Protecting South Sudanese Refugee Children in Uganda through Building Family Resilience
Foreword

TPO Uganda is proud to have partnered with War Child UK with support from Comic Relief UK to implement a series of child-focused interventions for South Sudanese children and their families over the past two years. These interventions focused on: increasing access to education; strengthening child protection systems; socioeconomic empowerment for the most vulnerable families; and providing psychosocial support to children and youth. Perhaps the single most important outcome for us was that the integrated nature of these interventions enabled children to become more resilient in the face of so much adversity. Children built meaningful relations with their peers at Child Friendly Spaces while the youth acquired lifelong skills and vocational education that they can use when they eventually return home.

For the parents and caregivers of children, seeing their children engage in productive activities not only freed up their time to attend to other chores but also brought them a sense of joy and relief. It was equally encouraging for families to witness refugee leaders actively participating in forming community child protection structures to ensure that children were protected from abuse and exploitation.

Patrick Onyango Mangen
Country Director, TPO Uganda
Renewed fighting in South Sudan in 2016 led to 120,000 people (65% children) forced to flee South Sudan, leaving behind everything to face a dangerous journey, and putting innocent children at risk of severe abuses and exploitation.

### FORCED TO FLEE:

- Walking long distances, snake bites, ethnic fighting
- Sounds of guns and bombs, death, hunger
- Camps infighting, being beaten, abuse, redundancy, hunger, domestic violence

200 Refugees arrive in Uganda per day
In some refugee settlements the refugees are given a small plot of land to build temporary homes, plant gardens for fresh vegetables to supplement their diets and other micro income generating activities. However, this is rarely sufficient to support a meaningful existence and organizations like TPO Uganda often have to intervene.

TPO Uganda with support from War Child UK supported 2,159 refugee children and young people affected by the conflict in South Sudan through building family resilience. Our interventions supported:

**Access to quality primary education:**
Schools are overcrowded with a high teacher-student ratio which prevents children from reaching their full potential and developing health life-skills. TPO built 2 classroom blocks, trained teachers and their assistants and provided scholastic materials to enhance the education experience.

**Development of child-friendly spaces:**
Children are deprived of the ability to access structured play, recreational and sporting activities which are key in increasing their resilience and well-being. Because most of these children are traumatized by the refugee experience we provided child-friendly spaces where they received psychosocial support from trained social workers and were engaged in activities that helped them deal with the trauma of war in a safe space.

**Equipping families with skills for income generation:**
Families have little access to recovery activities that help them generate income to pay for basic needs thus are more likely to adopt negative coping mechanisms that expose their children to harm such as child labour or early marriages.
Schools of Hope

Getting refugee children to enroll in school is a good first step. When they get there, children need appropriate classrooms, scholastic materials like books and pens. These schools need to be safe, well-managed with supportive staff to help the children succeed.

Irene Kasara is the Assistant Head girl at Alere II Primary in Alere Settlement. She is in primary 3. Irene says her mother laughed with joy the day Irene received the school books she needed from TPO. They had not been able to afford them. Irene’s mother worked hard to grow and sell vegetables in the settlement to help pay school fees.

TPO worked with senior women teachers to conduct sessions on menstrual management including making their own reusable pads to support girls to stay in school.

Irene Kasara

ACHIEVEMENTS

634 (390 males and 244 females) vulnerable children supported by TPO Uganda to go back to school

12 teaching assistants trained to monitor the children, including home visits.

344 adolescent girls (144 in Adjumani and 200 in Kiryandongo) trained menstrual management

2 Classroom blocks constructed to make room for new enrollments

School management support for 2 schools including monitoring the attendance of children

12

344

adolescent girls (144 in Adjumani and 200 in Kiryandongo)

trained menstrual management

INSIGHT

Peer to Peer mentors for peace

Longstanding ethnic and intertribal rivalries including refugee and host country conflicts affects creates a hostile environment which deters learning. We worked with peer-to-peer mentors to create a peaceful environment by reaching out to their age mates. This promotes a lasting mechanism to address the problems affecting vulnerable children.

