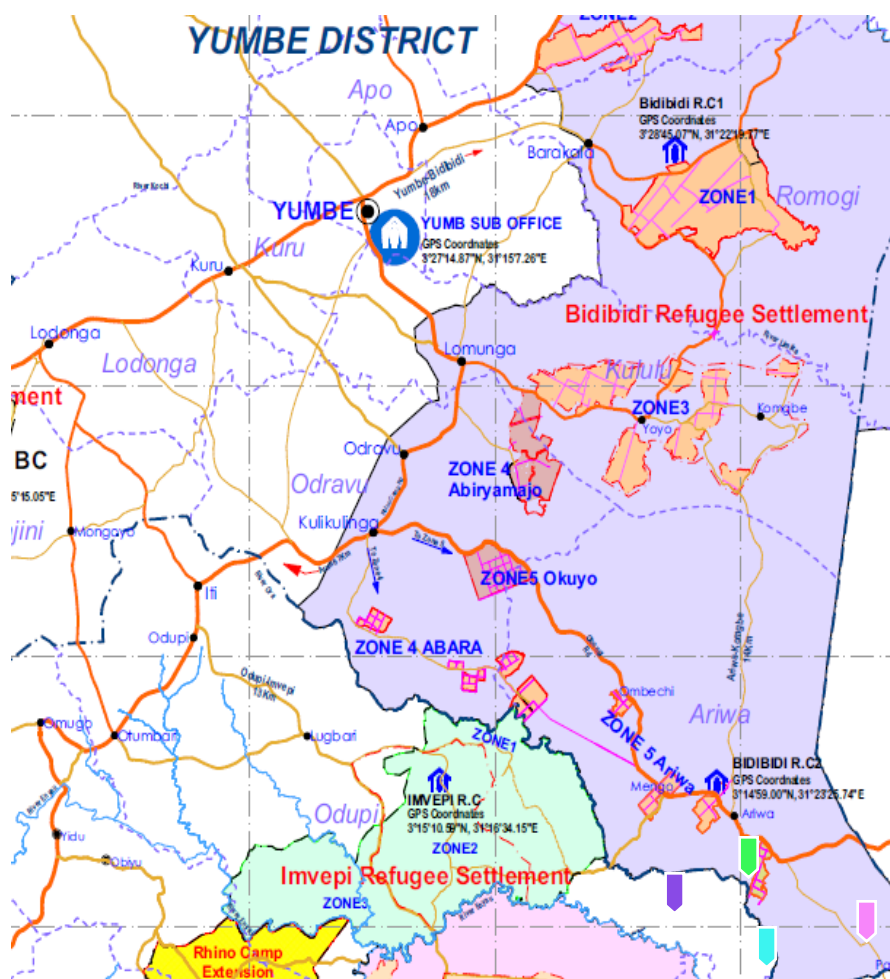
When they were ready to go into the community the young people organised themselves into mixed host and refugee community sub-groups of between four to five participants. Those with no or low literacy were paired with other participants who could read and write to record answers. The young people decided to organise themselves randomly and not to villages where they were from.

Location for the Data Collection

Given the vast size and scale of Bidi Bidi settlement, participants considered carefully the best areas of the settlement to focus the counts. They analysed potential sectors within the settlement and selected those which would be most representative of the wider areas. This would also mean alongside knowing numbers for specific areas of the camp, they could also make more accurate inferences regarding numbers across the whole of the camp.

Participants agreed to conduct the count in Bidi Bidi Zone 5 and Ariwa 1 Ombechi (see below map). Their rationale for selecting these areas was as follows:

- The remoteness of Ariwa, as it is one of the settlements far away from Yumbe town and other major service centres. It therefore helps represent other more extreme remote locations.
- Ariwa and Ombechi settlements have a lot of host Ugandan villages nearby which ensured they could capture information about host community children as well as those the refugee one.
- Participants knew the two locations. This meant while they might not be known to local people, they still had a good understanding of the area and locality.
- The group looked at the ethnic and cultural patterns and these two sites provided a good cross section that was representative of the wider settlements.



