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# **Integration Paradox in Schools with Refugee and National Children: A Case Study of Yumbe District, Uganda**

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January 2023



## Dedication

To Moses (not his real name), the 35-year-old refugee gentleman in Primary 5 who walks 14 kilometres daily to quench his thirst for knowledge; may you find meaning in your schooling experiences.

## Acknowledgements

We appreciate the management, head-teachers, teachers, parents, learners and the local leadership for accepting to participate in this study. We thank the partners led by Finn Church Aid (FCA), the District Education Officer and the Chief Administrative Officer for Yumbe District for supporting us in the data collection process. We sincerely appreciate the team of Uwezo Uganda assessors and data collectors from Care Community Education Centre (CCEDUC), the partner organisation, who collected the data.

## List of Abbreviations and Acronyms

CAO	Chief Administrative Officer
DEO	District Education Officer
DIS	District Inspector of Schools
FCA	Finn Church Aid
FGD	Focused Group Discussion
KII	Key Informant Interviews
LoI	Language of Instruction
OPM	Office of the Prime Minister
UMSC	Uganda Muslim Supreme Council
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UPE	Universal Primary Education
WIU	Windle International Uganda



## Table of Contents

<b>Dedication.....</b>	<b>i</b>
<b>Acknowledgements.....</b>	<b>ii</b>
<b>List of Abbreviations and Acronyms.....</b>	<b>iii</b>
<b>Table of Contents.....</b>	<b>iv</b>
<b>List of Tables.....</b>	<b>v</b>
<b>List of Figures.....</b>	<b>v</b>
<b>Executive Summary.....</b>	<b>vi</b>
<b>1.0 Background to the Study.....</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1 Refugee situation in Uganda.....	1
1.2 About Bidibidi Refugee Settlement.....	1
1.3 About Yumbe district.....	1
1.3.1 Primary education in Yumbe District.....	1
<b>2.0 Purpose of the Study.....</b>	<b>2</b>
2.1 Rationale of the study.....	2
2.2 Purpose of the study.....	2
2.3 Questions for the study.....	2
<b>3.0 Methodology.....</b>	<b>3</b>
3.1 Study approach.....	3
3.2 Study Sample.....	3
3.3 Study process.....	3
<b>4.0 Findings.....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>5.0 Conclusions and recommendations.....</b>	<b>18</b>
5.1 Conclusions.....	18
5.2 Summary of recommendations.....	22
<b>6.0 References.....</b>	<b>23</b>

## List of Tables

Table 1: Study sample- planned and achieved

Table 2: Study tools

Table 3: Teacher as a resource in the schools visited

Table 4: Combined literacy and numeracy disaggregated by status and gender

Table 5: Reading fluently and with comprehension by status and gender

Table 6: Reading fluently and with comprehension by status and gender

Table 7: Learners in target classes by age

## List of Figures

Figure 1: Enrolment across the classes by gender

Figure 2: Average enrolment by class

Figure 3: Proportion of girls enrolled in school by class

Figure 4: Enrolment by refugee status

Figure 5: Proportion of learners of the refugee status

Figure 6: School infrastructure

Figure 7: Toilet stance to pupil ratio by gender

Figure 8: Feeling of participation by refugee children

Figure 9: Feeling of being valued and able to speak up by refugee children

Figure 10: Feeling of safety by refugee children in

Figure 11: Learners opinion of how nationals participate in school activities

Figure 12: Learners opinion of how nationals are valued and can speak up at school

Figure 13: Learners opinion of how nationals feel safe at school

Figure 14: Attendance rates in selected class by class disaggregated by gender

Figure 15: Attendance rates in selected class by status disaggregated by gender

Figure 16: Proportion of learners enrolled in selected schools by refugee status

## Executive Summary

The purpose of the study was to explore and understand the integration issues for schools with large numbers of refugee children. Drawing from a case study of four schools in Yumbe district, the study that was conducted in September-October 2022 explored issues related to school management, use of resources, language diversity, teaching and learning processes and how children (irrespective of their residence status) experienced school in relation, but not limited to, speaking up, participation in class, feeling safe in school spaces, feeling safe on the way to and from school and feeling valued.

Using a mixed methods approach and a descriptive survey design, a sample of 530 informants consisting of 448 learners from Primary 3-Primary 6, 60 parents, 4 head-teachers, 16 teachers, 7 community leaders, 2 education officials and 1 development agency representative was included in the study. The study tools included questionnaires (administered to learners of both national and refugee status), adapted Uwezo learning assessment tools, school questionnaires and key informant interview guides (for teachers, parents, education officials, community leaders and development partner representatives).

The study revealed the following:

- (1) Schools with a large intake of refugee children are large taking an average of 2,000 learners, 61% of them mostly who are of refugee status while enrolling slightly more boys than girls.
- (2) The schools face an acute shortage of teachers with female teachers only accounting for a third of the teachers.
- (3) All the four schools have clean water, and provide sanitary towels to girls. However, the infrastructure availability varies in the four schools.
- (4) Most refugee children participate in school activities without discrimination, feel safe in and on the way to school, are free to speak up and feel valued.
- (5) Most children of the national status participate in school activities without discrimination, feel safe in and on way to school, are free to speak up and feel valued.
- (6) School attendance is low among the learners attending schools visited in the study.
- (7) Reading competencies among the learners in the schools visited are critically low regardless of the refugee status.
- (8) The language of instruction in the schools visited is inconsistent with the official language policy.
- (9) Few children in the select schools are attending age appropriate classes revealing the problem of overage children.
- (10) In the absence of the children of refugee status in the schools visited, the sustainability of the interventions would raise a concern.

The study draws the following conclusions from the findings:

First of all, schools in the host community are responsive to the presence of refugee children. Local communities have set aside land for the construction of school infrastructure through the support of the development partners, the schools allow for the inclusion of assistant teachers as a teaching resource. These teachers are assigned roles that go beyond the translation responsibilities, all the schools visited have adopted English as the language of instruction from early grades, they coopt parents of refugee status on the PTAs, they distribute student leadership roles equally among all learners and have adopted ethos that promotes cohesion among the learners.

Secondly, the presence of learners of refugee status in the host community schools has introduced a number of advantages. These advantages include improved school infrastructure, increased school enrolments, increased teaching and learning resources, made the schools appreciate diversity and resulted in diversification of the instructional approaches such as the adoption of accelerated learning models.

Thirdly, the presence of learners of refugee status in the host community schools has also introduced challenges to the schools. Among these challenges are a strain on the physical infrastructure, low attendance rates, sustained low completion rates, the language in education implementation dilemma and sometimes see the spillover of tensions in the community that pity the host and refugees.

Lastly, a large proportion of the learners in the select schools (regardless of being nationals or refugees) feel that the school environments allow them to participate in school activities, feel safe in and on the way to school, feel valued and feel that they can speak up about their concerns.

The following are a summary of the issues that need to be addressed in relation to schooling in refugee settlements based on the visited schools:

- 1) Focus on interventions that would improve school attendance through addressing barriers in the community, at school and at the individual learner level that facilitates the absenteeism.
- 2) Implement measures that will increase retention rates among the learners from Primary 4 where drop out rates exacerbate in the focus schools.
- 3) Invest in literacy programs to improve acquisition of foundational learning.
- 4) Resolve the language in education policy dilemma in the target schools.
- 5) Deliberately invest on sustainability measures for the impact created from the tripartite partnership.

## 1.0 Background to the Study

### 1.1 Refugee situation in Uganda

Uganda is one of the leading countries that **host people** of refugee status. Located in a region where political instability is rife, Uganda has been home to people of refugee status, particularly in the Northern, West Nile and Western regions and sub-regions hosting refugees from countries amongst them Democratic Republic of Congo, Rwanda, Burundi, South Sudan and Ethiopia. Uganda has a number of refugee settlements, the major ones being Acholi-Pii, Bidibidi, Imvepi, Kampala, Kiryandongo, Kyaka II, Kyangwali, Nakivale, Palorinya, Rhino Camp and Rwamwanja. According to the Office of the Prime Minister, Almost 50% of refugees in Uganda are located in the Bidi Bidi, Paringinya and Rhino refugee settlements, located in the northwest region of the country. Additionally, South Sudan accounts for 62% of refugees in Uganda, while the Democratic Republic of the Congo accounts for 29%. Of the three camps above, Bidibidi settlement hosted approximately 270,000 refugees, making it the largest refugee settlement in Uganda at the time of the research in October 2022.

### 1.2 About Bidibidi Refugee Settlement

Touted to be the second largest refugee camp in the world, the refugee settlement area is spread over the expansive area covering 250 square kilometres of the eastern half of the District, stretching southward from the South Sudanese border and spilling over into Moyo district along the western bank of the Kochi River. The transformation of Bidibidi happened over the last six years when several non-governmental organisations and the Government of Uganda began working in the area to address the needs of the asylum seekers from South Sudan in 2016. This has seen the settlement grow rapidly in population to close to 270,000 refugees fleeing from South Sudan. A significant portion of the settlement is based in Yumbe District.

### 1.3 About Yumbe district

Yumbe District is one of Uganda's most northern districts that borders South Sudan to the north, Moyo district to the east, Adjumani District to the southeast, Arua to the south, Maracha district to the southwest and Koboko district to the west. The district headquarters at Yumbe is located approximately 75 kilometres by road, north of Arua the largest town in the West Nile sub-region. Yumbe district is home to the Bidibidi Refugee settlement.

Found in the West Nile sub-region, Yumbe District was established in 2006 when Aringa County was split off from Arua district and renamed *Yumbe District*. Largely inhabited by the Aringa people (89%), other ethnicities include the Kakwa, Madi and the Alur whereas the Acholi (close to 2% of the district population) are scattered along River Nile and mainly engage in fishing and hunting. As such, the languages spoken in the district include the Aringa language (majority), Kakwa, Madi language and Alur languages. Kiswahili, Arabic and English are also spoken in some urban areas, particularly Yumbe town; the district headquarters. Religion-wise, the majority of the inhabitants in Yumbe district are Muslim (76%); one of the districts with the highest proportion of Muslims. According to UBOS (2019), the fertility rate in the Yumbe district stands at 7.5. It is estimated that with an annual population growth rate of 8.2%, Yumbe district has a population of 545,000 people.