Key activities
- Playing together
- Adjustment to school environment
- Learning support in class
- Linkages to psychosocial support services
- Peaceful resolution of problems
- Training in menstrual management including reusable-pads making for girls

SCHOOL BOOKS MADE US HAPPY

“When I joined school in 2014, my friend gave me two books which I used for math, English Christian Religious Education, and science. When I received a bag, pens and books, I was able to use one for each subject and I have filled them all up in one year.” Adut Ajang, Primary four

A GOOD FRIEND SHARES A BOOK

“I am Joseph Kwir, 15 years old, and I am in primary 6. My mother and I are refugees from Sudan. My mother enrolled me in 2012. We used to plant maize and sell it in the market but the money we got helped us at home and some also helped me buy two books. I would divide each book into two so that two subjects were in one book. Later, when TPO came to our school I got a new bag, more books and pens which have been enough for the whole year. I want to become an engineer for electricity so that schools and communities like this can have lights.”

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A DOCTOR FOR ANIMALS

“I got school books and a bag I don’t have to carry books in my hands anymore. When I grow up I want to be a doctor for animals. I am sad about my sick goat its sick that’s why I want to learn to help animals.” John Pouk, Alere II Primary School

CLEANER ME, CLEANER SCHOOL

“We were trained about menstrual management by the senior woman teacher; we learnt how to make reusable towels, we sew special clothes to make them. We got to know the purpose of the shower rooms that were provided by UN; before we just used these as toilets”.

Racheal Adut, Alere II Primary School

NO MORE TREE CLASSROOMS

“This school started off under a tree. However, the numbers were increasing and we couldn’t accommodate all the students. TPO Uganda built two classroom blocks which catered for the increase in students. Our pupils had a lot of trauma and fought a lot. TPO through teacher trainings in psychosocial support and reaching out to homes in the communities helped to change attitudes that created a peaceful atmosphere. The teaching assistants we got through their support helped us manage the classes and in identifying children who needed extra attention. Working with TPO enabled us to provide all round support both at home and at school. We didn’t have a way of handling special needs before this.” Bull Pajieth Deng, Head teacher Ayilo II C primary school

SURVIVING

Sixteen year old Jennifer was assaulted as she fled the South Sudan war on her way to Uganda. When Jennifer realized she was pregnant she wanted to die. Cathy, a social worker from TPO Uganda visited her regularly for counselling sessions. Together they addressed the trauma and the possibilities open to Jennifer. Slowly Jennifer began focusing on taking back her life.

“She encouraged me that I would be able to return to school after giving birth. My mother supported me and I have gone back to school. I now am hoping to sit for my primary leaving examinations this year.”

GROUP THERAPY

“I used to think a lot, I thought my daughter could never complete school. There was too much pressure to support her and her three younger siblings. I was placed in a group (Cognitive Behaviour Therapy for Trauma (CBTT)) in which I was elected chairperson we get counseling and support each other. This group made me strong and helped me learn how to handle my daughter. I sold part of our family food ration and registered her in school for five thousand shillings.”

Laila Susan

THE GIRLS CORNER

Equipping girls to manage their menstrual cycle, educating boys and school systems about what this means can go a long way in empowering girls to be proud that they are women, stay in school and succeed.

“I was using sanitary pads bought from the market during my period. Some months I failed to raise UGX 3,000 to buy pads so I could stay home until I was okay. I was later told by the senior lady that the school had emergency pads and we were trained also on how to make pads using needles and pieces of cloth.”

Sarah Nyajima, 16years old

“With the introduction of reusable sanitary pads in our school, we are able to manage our menstrual cycle easily without having to worry about where to buy them.”

Sarah Nyajima, 16years old

“Now we can stay at school the entire month. We can focus more on our studies. This is doing a lot for us.”