	Ombechi settlement - (94 H/Hs Reached)
	Ariwa 1 settlement - (253 H/Hs Reached)
	Ariwa 1 Host community (Ariwa, Basunga, Ewanati, Kiranga and Kagude) village - 143 H/Hs reached
	Ombechi Host Community (Ombechi, Barifa, Caranga) Village - (148 H/Hs reached)

Approaching Households

The group felt previous attempts at counting by NGOs had elicited incorrect responses as local families - upon seeing uniformed staff who were outsiders - were inclined to either try and hide the presence of orphaned children in their care because of suspicion or exaggerate numbers in hope of receiving some form of additional help.

To counter this, the group decided on a specific way to approach households and pose questions. They decided on a random sampling method where they interviewed every fifth household. Their reasoning being to avoid creating lots of attention in the community (for example crowds gathering to see what is happening) and create enough space so that interviews could be conducted quietly. They also wanted to circumvent the situation where families - upon seeing and hearing interviews in households next to them - might not answer honestly questions.

In introducing themselves they made clear they were local young people volunteering for a community project and were not working for the government or any INGO. They also decided it would be better to first ask general questions to ascertain how many children were living in the household, before then moving to specific questions to determine how many might be orphans or separated children, their situation and needs.

Research Analysis and Findings

The group collated and analysed their data together, agreeing what they felt were the most important issues raised, and what the feedback offered in terms of guidance on how to address attitudes, camp rules and policy. They then finalised their plans for advocacy activity, including suitable key messages for community-based awareness raising, and which local, and national organisations, individuals and groups with decision-making power they wished to target.



Photo of VoiceMore research planning workshop. Credit: War Child UK

RESEARCH RESULTS

Young people interviewed a total of 638 households. Below are summary tables of their data and the key quantitative findings.

The Demographic of the Orphans:

- 54% of Households have at least one orphan or separated child (58% refugee and 51% host).
- 25% of children are orphans or separated children (51% Male / 49% Female) (59% refugee / 41% host).
- Of the total number of orphans and separated children, 59% are refugee and 41% are host community.
- The largest demographic of orphans and separated children within the refugee population is 11-17 year olds (48.6%) whereas the host community have a larger percentage of 6-10 year olds (46.4%).
- Host community children are most likely to have been orphaned because of illness, compared to refugee orphans who are most likely to have lost their parents to war.

Number of households within the sample caring for orphaned or separated children

Location	Number of Households with orphans or separated children	Percentage of Households with orphans or separated children	Number of Orphans or separated children
ARIWA 1 SETTLEMENT	162	64%	391
OMBECHI SETTLEMENT	38	40%	70
Sub-Total Refugee	200	58%	461
BARIFA VILLAGE	32	49%	70
OMBECHI VILLAGE	13	33%	32
CHARANGA VILLAGE	22	51%	51
Sub-Total Locals Ombечи	67	45%	153
KIRANGA VILLAGE	25	44%	68
KANGUDE VILLAGE	31	63%	44
EWANATI VILLAGE	7	100%	13
BASUNGA VILLAGE	17	57%	48
Sub-Total Locals Ariwa1	80	56%	173
Sub-total Host Community	147	51%	326
TOTAL	347	54%	787

Age aggregation of orphan and separated children

	Total Percentage	Refugee Percentage	Host Percentage	Combined Male	Combined Female
0-5	20.3%	18.7%	22.7%	51.6%	48.4%
6-10	38.4%	32.8%	46.4%	50.7%	49.3%
11-17	41.3%	48.6%	30.8%	51.7%	48.3%

Reasons cited for losing parents					
	War	Kidnap	Disease/ Illness	Accident	Not Sure
Total Orphans	211	38	349	40	123
Percentage of total	27%	5%	44%	5%	16%
% of total Males	29%	5%	46%	5%	15%
% of total Females	26%	5%	45%	6%	17%
% of total refugees	40%	5%	33%	3%	16%
% of total hosts	9%	5%	60%	9%	15%

Care and Support for the Orphans:

- 82% of carers to orphans are female
- 12% of refugee households with orphans are receiving support but only 4% of host community households. (Individual orphans receiving support 14% refugee and 5% host).
- Save the Children are the largest provider of support to orphans and separated children, with 97% of households receiving any form of support getting it from Save the Children, but they still only cover 12% of refugee and 3% of host community orphan and separated children households overall.
- The greatest need reported of the orphans is clothing (78% refugee/50% host) followed by education (47% refugee/59% host).
- Host community orphans reported greater priority of need than refugees for services relating to Education (59%), Food (48%), Medical Care (28%) and Shelter (17%). Refugee orphans had a greater need for Clothing (78%), Soap (54%), Cash (15%) and non-food items (35%).
- The largest disparity between groups was for soap 54% refugee orphans compared to 10% host and for food, 48% host and only 5% refugee.
- Neither the gender of the orphan nor the gender of the primary care giver appears to impact the access to services.

The primary caregiver to the orphans		
Location	Number of care givers	% of care givers as female
ARIWA 1 SETTLEMENT	162	81%
OMBECHI SETTLEMENT	38	82%
Sub-Total Refugee	200	82%
BARIFA VILLAGE	32	84%
OMBECHI VILLAGE	13	92%
CHARANGA VILLAGE	22	77%
Sub-Total Locals Ombechi	67	84%
KIRANGA VILLAGE	25	64%
KANGUDE VILLAGE	18	89%
EWANATI VILLAGE	8	75%
BASUNGA VILLAGE	18	94%
Subtotal Locals Ariwa1	69	80%
Subtotal Host	136	82%
TOTAL	336	82%

Needs of children, as cited by respondents			
	Total %	Refugee %	Host %
Education	48%	47%	49%
Clothing	61%	78%	43%
Soap	32%	54%	8%
Food	22%	5%	41%
Medical care	15%	9%	22%
Parent Support or Child Care	1%	0%	2%
Shelter	14%	15%	12%
Agricultural support	1%	0%	1%
Cash Support	11%	15%	7%
Non-food Household items	24%	35%	12%

Number of households with orphans or separated children, and individual orphans or separated children, currently receiving support						
LOCATION	Orphan HHs getting Support	% HH receiving support	HH receiving support with a male caregiver	HH receiving support with a female caregiver	Individual orphans or separated children on support	% of orphans supported
ARIWA 1 SETTLEMENT	13	8%	3	10	36	9%
OMBECHI SETTLEMENT	11	29%	2	9	28	40%
Sub-Total Refugee	24	12%	5	19	64	14%
BARIFA VILLAGE	0	0%	0	0	0	0%
OMBECHI VILLAGE	1	8%	0	1	5	16%
CHARANGA VILLAGE	0	0%	0	0	0	0%
Sub-Total Locals Ombechi	1	1%	0	1	5	3%
KIRANGA VILLAGE	1	4%	1	0	2	3%
KANGUDE VILLAGE	4	13%	0	4	10	23%
EWANATI VILLAGE	0	0%	0	0	0	0%
BASUNGA VILLAGE	0	0%	0	0	0	0%
Subtotal Locals Ariwa1	5	6%	1	4	12	7%
Subtotal Host	6	4%	1	5	17	5%
TOTAL	30	9%	6 (10%)	24 (9%)	81	10%

EXISTING DATA

There have been some attempts made in 2018/19 by UNHCR, REACH and the Uganda Bureau of Statistics to count the number of orphans living in Yumbe and Bidi Bidi, however the data collected by VoiceMore suggests this data might not be capturing all the children.

Comparing VoiceMore data to other data sources			
	VoiceMore Data 2019	REACH Needs Assessment 2018	Ugandan Government Children's Census 2019
Refugee households with orphans	58%	38%	24.3% Not disaggregated by type of household.
Host community households with orphans	51%	37%	

VoiceMore's data suggests nearly double the percentage of households have orphans in Yumbe than were counted by the Ugandan government in the Children's Census 2019⁴. This is even though the government definition of orphan includes children who have lost one or both parents, rather than VoiceMore who only counted children as orphans who had lost both parents. Had the young people extended their definition to include children who had lost one parent, we suggest numbers would have therefore increased again.

VoiceMore's data suggests The REACH Joint Multi-Sector Needs Assessment⁵ also undercounted the number of households with orphans in Yumbe, by 20% in refugee households and 14% in host community.