#### 1.3.1 Primary education in Yumbe District

Delivery of education in Yumbe District is under the auspices of the Ministry of Education and Sports that provides the overall policy direction and implementation of the Universal Primary Education introduced in 1997. However, the reality that Yumbe is host to the largest refugee settlement of Bidi bidi brings to the fore the shared responsibility with both government and development partner agencies in the delivery of education in the district. Considering that the coordination of refugee affairs falls under

the Office of the Prime Minister while the UNHCR's mandate is to ensure that international protection is provided to refugees and durable solutions are found to ease their plight, education provision in Yumbe is a shared responsibility. To coordinate the delivery of education among the children of refugee status, Finn Church Aid works with the Office of the Prime Minister (OPM) and the UN Refugee Agency UNHCR as well as other actors in responding to the refugee situation in Uganda. FCA was selected by the OPM and UNHCR as an implementing partner in education and livelihoods in Bidibidi, Yumbe district. However, this support does not limit itself to the refugee settlements but finds a way to the host community where nationals benefit from such services such as education and healthcare.

The FCA coordinates the affairs of refugee education under its first thematic area of “Right to Education” under its three thematic pillars of Right to education, Right to livelihood and Right to peace. According to FCA 2022, Uganda accounts for 30% of the expenditure of the income of the agency. In the year 2020, the agency delivered 166,530 home learning packages distributed to children who were out of school during the COVID-19 pandemic (who include refugees and nationals). Beyond this intervention occasioned by COVID-19, it coordinated the construction of 72 classrooms in the refugee settlements, and supported over 17,000 to access vocational training in refugee contexts.

## **2.0 Purpose of the Study**

### **2.1 Rationale of the study**

The study in focus follows the findings established in the [2017 Uwezo Uganda assessment of learning in refugee contexts](#). Uwezo Uganda is famed for conducting learning assessments with a focus on literacy and numeracy using tools pegged on Primary 2, trained focus on refugee contexts, and conducting the assessment in four districts of Adjumani, Arua, Nakivale, and Yumbe. The study that sought to establish the distribution of the learning levels in the focus districts (with a focus on refugee settlements and the associated host communities) revealed issues beyond learning. The study [report](#) revealed that some government schools in the host communities had enrolled more children of refugee status than children of national status and in some cases, this ratio went up to 70%. This phenomenon informs the need for this study to establish the issues that such government schools in such contexts face as a result of the large intake of children from refugee settlements and how they respond to the integration of learners from such diverse contexts.

### **2.2 Purpose of the study**

The purpose overall of the study was to explore and understand the integration issues for schools with large numbers of refugee children. Drawing from a case study of schools in the Yumbe district, the study explored issues related to school management, use of resources, language diversity, teaching and learning processes and how children (irrespective of their residence status) experience school in relation, but not limited to, speaking up, participation in class, feeling safe in school spaces, feeling safe on the way to and from school and feeling valued.

### **2.3 Questions for the study**

The study questions were:

- 1) How do schools in the host community respond to the presence of refugee children?
- 2) What advantages do the refugee children bring to the host schools?
- 3) What challenges do intake of refugee children pose to schools in the host community enrolling them and how do they overcome the challenges?
- 4) How do children experience schooling in terms of speaking up, participation in class, feeling safe in school spaces, feeling safe on the way to and from school and feeling valued?

## 3.0 Methodology

### 3.1 Study approach

The study used a qualitative approach and applied a descriptive survey design. Drawing from a carefully selected sample of 4 schools from a predetermined district of Yumbe, the study methodology takes into consideration the following:

- 1) Inclusion of 4 government schools spread across the Bidibidi refugee settlement in Yumbe district, schools with generally a high enrolment of at least 1,500 learners; schools with over 50% of the learners who are of refugee status.
- 2) Selection of learners in Primary 3, Primary 4, Primary 5 and Primary 6 who include both boys and girls who are of both national and refugee status. Primary 7 learners were deliberately left out as the candidate class while Primary 1 and Primary 2 were left out due to the complexity of administering data collection tools such as questionnaires to them. In addition, samples were drawn from the learners who were present on the day of the visit; that means the decision of when to visit the schools had to be carefully made to settle on a date when attendance would be stable<sup>1</sup>.
- 3) Inclusion of teachers, parents, community leaders including religious leaders and development agency representatives as informants to complement the responses from the learners.
- 4) The use of multiple tools to collect the data. These include the use of closed-ended questionnaires aligned with the study questions, interview guides (for key informants and focused group discussions), adapted Uwezo learning assessment tools and observation checklists.

### 3.2 Study Sample

The study sample included learners, teachers, parents, community leaders and development partner organisations representatives. The target and achieved samples are shown in the table below.

Table 1: Study sample- planned and achieved

#	Informant	Planned	Achieved	Achievement
1	Learners (female/male, refugee/national) <sup>2</sup>	448	440	98%
2	Female National parents (female/male, refugee/national) <sup>3</sup>	64	60	94%
3	Head-teachers	4	4	100%
4	Community Leaders (LC1s, Religious leaders)	4	7	175%
5	District officials (Chief Administrative Officer, District Education officer and District Inspector of Schools)	2	2	100%
6	Development partner organisations Reps	1	1	100%
7	Male teachers	8	8	100%
8	Female teachers	8	8	100%
	Total	539	530	98%

### 3.3 Study process

The data collection team included a principal investigator, 4 researchers (each dedicated to a school) and four enumerators (all four from the community – from the Yumbe district that included those of refugee status). The study process included the following steps:

<sup>1</sup> Within refugee contexts, days and dates associated with food distribution could see school attendance decline. Furthermore, generally, school attendance on most mornings is always higher than afternoon.

<sup>2</sup> In each target class, 14 boys and 14 girls were selected making a sample of 112 learners in each school. A half of the selected children were to be of refugee status and the other half were to be of national status.

<sup>3</sup> In each school, 16 parents (8 male and 8 female) were to be included in the study. A half was to be of refugee status and the other half were to be of national status.



- 1) Finalisation of the study concept and obtaining all the necessary approvals at the national and district levels. The sampling frame and study tools were finalised in addition to the development of the data collection tools. The two questionnaires (pupil and school questionnaires) were then scripted on KoboCollect; a platform that was used to collect the data and ensure a short turnaround with entry increasing the validity of the findings. The following tools were used in the data collection:

Table 2: Study tools

#	Tool	Informant
1	Pupil questionnaire	Learners in P3-P6
2	Learning assessment (Assessment story and division tasks) <sup>4</sup>	Learners in P3-P6
3	School questionnaire	Head teacher
4	Teachers group informant interview	Teachers teaching P3-P6
5	Key informant interview	LC1/Religious leaders, Development partner agencies reps
6	Focused Group Discussion Guide	Parents

- 2) Recruitment and training of the data collection teams (four researchers and other 12 field assistants) to make a team of 4 people visiting a school. The field assistants were centrally trained on the process, data collection protocols and ethical considerations. A process pilot was conducted to confirm the data collection team's readiness.
- 3) Actual data collection steps involved
  - a. Dedicated three days of visit to each school. A team of 4 members was dedicated to each school and assigned codes and responsibilities.
  - b. At each school, the team leader introduced the study to the head teacher, finalised the mobilisation of informants (teachers, parents and local leadership), led in the selection of the children and assigned field assistants the tasks for each day. In each school, children were assessed during the morning hours with preference starting with assessing and interviewing children in lower grades. Learners were assessed and interviewed orally and on a one-on-one basis.
  - c. Team leaders conducted the key informant interviews and focused group discussions
- 4) Data from the questionnaires was downloaded and cleaned. The notes from the key informant interviews and FGDs were organised around the themes from the study questions
- 5) Tables were generated based on the study questions.

## 4.0 Findings

These findings are organised around, school and associated factors of providing education, the learning and the issues that the schools face in integrating learners of both refugee and national status. The following 11 findings emerge from the study.

<sup>4</sup>The Uwezo literacy assessment has four levels that include 10 letters/syllables, 10 words, a paragraph of 4 sentences and a story of two paragraphs (with two questions; a direct question and an inferred question). For this study, only a story (adapted from the 2021 assessment tool) with the two questions was administered.

The Uwezo numeracy test has tasks on number recognition, quantity discrimination and operations- addition, subtraction, multiplication and division. The assessment also contains an ethno math question used to assess mathematics in the lives of the children. For this study, only division tasks from the 2021 assessment tool were used to assess the selected children.



1. Schools with a large intake of refugee children are large taking an average of 2,000 learners, 61% of them mostly who are of refugee status while enrolling slightly more boys than girls.

- A. **There is an acute classroom shortage in the schools with one classroom holding up to 206 learners.** There are only 39 classrooms across the four selected schools and the classrooms are expected to handle 8,069 learners. The average pupil-classroom ratio of 206:1 is more than five times the recommended size of a classroom serving 40 learners.
- B. **Enrolments are highest in Primary 1 and lowest in Primary 7 where they drop by 560% demonstrating high wastage rates.** Whereas there are 1,830 learners enrolled in Primary 1 (an average of 458 per school), there are only 324 (an average of 81 per school) learners enrolled in Primary 7.