Sarah Nyajima, 16years old
Scovia and her friends at school are taking control of their menstruation with these pads. They no longer miss school during their period.

“For the first time, we had a comprehensive training in reproduction health. The knowledge about menstrual cycle to the girls improved their confidence; they now feel free to come and request for help in my office. Boys know not to laugh at the girls who miss classes during their cycle or have an accident and spoil their clothes. Personally, I didn’t know how to make the reusable pads; TPO taught us and now I am an instructor here. At least ten girls per year were saved from dropping out of school.”

Senior teacher, Alice Konyio

How has TPO helped you work with the refugee children in your school?

“Every Tuesday TPO taught us about how to handle psychosocial issues. TPO social workers supported children who had severe adjustment problems. Before this, I did not know how to handle pupils who cried a lot, I would call a student and they would run away crying. There was one girl who never wanted to share a desk and always fought with others. When I asked her why, she told me that she feared anyone who sat close to her, that they were an enemy. TPO helped us understand that these problems were a result of the war trauma our pupils faced and we learnt how to be patient and support them.”

Joyce Asaba, Deputy Head Mistress & Senior Woman teacher

What is the role of the child protection committee?

Our mandate as a committee is to support the community, and work with partners to help our people find the services they need. For example, I worked with TPO to identify psychosocial challenges among children.
I was able to talk with my friends like George about the bad dreams I used to have in the night. He helped me join a support group. In the group we learnt about trauma and diseases of the brain. We went to Canrom and Panyadoli Hill primary school in 2016 to meet with other groups and we shared on how to overcome bad dreams by talking with the counsellor and also through drawing pictures. We learnt how to be patient with our friends. TPO used to come every week, to support the different groups here. The groups are Peace, United and Wisdom groups. Our friends used to fight and quarrel a lot, but now back to Cluster B where I stay I have my Ugandan friends and we are happy together.

Gatthak Moses, 14 Years, primary 6 Arnold Memorial Primary School

“I learnt about drama which taught us how to stay in peace with our friends. It was nice for me to visit other schools like Brilliant primary school (which I always heard of) and Canrom, I realized that we learn the same things and I was able to make many friends from other tribes. I learnt that it’s good to make friendship, hating other tribes is not good.” George Tongh, a 13 year old primary six

“We had to work with these children who were ex-combatants to counsel them to appreciate their new position as civilians. It was not easy, but TPO’s intervention with psychosocial support helped to change mindsets. TPO established peace clubs that have brought both refugee and Ugandan children to study together. We need to continue psychosocial support because we are receiving new refugees everyday.”

Ermin Akomi head teacher in Alere II primary school
PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT FOR CHILDREN

CHAPTER 2

Child-friendly spaces

Safe spaces for learning, play, access to child-friendly services is paramount in protecting children, creating structure, stability, a sense of normalcy, and helping refugee children start their healing process. TPO Uganda set up two new Child Friendly Spaces in each settlement.

INSIGHT

Child-Friendly Spaces as community owned programmes

Each Child Friendly Space is managed collaboratively by caregivers and center management. CFS Staff include:
- Teaching Assistant ECD
- Animator
- Security guard.
- Center Management Committees (five parents, Peace Committee Members and Relief Welfare Committee Block leaders)

Management committee members bring diverse abilities to support the children. TPO Uganda was intentional about equipping them to take over operations at project close.

Activities:

- Structured play and recreation: Building the self-esteem of children is key in helping children cope and interact freely, confidently and peacefully with others. Children enjoy indoor and outdoor games, storytelling, cultural songs and dances, sports and games.

- Early Childhood Development: Pre-primary school children (3-6 years) specifically attend ECD in the morning and later engage in structure play and recreational activities in the evening.

- After school activities: Children from the ages of 7-12 years attend after-school recreational activities.

- Psychosocial support services: One on one individual counseling, animation therapy and group therapy, referral for treatment of mental health problems.