However, it is worth noting that the Children's Census attempted to collect data from every household in Yumbe and REACH's data was collected via 63,722 household surveys across thirteen districts of Yumbe. Whereas VoiceMore only sampled 638 households across Ariwa and Ombechi. Therefore, we are assuming that the villages chosen and sampled by VoiceMore are a fair representation of Yumbe and can be extrapolated as such.

In Bidi Bidi settlement looking only at refugee households, UNHCR⁶ found in 2018 that 62% of households had at least one unaccompanied or separated children living with them. Although this is much closer to the 58% of refugee households VoiceMore found to be hosting orphans, the UNCHR number includes children whose parents are alive but not with them, so will be a greater pool than children who have lost both parents.

Where data does already exist on the number of orphans in a household or village, either in Bidi Bidi or Yumbe, there is no evidence of agencies collecting more detailed categorisations in the data. The VoiceMore research appears to be the only source breaking down the

⁴ Status of Children – Children Census Tables Data from Ugandan Bureau of Statistics. 3rd Jan 2019 https://www.ubos.org/wp-content/uploads/publications/01_2019Status_Of_Children_%E2%80%93_Children_Census-sourced_Data.xls

⁵ Joint Multi-Sector Needs Assessment August 2018. Pages 76, 77 and 126 <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/download/65982>

⁶ UNHCR and REACH Multi-Sector Needs Assessment: Bidi Bidi Settlement. August 2018 https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/reach_uga_msna_settlement_factsheet_bidibidi_aug2018_0.pdf

demographic of orphans by age, gender, gender of care giver, village and whether they are refugee or host community.

In addition, the VoiceMore data is completely unique in looking specifically at the needs of orphans as a vulnerable group, as the REACH Needs Assessment looks at vulnerable groups but not specifically orphans.

When examining the needs of communities as a whole, the REACH assessment found in Yumbe the only area in which host community reported needing more support than refugees was in education. Whereas VoiceMore suggests host community households with orphans reported having greater needs than refugee households also in terms of food, medical care and shelter.

Case study: Ugandan host community grandmother, Fatima*

Fatima is a 60-year-old single grandmother living in Yumbe. She is looking after two Uganda children who lost their parents.

"I have two male and two female orphans under my care. I am now weak, I used to care for them through farming but now I am very weak because of old age. I sell my food items to buy soap, clothes, and pay school requirements. I am paying 4000 shillings per term, per child for the 2 children in lower class and 30,000 per term, per child for the two in upper primary. We are getting no external support from Government and NGOs working around. Feeding the children is the biggest challenge now. I can't even work to get money. I pray that authorities can support me with feeding and school fees for these children."

*not real name



Photo of house for family of nine: one adult male caregiver and eight children. Credit: War Child UK

TYPES OF EXISTING SUPPORT OFFERED

The data collected by the young people shows the level of support being offered to both the refugee and host community families is very low. According to this research, only 10% of individual orphans receive some form of support: 14% in refugee households and 5% in host community households.

The type of support offered is also primarily limited to low-level, material-based help. Below are summaries of the type of aid offered to some families.

Education support

Some families can receive education support which normally takes the form of books and pens for school, however the costs of school enrolment fee at around 5000 shillings for primary school (about £1) is prohibitively expensive for families. Children must also have uniforms which families normally cannot afford. Children can start classes without a uniform and paying the fee, however they eventually are asked to leave unless they can find the money for these which in most cases is not possible, resulting in them being sent away.

Cash for work

Some families are supported by a 'cash for work' system whereby they are offered money for assisting jobs provided by local authorities. This includes jobs such as clearing roads or cutting back trees. This work is offered on an ad hoc basis.

Food Aid

South Sudanese refugees received aid tokens which are exchanged for basic food items such as rice and cooking oil. However as essential items such as washing powder or soap are not provided, many families sell part of their food rations to try and purchase these. For families with high numbers of children including orphan children, some non-food items can be received such as a jerry-can (for fetching water) and some clothes.

There are also challenges with the way in which distribution of support and aid is made, both by international agencies and also local support groups. For example:

"When they bring in support it goes via the elders, there is no clear boundary around the orphans. They do not make clear that the money is for the orphans, so they just round up all the people with special needs. Because the elders listen more to adults than to children, then more is allocated to adults or elderly people than orphans."