Figure 1: Enrolment across the classes by gender

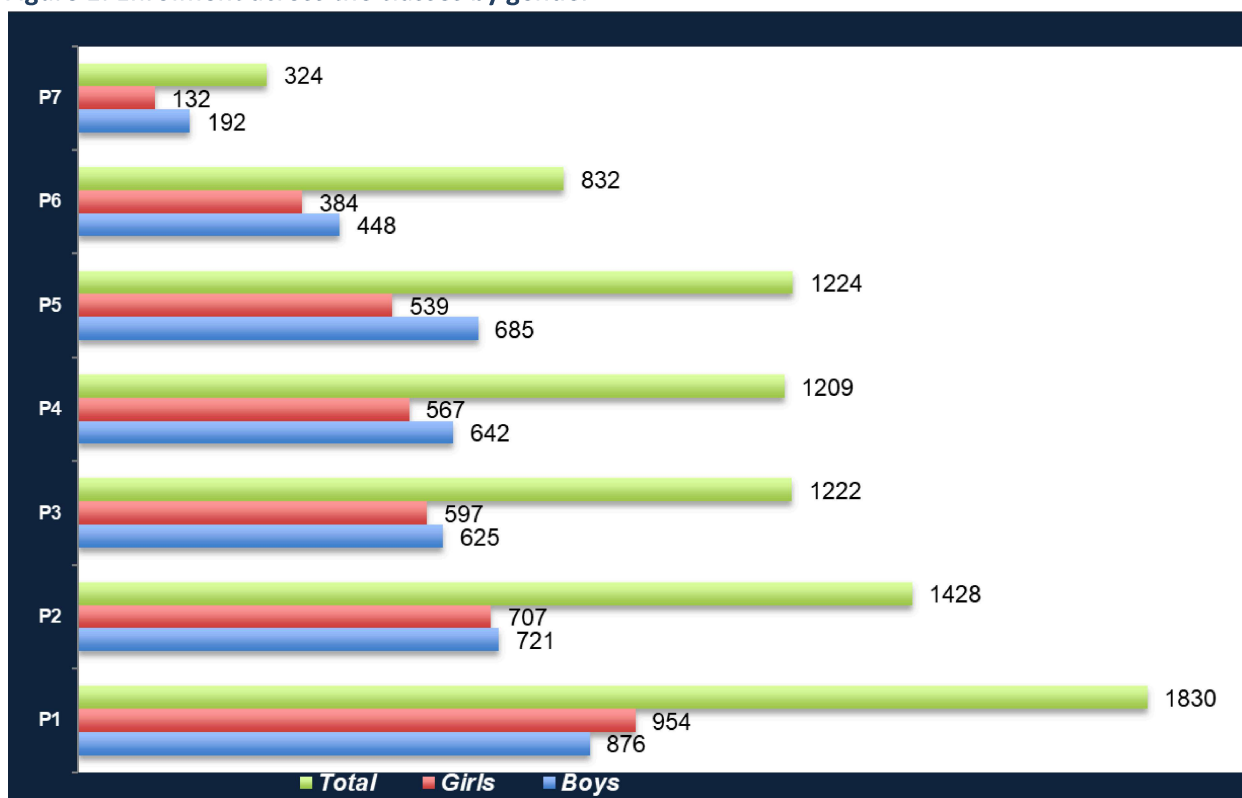
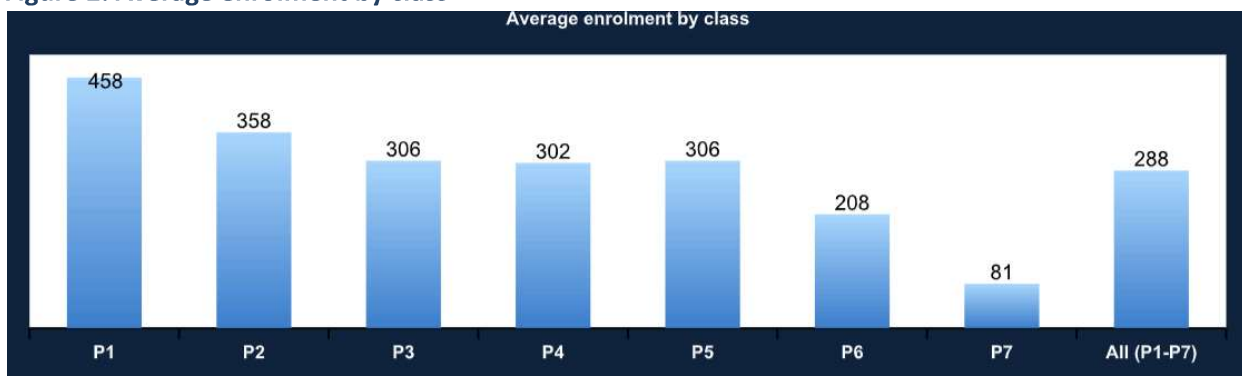
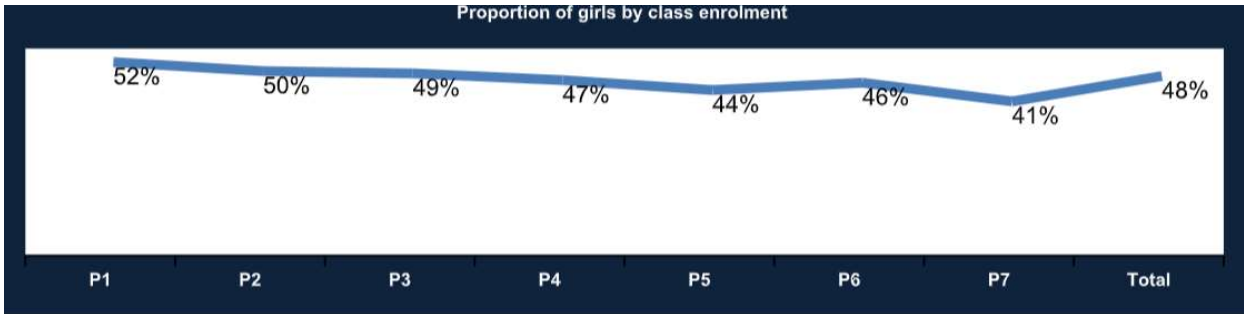


Figure 2: Average enrolment by class



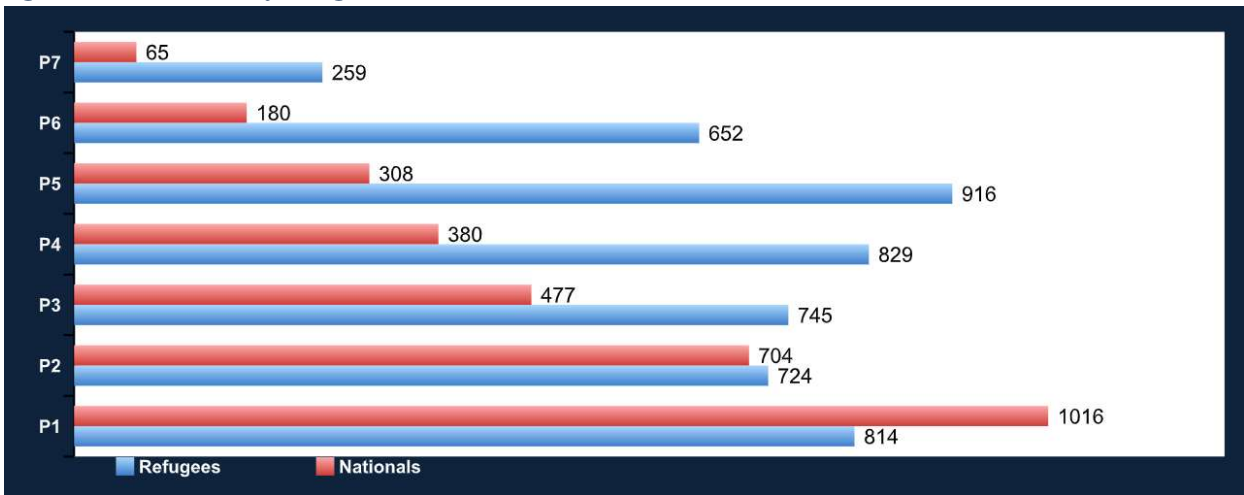
Further, there are more girls than boys enrolled in Primary 1, but this changes as the classes go higher. By Grade 7, the ratio of boys to girls reaches an all-time low of 59:41. The average ratio of boys to girls across the four schools is 52:48 meaning that there are 4% more boys enrolled in schools than girls.

**Figure 3: Proportion of girls enrolled in school by class**

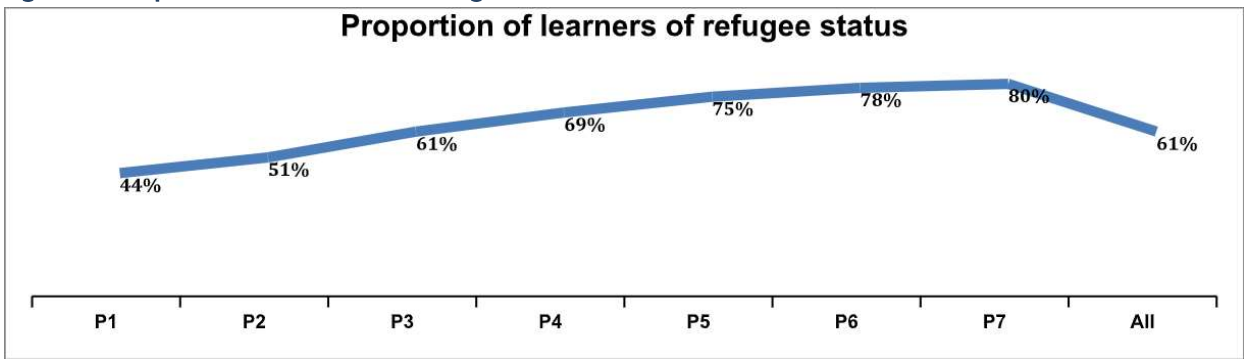


Up to 61% of the children enrolled in the selected schools is of refugee status. The proportion of children of refugee status is lowest in Primary 1 (at 44%) and highest in Primary 7 where it almost doubles to reach 80% (Figures 4 and 5).

**Figure 4: Enrolment by refugee status**



**Figure 5: Proportion of learners of refugee status**



## 2. Schools face an acute shortage of teachers with female teachers only accounting for a third of the teachers

Teachers are an integral resource in curriculum implementation in any school. Teachers as a resource encompass adequacy (number), quality (pre-service training capacity and continuing professional development-CPD) as well as appropriateness (gender distribution). Across the four schools visited, the

average number of teachers in every school is 26 serving an average pupil enrolment of 2,017 learners. This translates to a ratio of 1:78 that is way above the recommended ratio of 1:40 learners.

Further, the teachers are expected to be trained prior to be assigned teaching and other associated roles. However, on average, every school visited has 3 untrained teachers who are mostly men.

In addition, although the proportion of the girls enrolled in school is 48%, only a third (33%) of the teachers in the schools visited were women (Table 3).