- Life skills: 13-18+ years attend life skills training sessions including group sports, conflict resolution; adolescent girls also attend menstrual cycle management sessions.

Community Links for child protection: We strengthened the capacity of community based child protection structures such as Refugee Welfare Committees (RWC), Child Protection Committees (CPC), and Crisis Response Teams (CRT) to identify and respond to child protection issues in the community including referral to specialized services. The community child protection structures are supported by community facilitators and TPO Uganda Social Workers.
Children in the CFS come from different communities, some are Madi, Dinkas, and Nuer. In 2014, they did not want to play together; they always played in isolated groups. We have been able to bring them together engaging them in animation therapy. We use the ‘journey of life’ method which allows the children to draw their experiences and reflect on what happened during the war, and how they can have hope for the future.

At the CFS, many children have learnt how to speak English, count, and make friends. Our CFS is next to a primary school (Ayillo II primary school), the children pick interest in going further with their schooling. Some of our young children who are of enrolling age have joined primary.

We have been able to increase enrollment of young girls in the CFS by talking with their families about the benefits. Parents were hesitant to send them here as they thought the girls were supposed to stay home all day and help with house chores.

Young girls in school

Literacy and friendships

Peace

Abram Deng Chol, Animator, Ayilo

Abram Deng Chol, Animator, Ayilo
The opportunity to earn an income via employment or operation of a business is fundamental to ensuring the right to a dignified life and recovery from crisis for persons affected by conflict. We worked to increase food security and household incomes through skills empowerment both for youth and adults. The more families are economically stable the easier it is to meet the needs of their children and enable them to thrive amidst such difficulty.

Achievements:

- Bespoke (Tailor made small enterprise trainings specific to the culture and setting of the refugees—especially making Sudanese style bed sheets), VSLA, Junior Farmer Field Schools and the provision of startup kits for youth projects.
- Access to finances through Village Savings and Loan Associations (VSLA).
- Vocational skills and entrepreneurship training including start up kits for successful graduates.
- Junior Farmer Field schools: Hands on agronomic skills for improved productivity, both quality and quantity of harvests. Two Junior Farmer Field Learning (JFFLs) established.
- Youth group projects were supported with start-up kits, tools and seeds. For example in Alere, the project is supporting out of school youth to start and manage economic activities such as tailoring and salons.

“When I first came to the camp, I did not have what to do to make money. I collected and sold firewood. When TPO came they taught us how to manage business; how to separate the money for capital (investment) and savings. I make decorated bed sheets and sell a set at UGX 50,000 and make a profit of UGX 10,000. If we had a tailoring machine it would help us to work faster.” — Martha Yom

“When we were trained, I started by sewing my Kitengi which I wear for Sunday church service. I am happy I get some little money and we have been able to save two hundred thousand within our group. We intend to buy a sewing machine so we stop sharing and get enough time to practice.” — Alakiir Thon

“We had no hand skills, no jobs, and we just stayed home. We were trained on how to manage businesses; how to save our profits, count our money and make the business grow. We were provided with materials which we have been using to train and learn better. Some group members have sewn school uniforms for customers like Alere primary school. Some have sewn kitengi (traditional dresses) for female customers.” — Aduma Manyok

1 US Dollar = 3605.00 Ugandan Shillings
“TPO’s support to families through setting up enterprises has brought a change in lives; there is a family of two boys who were engaged in an agriculture training and after a year of good harvest, they had saved enough money to build a retail shop which is a great benefit to the community.”

Milly Nancy Lagu, Chairperson Child Protection Committee/Refugee Welfare Committee

“I was struggling to take care of my children. When TPO trained us on how to manage business and money, I learnt everything I could. TPO helped us get chicken and sold them and bought a goat at UGX50,000. It is doing well and I am hopeful. I was also in the farmer field school where we learnt how to plant in lines, proper spacing and utilizing the planting seasons well. I will continue using the skills I learnt to increase my field harvest.”