VoiceMore Participant.

RESEARCH CONCLUSIONS

The young people's conviction that numbers of separated and orphan children are very high in both communities has proved correct. Their concern that numbers were misunderstood and under-reported by state departments and international agencies also appears well-founded. A youth-led, community-based approach to in the research count has revealed higher numbers and a greater need than previously known.

Similarly, the group's concerns regarding needs of children have been evidenced. It is clear the level of current support being offered is not adequate for the numbers of children in the area and the vast majority of children and families supporting additional orphan and separated children are receiving no support at all.

While some families are evidently trying their best to support children in their care with very little means and no external support, others see children in their care as sources of cheap labour and domestic help. The possibility of these children experiencing neglect, physical, sexual or emotional abuse is subsequently high, and protection within the community limited.

Local context must also of course be considered; a large proportion of the population in northern Uganda experience extreme poverty and many families, including those not caring for non-biological children, experience significant challenges in providing adequate food, shelter, education and healthcare. However, for many children not living with biological families, their chances of being prioritised for this limited household resource is often reduced, and they can easily fall to the bottom of family 'hierarchy'. Under such pressured and fragile circumstances orphan and separated children subsequently can suffer disproportionately.

A combination of factors in the Yumbe district - caused by war, displacement and prolonged poverty and geographical isolation - have merged to create a situation where high numbers of separated and orphaned children from both communities find themselves trying to survive with minimal support. Most concerning, the groups feedback and research emphasises and exposes the increased vulnerabilities of these children; they are currently slipping out of all monitoring mechanisms and have become invisible to local, national and international services, with possibility and incidences of abuse high and severe as a result.

IDEAS FOR ADVOCACY ACTION

Post research analysis the VoiceMore groups met to discuss what they felt could help improve the situation within their community and at a district and national level. The groups formulated a set of activities and plans for advocacy action which they will seek to promote and implement, outlined below.

Caregiver Community Meetings

The young people felt there is a need to bring together caregivers in each village and help facilitate dialogue around orphan issues. This would include discussion on the rights and responsibilities children possess, and helping caregivers understand the negative impacts high levels of work and withdrawal from education can have. These sessions would be targeted at families identified during the research, with the VoiceMore group acting as facilitators. They felt mixing community and refugee families could be beneficial in terms of joint problem sharing, and that each week could focus on a specific topic, as identified by the caregiver group itself.

Awareness Raising at Medical Facilities

One common issue raised by the group that is often experienced by orphan children was being turned away from medical facilities. Separated and orphan children were often left alone to approach services when sick, but without an adult present they are turned away without treatment, often aggressively. The group feel greater awareness raising among medical teams of the circumstances of orphan children in the area, and why so many might turn up without an adult advocate, could help reduce this issue. As part of this they recommend training for front-line medical workers in child-protection and how to make services more child-friendly.

Awareness Raising in Schools

The VoiceMore group suggest schools could play a more active role in monitoring and supporting orphan and separated children in the community. This could include schools helping keep records of orphan children and track and link to other services to share information on cases of concern. As some of the main barriers to education include a lack of leniency with children who cannot afford the uniforms or fees on time, they suggest this should include offering longer periods for them to be able to find these or supporting them directly by providing material or financial assistance.

Meetings with Sub-County Councillors

In the area sub-county councillors - who are elected leaders - are responsible for helping make and implement by-laws. Citizens and community members can formally request a debate on specific issues. These debates are then chaired by the sub-county speaker, with a community development officer and local council chairperson present. The sub-county councillor makes a ruling following the debate which must be followed up with an action plan. The VoiceMore group propose to raise the issue of neglect and abuse of orphans as a debate topic, and to structure their presentation around findings in the report, in an attempt to force greater attention and local action on the issue.

Strengthening Community Level Support

During the course of their data collection, the young people felt there were many households who could benefit from being able to share their struggles and concerns with families experiencing similar things. Currently no peer community support network exists in the area and the groups believe the creation of one could serve two helpful purposes: sharing knowledge and tips for coping, and help families more effectively voice and advocate on their needs. The young people envisage this as a forum where identified and invited families can

attend on a regular basis to network. To help ensure adequate support and sustainability, they suggest organisations charged with child protection in the area, including international agencies and local Community Development Officers (who report directly to the District Community Development Officers), should take a lead on setting up and communicating with these groups.