**Table 3: Teacher as a resource in the schools visited**

Teachers indicators	Number
Teacher to Pupil ratio	1:78
Average number of teachers in each school	26
Average number of female teachers	8.8
Average number of trained teachers	22.5
Average number of female trained teachers	8.25

### 3. All the four schools have clean water, and provide sanitary towels to girls. However, infrastructure availability varies in the four schools

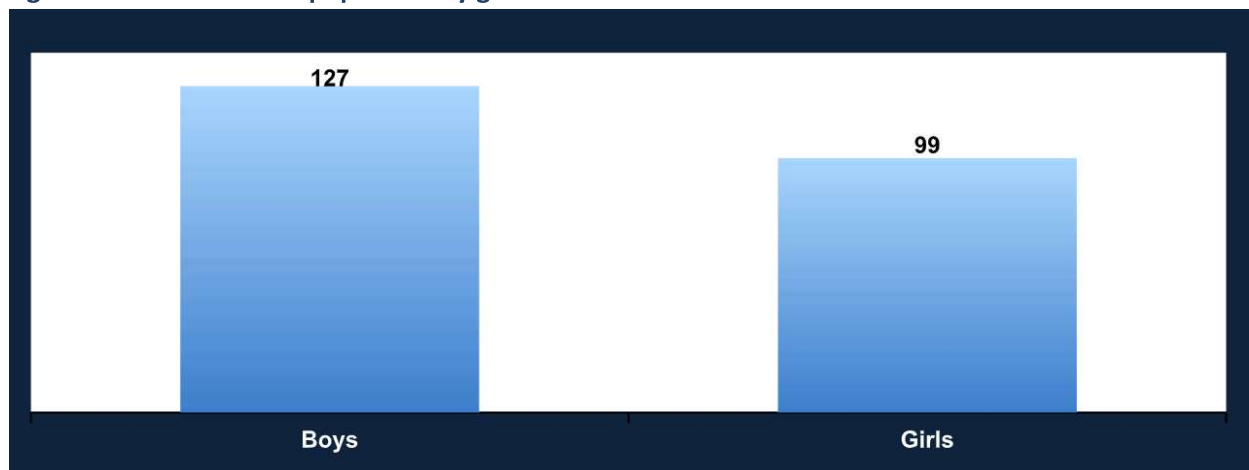
Schools require maintaining environments that facilitate learning. These environmental conditions include the physical infrastructure, water, sanitation hygiene and psychosocial environments that are safe for learning. The physical infrastructure in schools includes the availability of adequate classrooms, libraries, toilet facilities, electricity, and playing fields among others.

There is a library facility in one school, two schools have their compounds fenced, two schools have an administration block and two schools are connected to electricity. On the other hand, three schools have a playing field. All four schools have clean water in the compound from the borehole and the pipe as the source. Similarly, all four schools provide sanitary towels to girls. See Figure 6.

**Figure 6: School infrastructure (n=4)**



Figure 7: Toilet stance to pupil ratio by gender



#### 4. Most learners of the refugee status participate in school activities without discrimination, feel safe in and on way to school, are free to speak up and feel valued

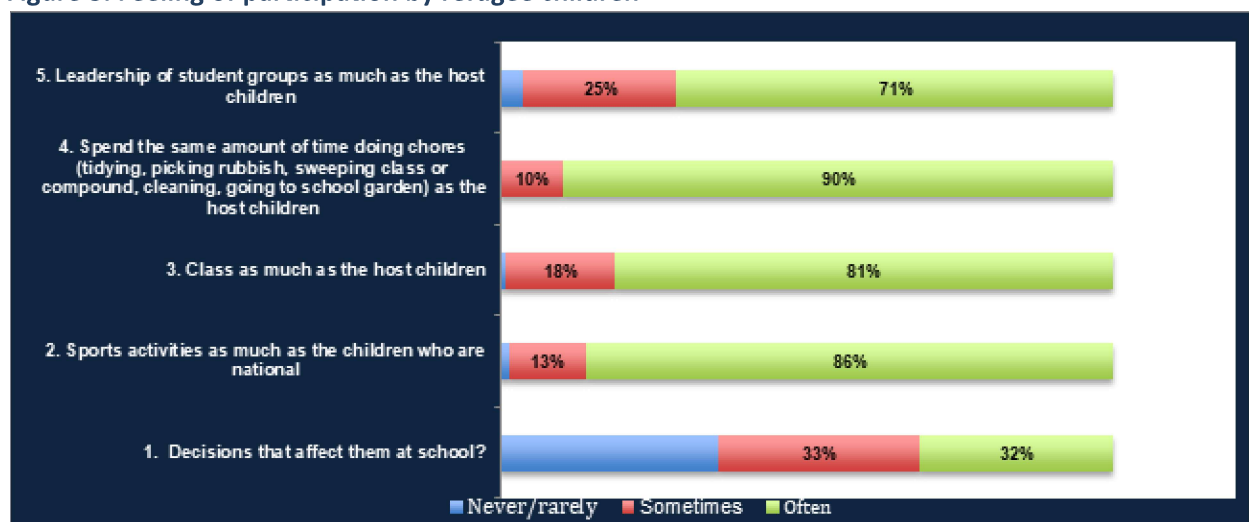
Children of refugee status are classified as vulnerable groups, in need of more than just learning and teaching experiences that are defined in the curriculum. The contexts in which they learn are different, new geographical contexts in addition to exposure to the curriculum that is different from their national curricula in the countries of origin. Basically, their learning conditions are modified in almost all aspects.

In the context of Uganda, select schools allow for the integration of children of refugee status within government schools. As such, the complexities in the relationships between the children and the caregivers (parents and teachers) may affect how the refugee children feel safe, participate in school activities, feel valued and therefore speak up on issues that affect them.

On the issue of participation by children of refugee status (Figure 8):

- (i) 90% of the learners are of the opinion that there is no discrimination in the allocation of chores at school. The children of refugee status are allocated the same tasks as the children who are nationals.
- (ii) More than 80% of the learners are of the view that teachers allow all children regardless of their refugee status to participate in classroom and sporting activities.
- (iii) Close to 35% of the learners were of the view that refugee children are rarely involved in making decisions that affect them at school.

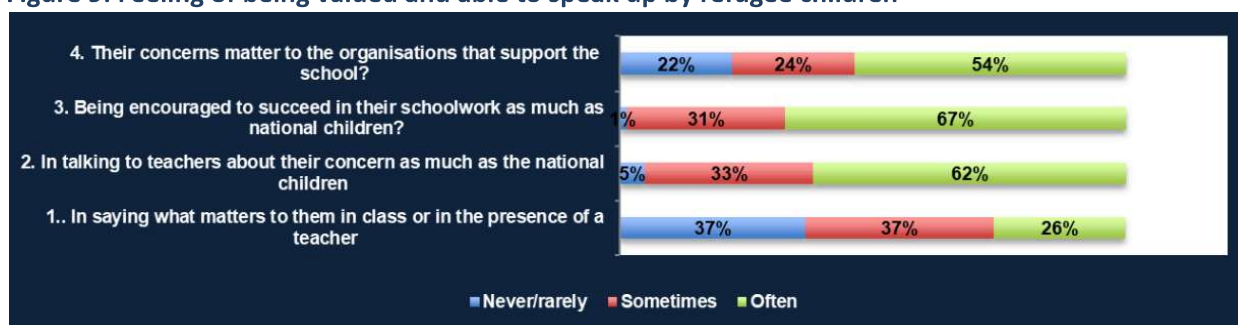
Figure 8: Feeling of participation by refugee children



On the issue of being valued and speaking up by children of refugee status (Figure 9):

- (i) More than 60% of the learners were of the view that children of refugee status are often encouraged to succeed in school work and are free to speak up to teachers about matters that concern them
- (ii) More than half (54%) of the learners were of the view that organisations that support the school often get concerned about matters affecting children of refugee status.
- (iii) Slightly a quarter of the learners (26%) were of the view that children of refugee status often spoke up on matters that concern them in class in presence of a teacher.

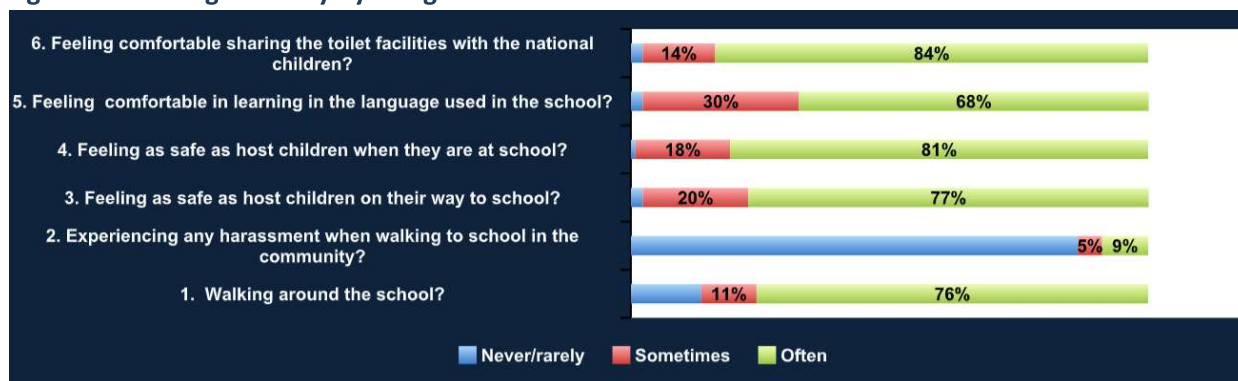
**Figure 9: Feeling of being valued and able to speak up by refugee children**



On the issue of feeling safe by children of refugee status:

- (i) More than 90% of the learners often feel that there is no harassment when walking towards the school
- (ii) More than 80% of the learners often feel safe at school and are comfortable sharing toilet facilities
- (iii) More than 70% of the learners often feel safe on their way to school and while walking around the school
- (iv) Close to 70% of the learners often feel comfortable in the language used in the school.

**Figure 10: Feeling of safety by refugee children**



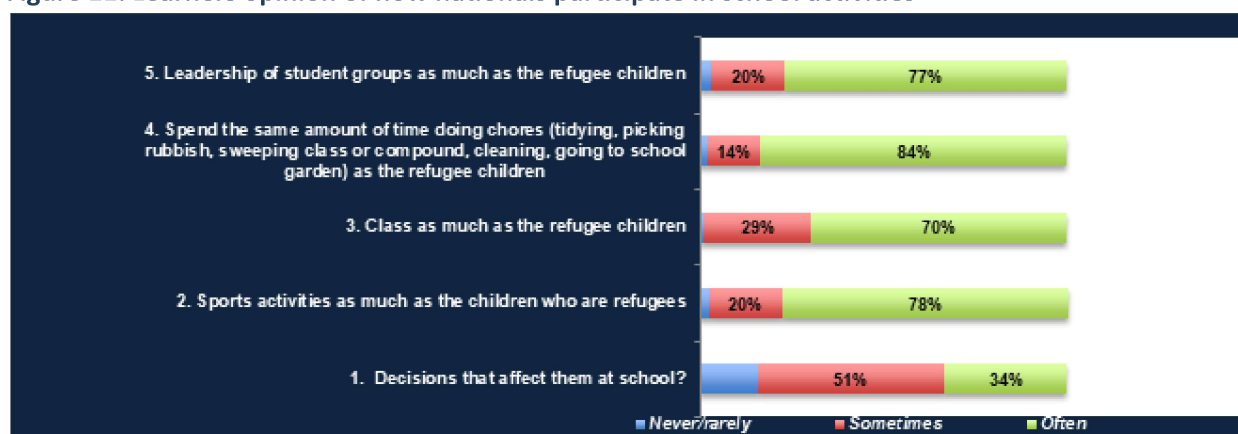
## 5. Most learners of the national status participate in school activities without discrimination, feel safe in and on way to school, are free to speak up and feel valued

On the issue of participation by children of national status:

- (i) More than 80% of the learners are of the opinion that there is no discrimination in the allocation of chores at school. The children of the refugee status are allocated the same tasks as the children who are nationals.
- (ii) Close to 80% of the learners are of the view that teachers often allow all children regardless of their refugee status to participate in classroom and sporting activities.
- (iii) Close to 15% of the learners were of the view that learners of the national status are rarely

involved in making decisions that affect them at school.

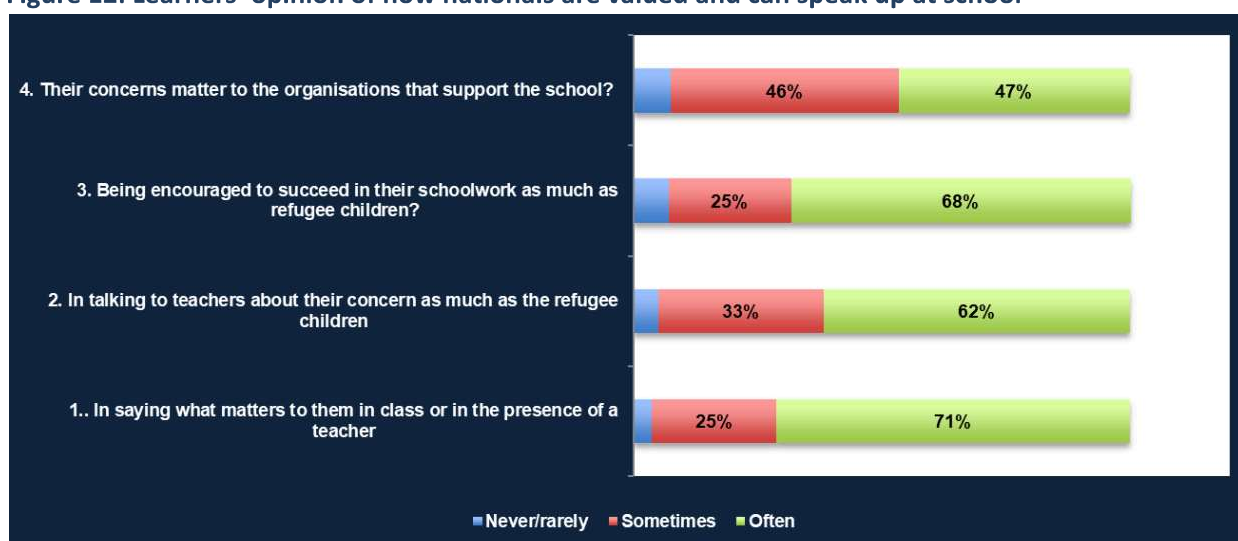
**Figure 11: Learners opinion of how nationals participate in school activities**



On the issue of being valued and speaking up by children of the national status:

- (i) More than 70% of the learners were of the view that children of the national status are often encouraged to succeed in school work and are free to speak up to teachers about matters that concern them
- (ii) Almost a half (47%) of the learners were of the view that organisations that support the school often get concerned on matters affecting children of the national status.
- (iii) Slightly a quarter of the learners (62%) were of the view that children of the national status often spoke up on matters that concern them in class in presence of a teacher.

**Figure 12: Learners' opinion of how nationals are valued and can speak up at school**

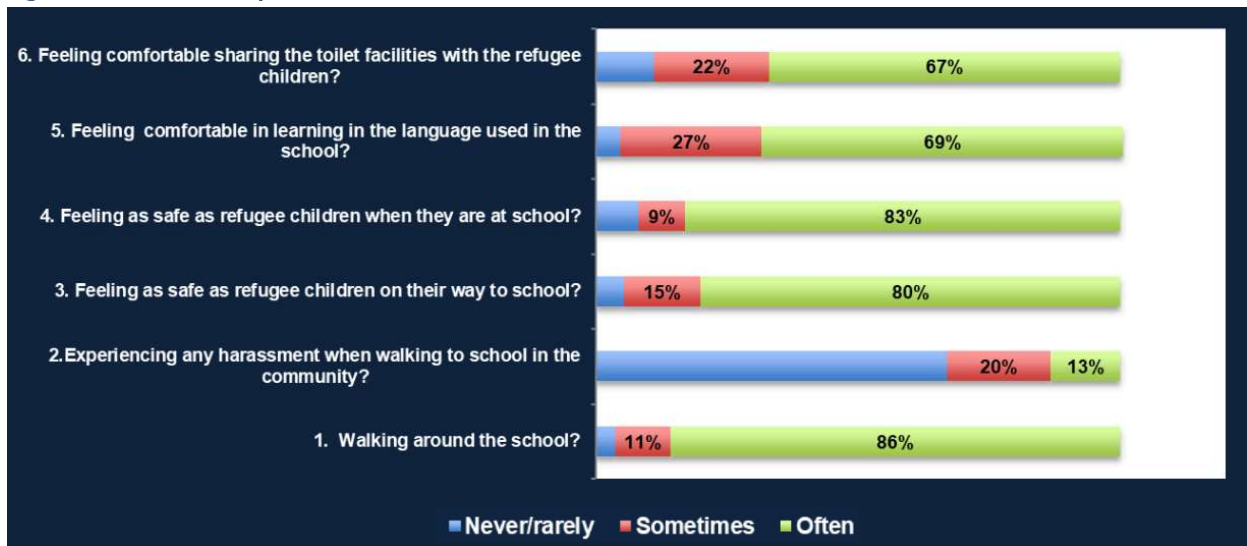


On the issue of feeling safe by children of the national status (Figure 13):

- (i) Close to 70% of the learners often feel that there is no harassment when walking towards school and sharing toilet facilities at school
- (ii) More than 80% of the learners often feel safe at school and walking around the school
- (iii) Close to 70% of the learners often feel comfortable in the language used in the school.



**Figure 13: Learners opinion of how nationals feel safe at school**



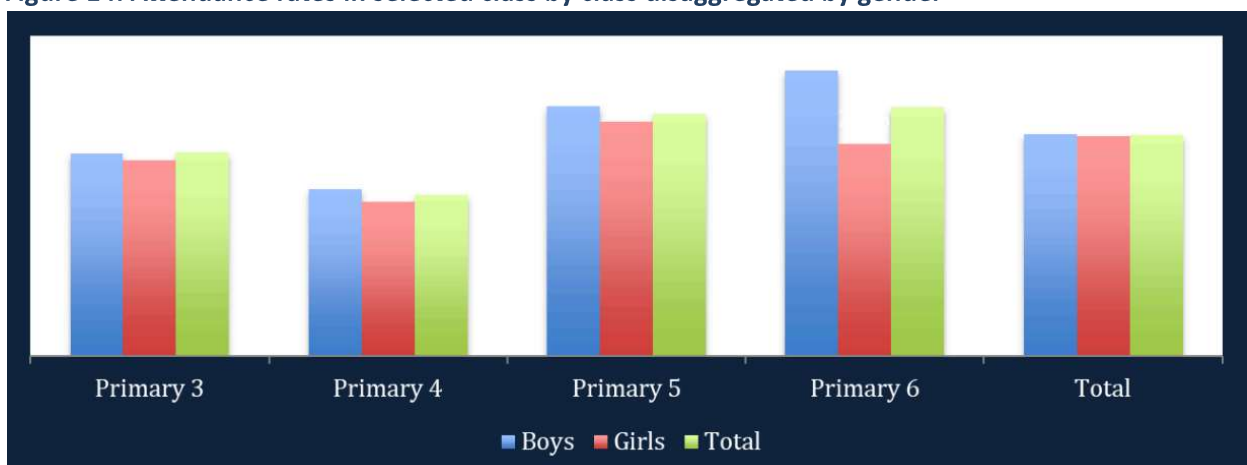
## 6. School attendance is low among the learners attending selected schools

Whilst securing enrolment is necessary, ensuring consistent attendance is equally critical. The seventy-two percent absenteeism rate indicates systemic barriers requiring urgent investigation. School attendance measured through absenteeism is necessary considering that learning experiences are planned and delivered on daily basis. Absenteeism denies children an opportunity for curriculum experience. With lessons organised for around 30/35 minutes on each learning day, a day missed from school is quite a lot for a learner. A spot check on school attendance in the classes was conducted on the morning of the survey. This was to capture attendance on any “normal” school day.