Strengthening the Existing Child Protection Committees System

Within the Yumbe district Child Protection Committees are in operation, these are normally supported and run by international non-government agencies. The reach of the services is however currently inadequate. Agencies are attempting to work with those most at risk in communities, but evidently the needs are far outstripping what they are able to provide. The VoiceMore group feel the committee's system has the potential to work well, but they need to widen and expand their services deeper into communities. As part of these efforts the groups felt conducting home visits (currently not happening or extremely rare according to their feedback) could play a vital role in helping identify the worst abuse cases.

Training and Capacity Building Local Councils and Refugee Welfare Committees

The young people felt existing local community groups, such as the Refugee Welfare Committees (RWC) who advocate on behalf of South Sudanese refugees in the area, and the local councils who work to help support communities, should receive formal training in child protection which should include a component focused specifically on orphan and separated children situation and needs. Their suggestion is the Child Protection Committees would be best placed to help coordinate and deliver this, with the young people able to support by offering local perspectives and views.

Improving the Communication of National Policy

Uganda already has in place a policy on Orphans and Vulnerable Children⁷, however this is not published into the local languages most of the community leaders and local agency teams in the area speak and are proficient in. The young people suggest translating the policy into local dialects such as Lubgara, Kakwa and Juba Arabic, including shorter summary documents. Copies could then be distributed to key stakeholders in the area who have responsibility for looking after Ugandan and refugee children and communities, so they better understand commitments the government has made and what the expectations in terms of care and protection are in existence and agreed upon already.

Awareness Raising at Local Level

The last suggestion the group had for advocacy action was awareness raising to all communities using public theatre shows. This is a popular mode of communicating messages in local villages, and the group felt it would be an effective way of improving awareness and encouraging collective community responsibility for the children's care. They plan to organise the shows to coincide with national and international days, such as International Refugee Day or Day of the African Child.

⁷ Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development, National Orphans and Other Vulnerable Children Policy. 2004.
<https://bettercarenetwork.org/library/social-welfare-systems/child-care-and-protection-policies/national-orphans-and-other-vulnerable-children-policy-of-uganda>

VOICEMORE RECOMMENDATIONS

While the group's advocacy activity will remain predominantly local as outlined above, there are several general recommendations regarding the situation of orphan and separated children raised in this report which have wider application. War Child and the VoiceMore young people call for greater deliberation and action to the below:

- **Greater consideration to current processes for tracking children crossing borders:** internationally large numbers of children are crossing borders in attempts to flee conflict and violence. Though these influxes can be large and challenging for international agencies and borders to control and monitor, efforts should be made to consider how questions are asked regarding the children adults are accompanying to cross. This would reveal more clearly who separated and orphan children are, which would in turn assist later in tracking and protecting more effectively.
- **A more targeted approach in child protection:** while not all children who are informally adopted will be exposed to neglect and abuse, however in situations of displacement and extreme poverty this risk does increase. Not having a biological parent or close family member can significantly increase vulnerability. Governments, international agencies and district and local children's services should ensure they are making efforts to identify these children in the early stages of them moving to an area or informally joining a family to live with, in order to ensure adequate care and protection is being provided.
- **Strengthening and building on community systems of care and protection:** in a cultural context where informal adoption and extended family care is not unusual, government and international communities should not take for granted this form of traditional care system. Many families are attempting, with very minimal resources, to look after vulnerable children in their communities. However, their ability to do this is neither guaranteed nor infinite. Greater focus needs to be given to community-based interventions where families can work together for support, where leaders are encouraged to identify and support more vulnerable households in their areas, and local pre-existing child-protection systems are strengthened.

CONTACT INFORMATION

For more information about this report or War Child's VoiceMore programme please contact our Youth Advocacy and Engagement Adviser Sophie Bray-Watkins on sophieb@warchild.org.uk

You can also find out about the research and advocacy from other VoiceMore groups in The Central African Republic, Jordan and Democratic Republic of Congo on our website www.warchild.org.uk

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