The findings show that school attendance in the selected schools was very low with more than 70% of the learners missing school on the day of the visit. Specifically as shown in figures 14 and 15:

- (i) Absenteeism was lowest in Primary 3 where only 25% of the learners of either gender were in school on the day of the visit. School attendance was highest in Primary 6 where 31% of the learners were present on the day of the visit.
- (ii) School attendance was slightly highest among the boys in Primary 6 (36%) and lowest among girls in Primary 4 (19%)
- (iii) On average, 72% of both boys and girls were absent from school on the day of the visit.

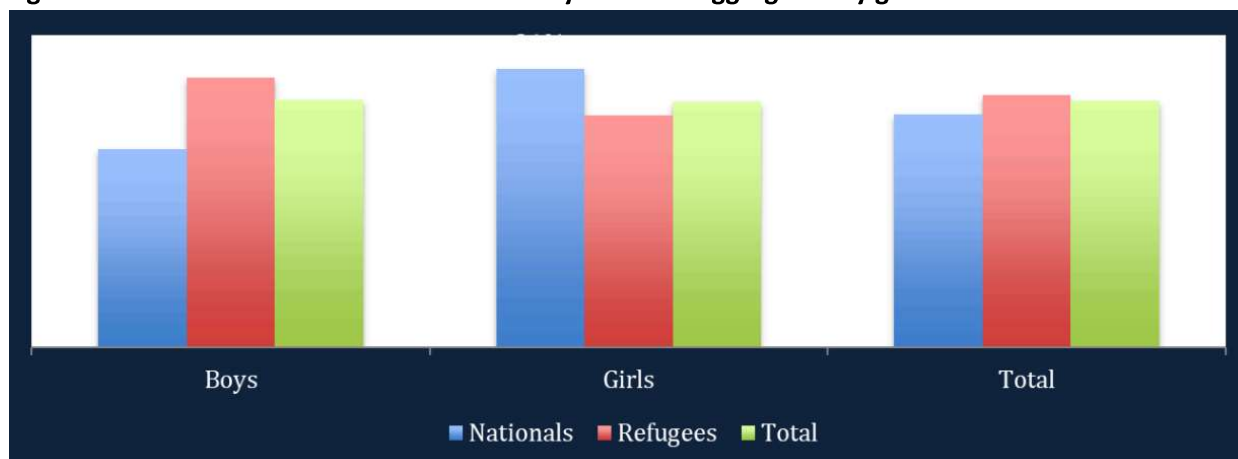
**Figure 14: Attendance rates in selected class by class disaggregated by gender**



An analysis of the attendance by status reveals not much difference in attendance between the refugees and the nationals. Specifically:

- (i) There are slightly more refugees (28%) than nationals (26%) who were in school on the day of the visit
- (ii) There were more refugee boys (30%) who were in school on the day of the visit compared with boys who are nationals (22%)
- (iii) There were more national girls (31%) who were in school on the day of the visit than refugee girls (26%)

**Figure 15: Attendance rates in selected class by status disaggregated by gender**



## **7. Reading competencies among the learners in the select schools are critically low regardless of the refugee status**

The official language of education in Uganda requires that learners be instructed in the language of the catchment areas prior to learners joining primary 4. During these formative years of learning, English is taught as a subject. Therefore, the foundation of literacy in English is important in not only measuring foundational learning but also projecting the sustainability of learning. Similarly, by end of Primary two, learners are expected to have mastered the numeracy competencies that include performing basic tasks that involve all four operations (starting with addition, followed by subtraction, moving to multiplication and ending with division).

During the visit to the four schools, an adaptation of the assessment was conducted that included assessing whether the surveyed learners could read fluently; comprehend primary two texts as per the curriculum expectation. Similarly, the adaptation of the assessment sought to establish whether the surveyed learners could also perform the division tasks.

The findings as presented in Tables 4, 5 and 6 show that even by primary 6, there is a significant proportion of learners who can neither read nor comprehend a primary two text. Similarly, more than 30% of the learners in Primary 3-Primary 6 could not perform primary 2 division tasks. Specifically

- (i) Only 15% of the learners enrolled in Primary 3-Primary 6 in the schools visited could fluently read a Primary 2 text, comprehend and perform Primary 2 division tasks. Similarly, the difference between the boys and girls was insignificant. Equally, there weren't any significant differences between the reading and numeracy competencies of the national children and the children of refugee status.



**Table 4: Combined literacy and numeracy disaggregated by status and gender**

Competent	National	Refugee	Total
Female	14.5%	13.5%	14.0%
Male	15.7%	18.0%	16.9%
Total	15.1%	15.8%	15.5%

- (ii) As demonstrated in table 5, the reading levels among the learners in Primary 3-Primary 6 are low with only 15% of the learners demonstrating both fluency and comprehension for a Primary 2 text. There weren't any significant differences between boys and girls. In the same vein, there weren't many significant differences in the reading levels between children who are nationals and the learners who are of refugee status.

**Table 5: Reading fluently and with comprehension by status and gender**

Competent	National	Refugee	Total
Female	14.5%	13.5%	14.0%
Male	15.7%	18.0%	16.9%
Total	15.1%	15.8%	15.5%

- (iii) As demonstrated in Table 6 below, the numeracy competencies were much higher than the literacy competencies as shown in Tables 4 and 5 above. In the case of numeracy, the proportion of the children who could perform Primary 2 division tasks was almost 74% that was almost five times the proportion of the children who read and comprehended a Primary 2 text. Similarly, there were more learners of the national status than of the refugee status who demonstrated competency in performing division tasks. Furthermore, there were more boys than girls who demonstrated numeracy competencies.

**Table 6: Reading fluently and with comprehension by status and gender**

Competence	National	Refugee	Total
Female	69.1%	64.0%	66.5%
Male	88.0%	73.9%	80.8%
Total	78.4%	68.9%	73.6%

## 8. The language of instruction in the schools is inconsistent with the official language policy

The official language policy in education takes cognisance of the varied language contexts in the country. It recognises that contexts could be monolingual (one language is spoken), bilingual (two languages are spoken) and multi-lingual (more than two languages are spoken). The policy is explicit on the use of the language in each of these contexts- the need to use the language spoken in the catchment areas. As such, this requires resources that include teachers and materials that would use the language of the catchment area with ease to offer instruction.

Although the contexts visited in the study could be considered bilingual, the linguistic differences in the languages (spoken by the refugees and the Kakwa-Aringa spoken by the nationals are a world apart). As such, a middle ground would be appropriate and in this case, English would be most appropriate.

In all the schools visited, the language of instruction across the grades is English. In some classes where there is the use of local languages (rarely), the inclusion of assistant teachers (who are of refugee status) helps to resolve the language barrier. They sit in classes, and offer translations where appropriate but still offer instruction to the learners. For the children who speak the local languages, the teachers in the schools do not necessarily speak the language spoken in the catchment areas. Furthermore, there is a shortage of material (books) that could be used let alone to offer instruction in the language spoken in the catchment area. A teacher remarked:

*“I come from Eastern Uganda, I cannot speak the Kakwa-Aringa spoken by most of the children here. Even if I were to translate a concept in the local language, some concepts cannot just be translated. In college, I was not trained on how to teach using local languages. Even when I have an assistant teacher translating in class, I feel sometimes that it is just a waste of time having someone interjecting when you are explaining a concept”*

**(Classroom teacher in a selected school, 2022)**

Language emerges as a substantive barrier despite the pragmatic adoption of English across grades, with literacy outcomes revealing the significant limitations of current pedagogical approaches. The literacy levels demonstrated by less than 16% of all the learners in Primary 3-Primary 6 who can read a text reveals the dilemma that language brings in such contexts. In some cases, it is noticeable to observe learners sit in distinct groups where they can speak a familiar language. On the outside, this may be seen as learners who do not want to interact when in the real sense, language still serves as a barrier to children interacting freely with each other no matter their refugee status.

## **9. The host schools admitting learners of refugee status are large, holding more than 2,000 learners**

There is no standard definition of school size in Uganda. And this phenomenon is global. There has not been a clear definition of what would constitute the criterion for classifying small, mid-sized let alone large school sizes. School establishment has largely been associated with the “perceived” need whose indicators include the distance walked by children to school considering that a significant proportion of children access the school through walking. On the other hand, communities (particularly the parents and leadership) could verbalise the need for establishing a school and work closely with education officials to establish a school. Even within the context of the four visited schools, this is the case. **The tripartite partnership that involves the community, the Government and the development partners** is evident in the establishment of the schools. To start with, the communities set aside land on which the schools were established. The Government took over the schools, established the staff ceiling, deployed the teachers and adopted the schools as UPE schools. On the other hand, the development partners are credited with developing close to 90% of the infrastructure in these four schools.

Considering the proximity of the schools to the refugee settlements, it is obvious that the majority of the children would be children of refugee status. The settlement patterns for the nationals in these areas are not commensurate with the settlement patterns of the locals. As such, the proportion of the national children attending the selected schools is lower than the proportion of the refugee children attending the selected primary schools.

However, there are similarities in the trends related to overall school sizes, attendance and retention. The proportion of children attending these schools who are of refugee status is 61% as was reported in Figure 5, compared to the national that stands at 39%. However, a deeper analysis reveals the gender and class dynamics where there is an assumed pattern. Whereas the proportion of the children who are

of refugee status stands at 44% in grade one, this proportion increases to an all-time high of 80% when it reaches Primary 7 meaning that four in every 5 children in Primary 7 are of refugee status. On the other hand, this may imply that reveal that close to half of the learners of the national status who enroll in Primary 1 fail to reach Primary 7 years later. This demonstrates the wastage rates through perceived dropout rates among the nationals.

In seeking to establish the widespread wastage demonstrated through high dropout rates among learners who are nationals, the leadership within the communities agree on a coalition of factors- all human-related factors that could account for this constant phenomenon. The “decreasing demand” for education among the locals could reveal the despondency. A community leader had this to say

*“But even if they remain in school, they don’t learn anything at all, they still finish school and fail, the secondary schools are far and even those who finish school do not get jobs. They are just here like those who didn’t go to school”*

**(Community leader, Yumbe 2022)**

With a stark reality of differences, a parent of a child with refugee status had this to say

*For us as refugees, education is the only hope. My daughter has no option but to finish school, maybe get a scholarship, go outside the country, get a job and marry a man from out there. She knows that this is possible and I always tell her to work hard. I don’t want her to play around with her education. She saw her friend who went away and now sends money to her parents”*

**(A female parent to a child of refugee status, 2022)**

These two worlds apart of people experiencing similar education experiences have two different prognoses of what is perceived as opportunities and lack of them thereof brought by education. To the children of the national status, the prospects of a better future with education are bleak with a grim future that is painted with giving up, settling for the fate that potentially spins into a cycle of low motivation for education and reduced effort to improve outcomes. On the other hand, the children of refugee status could be having a painted world of possibilities enabled by education outcomes that include completion of primary education, performance in selection examinations as well as transition prospects.

Such a world of children attending the same school but with different possibilities in their minds could reveal a lot. In an ideal world, educating children is realising their right to infinite possibilities (as an enabler to self-determination). For the children of the national status, the odds (in the minds of the parents) do not favour these children. This could have created a dilemma that spins to the schools, low motivation among the children, rampant absenteeism of up to 60% and eventual school dropout.

Inquiring where the girls go after dropping out of school, the responses from the different stakeholders (parents, teachers, community leaders and education officials) concur that the girls get married off to “ready” suitors. But even in such a religious homogeneous community where Islam is practiced by over 90% of the local community members, the religious leaders are aware of their moral and legal responsibilities of marrying adults and therefore deny consummating marriages involving children.

Thus, school sizes are not just about numbers. Perhaps, they are more of the intricacies involved in balancing the prospects of education with the current realities for both children of the refugee and the national status. Definitely, the enrolments in the registers, the attendance rates, drop out and completion rates are worth interrogating in these contexts.

## 10. Few children in the select schools are attending age appropriate classes revealing the problem of overage children in primary schools

Curriculums all over are largely age appropriate. Although models such as problem-based and competence-based learning are articulated, the designs of curriculums are largely age appropriate. To start with, age defines the entry age for schooling. In Uganda, the official primary entry age for children is an attainment of 6 years. Although cases of underage are reported in some contexts, particularly in urban areas, this age is largely the norm across the country. In addition, an allowance of one year (7 years) is common in some contexts across the country. Further, it is an expectation that children spend seven years completing primary schooling. Globally, the debate has raged on the appropriateness of transiting children after one year revealing the age-appropriateness approach in curriculum designs. In cases where children fail to achieve and demonstrate the expected learning competencies, school systems have held back children for one more year (grade repetition) an undesirable schooling phenomenon.

However, the debate has also been rife on the place of automatic transition without accountability. For instance, who should be held accountable when learners fail to achieve and demonstrate the defined competencies? Questions in this debate include; is the curriculum ambitious or well-defined to specify the time it would take for children to acquire and demonstrate the competencies? What role should teachers play in ensuring that the needs of all learners are met to enable all children in the classroom to achieve and demonstrate these competencies? What role should individual differences play in drawing conclusions on the achieved and demonstrated competencies?

**Table 7: Learners in target classes by age**

Class	Primary 3	Primary 4	Primary 5	Primary 6
9 Years	2%			
10 Years	11%	0%		
11 Years	11%	5%	1%	1%
12 Years	45%	25%	10%	2%
13 Years	26%	28%	14%	7%
14 Years	13%	30%	28%	12%
15 Years	1%	7%	23%	17%
16 Years	0%	6%		29%
17 Years	0%	1%	5%	17%
18 Years	0%	0%	3%	5%
19 Years+	0%	0%	0%	1%
Modal Age	12	14	14	16

### Key

Age appropriate class  Modal Age

The situation in the schools visited reveals a reality of overage children in some cases of up to 4 years. One may argue that the COVID-19 situation that led to school closures for 18 months would discount the age appropriateness by 3-4 years. As it is, children are not attending age-appropriate classes whether nationals or those of refugee status. This presents potential problems that include possible dropouts, as learners get frustrated with the difficult curriculum.

### Case of Moses, not his real name

Moses is 35 years old and is of refugee status. Moses walks 14 kilometres to and from school. He is in p5. Moses is a quiet student who rarely interacts with other pupils. His towering figure in his long legs protruding from the brown pants makes his stature intimidating to his p5 classmates. He sits at the back and still struggles to fit on the desks designed for children almost three times his age. For Moses, he can rarely be seen playing with his “mates.” He is older than some of the teachers in the school. He is an average performer in class and he rarely asks questions in class. Details about his family life are scanty apart from knowing that he is of refugee status.

The above case illustrates the salient issues that schools visited face when handling extreme overage learners. The overage issue is one that is not characterised by policy answers. From the admission eligibility, screening for placement, learning support systems needed as well as integration with the rest of schools is required particularly where enforcing discipline is concerned, the phenomenon is left for schools to figure out the answers. For equity-based models where accelerated learning is embraced, the policy space is still open and still stuck with a lack of clarity on how the needs of over-age learners could be handled. The curriculum material (books and classroom environments) are designed for children learners and not necessarily designed for “learners”. And this is not any different in the schools visited where there is a large intake of learners of refugee status.

#### **11. In the absence of the children of refugee status in the schools visited, the sustainability of the interventions would raise significant concern, representing a critical systemic vulnerability that requires deliberate attention**

Considered a public good, education gets subjected to the macro-economic contexts that determine the quantity and quality of its provision. With the Constitution guaranteeing the children's right to education facilitated through the provision of UPE and other accompanying policies, primary school education is a topic at the centre of national development. With the current annual budget allocation of close to 2.7% of the national GDP, education is a major spender. With an annual population growth rate that is considered one of the highest in East and Central Africa, the population is an important driver of the education provision in Uganda. It is common knowledge that infrastructure development is capital intensive and its maintenance can equally be capital intensive to increase its life.

The increasing demand for recruiting enough, quality and well-remunerated teachers is real in Uganda. Furthermore, the provision of adequate and quality infrastructure is daunting to any Government necessitating the participation of the development partners in accelerating access for underserved groups and delivering quality education models.

It emerges from the visit to the schools that prior to the development partners pitching tents in the selected schools, the infrastructure in the schools was acute and the existing was dilapidated. The onboarding of the development partners has seen the development of new infrastructure that includes classrooms, toilet and sanitation facilities, and offices including the installation of water and energy in the schools. A parent of the national status remarked:

*“Look at us over here, look at our houses around here. They are all grass-thatched. Where would we have raised the money to build these big concrete buildings? Look at this school. What else can I say about what should be done? All that we can say is thank you to those NGOs that did this. We don’t know what we would have done without them, our children now learn better. I don’t think that there is anything else that we can add”*

(A male parent of a child of national status, 2022)



This above remark illustrates the transformation that the school as an institution has brought in its neighbourhood.

### **A school that transformed a village**

In one school, a shopping centre has emerged, a business complex that is made of shops for fast-moving goods, a health facility, residential houses and an entertainment joint (a pool table and movie screening shop). These facilities were unheard of a decade back. But the market has sprung. An LC1 owns a shop here and balances between speaking to us and attending to his customers. He has witnessed the transformations in the village ever since development partners negotiated for setting up a school and a health facility at this junction leading to numerous quiet villages. But the emergence of the shopping centre complex comes with multiple phenomena; at least a bottle of beer can be found here and the barman is not strict on age. The movie screening shop could stream till morning and sometimes boys stay in till late, sometimes sneaking in girls; the effect would be that they would be absent from school the following day. The boys are quite excited about playing at the pool. And at least, one can charge their phones at the centre and better still transact on mobile money from this centre. Talk about the transformation a school and health facility has brought to this previously quiet village.

These transformations are beyond the anticipated immediate benefits of education; increasing access for underserved groups. The impact is beyond the school environment permeating the livelihoods, and shifting consumer patterns (change in lifestyles) for both nationals and refugees. As opportunities or lack of them thereof emerge, the reality of sustaining these transformations is rife. For schools, such capital-intensive infrastructure that includes maintaining the physical nature of classrooms, water infrastructure, sanitation, school learning materials and playgrounds is one that cannot go unmentioned. To deal with this phenomenon, all four visited schools have parent associations consisting of between 9 and 11 members. In the four schools visited, at least one PA member is a female parent of refugee status. The association seeks among other things to encourage parents to pay some fees to maintain the infrastructure to supplement the UPE funds. But even this, to all the four schools visited is not easy; the meagre funds trickle in slowly and are barely enough to meet the needs. The partners have to do much of the financial weightlifting to get the schools running. A head-teacher remarks in sentiments shared by another LC 1 Chairperson:

*“I don’t know what would happen if these partners pulled out. I doubt if the parents around would do much either out of not caring about education or due to the poverty levels. After all, they didn’t seem to care so much before the partners arrived. In any case, there is a feeling that the school is far much developed than even where the children themselves stay at home”*

**(A headteacher to a school visited, 2022)**

## **5.0 Conclusions and recommendations**

### **5.1 Conclusions**

We conclude that the presence of refugee children in government schools within the host community has come with a mixed bag of fortunes; bringing advantages while not only introducing new challenges but also amplifying the already existing challenges in the design and delivery of teaching and learning experiences. As such, the host community schools are adjusting to respond to the presence of refugee children. We draw these conclusions based on the four study questions as follows:

### **Question One: How do schools in the host community respond to the presence of refugee children?**

Schools in the host community as community resources are responsive to the presence of refugee children. The communities have been consulted, agreed and set aside land on which the schools are established. As Government supported schools, the tripartite partnership framework (implied and practised) involves the Government continuing to provide UPE funds and deploy qualified and trained teachers to the schools. The communities through the Parents Association have a structure that allows for the payment of some levies to meet the needs of running the schools. This framework (is completed by the work of the development partners that are coordinated by the Finn Church Aid who complement the Government and parents' efforts by the provision of infrastructure, recruitment of additional teachers (assistant teachers), provision of teaching and learning material, and participating in community empowerment and parental engagement initiatives to promote learning outcomes. As such, we draw the following six conclusions on how the host community schools respond to the presence of refugee children in the schools

- (i) Local communities have set aside land for the construction of school infrastructure through the support of development partners. Across the four schools visited, the local communities donated the school land.
- (ii) Schools allow for the inclusion of assistant teachers as a teaching resource. These teachers are also slotted for assignments beyond the translation roles. The assistant teachers are effectively elevated to full-time teachers to cope with the curriculum demands.
- (iii) All the schools visited have adopted English as the language of instruction from early grades. There is consensus that the use of local languages as the medium of instruction is not feasible in such contexts.
- (iv) The schools' parents' teacher associations include parents of children of refugee status. In all the four schools visited, there is one female parent of refugee status who is a member of the school parents' teacher association
- (v) The leadership roles among the students are shared between the children of the national and those of refugee status. The most common senior leadership role in the school is the head boy/girl and the deputy all schools balance between the two categories of learners. As the schools embrace democracy that involves giving latitude to students to participate in selecting their leaders, there is the concept of "guided democracy"<sup>5</sup> that encourages and seeks to share the roles between the two groups of learners.
- (vi) There is the adoption of school ethos that facilitates smooth interactions between the two groups of learners. The school routines, uniforms, classroom sitting patterns, behaviour management strategies and group formation allow for smooth interactions involving the two groups of learners.

### **Question Two: What advantages do the refugee children bring to the host schools?**

Schools are important and towering institutions in the community. The artificial set up of geographical communities brought about by forced migration of populations resulting in the establishment of refugee settlements alters the setup of the communities, catalysing change and leaving social-economic transformations. In the case of the four schools visited, the presence of refugee children in the host schools has come with the following advantages.

- (i) There is a school infrastructure revolution in the four schools. According to the informants, the school infrastructure prior to the arrival of the refugee children was not only acute but also

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<sup>5</sup> Although denoting negative meaning and originating from Indonesia from late 1950s, guided democracy entails in other words, the government controlling elections so that the people can exercise all their rights without truly changing public policy. In this context, school authorities provide room for students/learners to choose their leaders under strict guidance that enables those considered favourites to be selected for positions. In this approach, the school guides those who rise to the student/learner leadership while allowing the learners to select from the narrow list.

- dilapidated. Through the support of the development partners, new infrastructure that includes classrooms, libraries, and water points has come up. Designed and built using sustainable construction principles, it is possible that these infrastructures would last long if well maintained. Such standards of material selection and building could be exported to other contexts even where children of refugee status are not enrolled.
- (ii) School enrolments have shot up. Excluding the proportion of refugee children from the school enrolments could bring down the average enrolments from the current 2000 to close to just 800 (61:39 for refugees and nationals respectively). Even with such an enrolment of 800 learners of national status, the informants agree that these gross enrolments are way above what were enrolments prior to the arrival of the learners of refugee status.
  - (iii) Increased school resources that include teachers and other learning materials. The presence of learners of refugee status has seen an increased presence of development partners. Through an elaborate coordination framework that delegates this responsibility to the Finn Church Aid, resources that include teachers, teaching and learning materials are mapped and given to the schools. In addition, Government supported teachers have also been trained in all the four schools visited.
  - (iv) Schools appreciate diversity in education delivery. The presence of children of refugee status has created a need for diversity sensitivity among education service providers. As such, school practices have embraced measures to encourage integration that include the distribution of leadership positions among students, choice of a language that works for the majority of the learners and inclusion of female parents of refugee status on the PTAs. This increases the diversity index for the schools.
  - (v) Schools have diversified curriculum delivery approaches. With multiple partners coming on board, at least one school has embraced an accelerated learning program that readmits young mothers. This approach is flexible allowing learners who temporarily drop out due to pregnancy to be re-enrolled, and offered tailor-made learning experiences before being integrated into the general classrooms.

**Question Three: What challenges do intake of refugee children pose to schools in the host community enrolling them?**

The alteration of the geographical communities and rapid expansion of the education infrastructure and the accompanying social transformation cannot be left to go without mentioning the challenges this has brought. The learning outcomes as demonstrated through the reading scores are low among the learners (whether nationals or refugees). Among the challenges include

- (i) The strain on the physical infrastructure in the schools. Although there is the expansion of the infrastructure that includes classrooms, office rooms/blocks and toilet facilities, the ratio of learners using these infrastructures is high. Furthermore, the pupils to teacher ratio are also high. Schools have by default settled on negative coping strategies such as not feeling the strain owing to the rampant absenteeism rates that mask the problem of high enrolments. As mentioned in the findings, attendance rates can go to less than 40% on a random day in the morning and could drop further during the after-lunch sessions.
- (ii) Schools face the challenge of low school attendance. Schools face periodic challenges that are associated with the food distribution day when on average, school attendance among children of refugee status dips. As such, teachers face the challenge of designing and delivering teaching experiences that do not let these learners miss out. However, what emerges is that there is general acceptance that absenteeism is a norm in schools. As such, school programs are rarely interrupted by low attendance rates.
- (iii) The continued contagious low completion rates among the nationals are masked in the high enrolment numbers. Over time, nationals consider these schools for refugees. By Primary 7 when only 20% of the learners are of national status, these numbers are not considered low considering the overall school enrolments that may perhaps mask the problem of low completion rates, particularly among the learners of the female gender.



- (iv) There is a real language of instruction dilemma. It is obvious that schools have made a pragmatic decision to use English as the medium of instruction across the grades. However, learning assessment findings reveal that less than 16% of the learners in Primary 3-Primary 6 can read fluently and comprehend an early-grade reading text. This brings to sharp focus the effectiveness of the school-based policy decisions of using English as the medium of instruction even where evidence shows results that are contrary to the decisions. As such, it is probable that the challenge of low and delayed learning outcomes is rife in these schools.
- (v) The tensions in the community involving refugees and nationals involving livelihood resources minimally spill into the school set-ups. Two resources that elicit integration balance include firewood and land for cultivating crops. Within the restricted settlements, the pressure for wood for cooking can be real resulting in the need to seek resources outside the settlements. Equally, persons of refugee status lease land for cultivating that sometimes results in conflicts with some landowners who may obliterate the commitments in the agreements. Such may be emotive and although mentioned in low tones create mistrust between the two groups of the population. Naturally, for children, it is not difficult for them to take sides. However, the school settings (head teachers, school teachers and management committees) are sensitive to the happenings outside the schools and rarely do anything that would spark these tensions. Schools have maintained environments and habits that encourage children to interact de-escalating any tension and resulting in harmonious co-existence between the two groups of learners. The involvement of the development partners in the integration efforts involving dialogues between the two groups has accounted for this co-existence.

**Question Four: How do children experience schooling in terms of speaking up, participation in class, feeling safe in school spaces, feeling safe on the way to and from school and feeling valued?**

Schooling is more than just learning and teaching experiences. Learning outcomes require conducive environments that include learner readiness and motivation to learn. Studies have been conducted and established that learner participation and school safety are measures of readiness that define the quality of teaching and learning interactions. We draw the following conclusions from the study:

- (i) **Participation and non-discrimination:** More than 90% of the learners are of the opinion that there is no discrimination in the allocation of chores at school. More than 80% of the learners are of the view that teachers allow all children to participate in classroom and sporting activities regardless of refugee status. However, close to 35% of refugee learners and 15% of national learners report that they are rarely involved in making decisions that affect them at school.
- (ii) **Being valued and speaking up:** More than 70% of learners report that children are often encouraged to succeed in school work and are free to speak up to teachers about matters that concern them. However, whilst more than 60% of refugee children and more than 70% of national children reported being encouraged to speak up, only 26% of refugee learners and 62% of national learners actually spoke up on matters that concerned them in class in the presence of a teacher. This disparity suggests that children feel safe to speak up but may lack the confidence or language proficiency to do so consistently in formal classroom settings.
- (iii) **Feeling safe in school spaces:** More than 80% of learners of both refugee and national status often feel safe at school and are comfortable in physical spaces. More than 90% of refugee learners feel that there is no harassment when walking towards the school. Close to 70% of both groups feel safe on their way to school and while walking around the school grounds. Community tensions over livelihood resources have not translated into threats to children's physical safety within or around the school.
- (iv) **Comfort in the language of instruction:** Close to 70% of learners of both refugee and national status often feel comfortable in the language used in the school. This is noteworthy given the documented challenges with English medium instruction. Children may feel comfortable socialising in English whilst struggling with academic content. Less than 16% of

learners in Primary 3–Primary 6 can read fluently and comprehend an early-grade reading text, indicating a significant gap between comfort and proficiency.

- (v) **The integration paradox:** Whilst the vast majority of children report positive social experiences—feeling safe, free to speak up, and included in activities—the schools simultaneously struggle with massive infrastructure strain, low attendance, low completion rates, and critically low literacy outcomes. Schools have created socially inclusive and emotionally safe spaces, but structural challenges prevent these positive experiences from translating into effective learning.

## 5.2 Summary of recommendations

We draw the following conclusions from the study:

The visited schools reveal what it takes to be deliberate to integrate learners with diverse statuses. A large proportion of the learners surveyed feel safe in the schools, can speak up, feel valued and feel that there are spaces for them to participate in the learning process. However, the findings also reveal some challenges those schools with an intake of a large proportion of children of refugee status face. The large school sizes, the implementation of the official language policy, the infrastructure deficits, high absenteeism rates, and low completion rates in addition to low literacy levels are among the challenges that these schools face. The following is a summary of the recommendations that such schools need to address:

- 1) Focus on interventions that would improve school attendance by addressing barriers in the community, at school and at the individual level that facilitates absenteeism. The contagion effect of absenteeism should be contained.
- 2) Implement measures that will increase retention rates among the learners from Primary 4 where the dropout rates are high in the focus schools. Measures at the community and school levels should be implemented to complement the existing efforts to keep all the enrolled children in school.
- 3) Invest in literacy programs to improve the acquisition of foundational learning. Literacy camps, additional reading materials and teacher capacity development should focus on accelerating reading competencies among the learners enrolled in school.
- 4) Resolve the language in education policy dilemma in the target schools.
- 5) Deliberately invest in sustainability measures for the impact created from the tripartite partnership involving parents, the Government of Uganda and the development partners in the delivery of education services in the selected schools.

## 6.0 References

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