Nyeko Bismak

“Farming for Success”

“We were trained different methods to grow food in the Farmer Field School. I planted maize in lines using a rope, so the plants were straight. We were able to weed which was better than the methods we were used to. When the maize and beans were harvested, they gave us some to take home. I was able to train my ten year old brother in primary three. I hope to plant in the next season.”

Sharon Etudia

“I learnt how to apply fertilizer to the plants. I had never used it in my life. My maize grew bigger than before. We also learnt to use nursery beds.”

Derrick Nahaud

“We believe that refugee children can be better protected if their families and communities are stronger, protective and supportive of their wellbeing. When you work at a refugee camp you are dealing with trauma, culture issues, poverty, loss and despair. Interventions must tackle all these interlinked factors.

Learn, adapt and shape interventions to actual needs

We learnt to adapt pre-conceived plans to the actual needs of our clients. Several examples stand out; when we begun the Early Childhood Development (ECD) program we thought it would be (3-5) years but most of the refugee children from Sudan start school as late as 8 years. We adapted the program to fit the older children, they are doing very well.

Take chances

At project start we thought teaching traditionally pastoral communities effective agricultural practices would not necessarily work well. The goal was to help improve livelihoods and food security. When we introduced the concept, we had a group of young people who were trained and mentored through to their first harvest. The first fruitful season increased interest, and in the second we worked with more beneficiaries than we had planned for. So, our earlier perception was wrong. We have seen many people’s attitudes about “digging” – agriculture change for the better. The only concern now is addressing prolonged drought.

Changing perceptions through CFS

Corporal punishment was widespread especially among the Dinka community. Many adults thought this type of punishment would keep children in line. Step by step we started to demonstrate through the child friendly spaces and home visits that children can be taught differently, they can be disciplined without violence.

Partner for Mindset and Behavior change

A big part of the menstrual management training involved dealing with harmful practises and beliefs. For example when a girl starts menstruating she is called “abuba” meaning old and therefore ready for marriage. The Senior Women teachers we worked with observed that following our training and sensitization in schools, fewer girls were dropping out to get married in comparison to previous years. It is also encouraging to see girls who went through training on menstrual management train others on how to make reusable sanitary pads. Even after the project calls the district officers still call on us to train girls in the public schools.

Rose Mogga, Project Coordinator, TPO Uganda - Adjumani field office.

“We learn and adapt for the most practical and beneficial outcome”
A DAY IN SANDRA’S LIFE

Sandra is 11, on a day like this she would like to wake up to the sound of birds in her hometown.

Here I’m at our Lady Nursery and Primary School where I learn to play with others. I know my ABC’s.

This is Grace Adee, Sandra’s mother. By the time TPO started working with this family, Grace was about to give up on sending her daughter to school. It was unaffordable. With TPO support Sandra was able to get all the school supplies she needed. Grace is now able to focus on keeping Sandra healthy.

My favorite time- Going back home to mom and my brothers.

Sandra loves eating anything her mother makes. It is breakfast time in Kiryandongo.
FIELD NOTES

INTEGRATE PSYCHOSOCIAL AND ECONOMIC INTERVENTIONS

Improving psychosocial wellbeing of refugee children and families was supported through integrating interventions such as quality clinical psychotherapy including drugs, family, school and community based interventions.

COMMUNITY OWNERSHIP CAN CONTRIBUTE TO LASTING CHANGE

Establishing Child friendly space committees headed and managed by the community increased ownership, relevance, responsibility for property. The CFS can be better sustained because they are owned by the refugees.

MANAGING MONEY IS KEY

Most refugees are starting on zero resources when they arrive. Introducing livelihood interventions that involved managing money through Village Savings and Loans Associations (VSLA) equipped our clients to maximise their resources.

SUSTAINING SCHOOL SUPPLIES

School Support should aim to support children through their education cycle or create ways for families to earn money for scholastic supply. One offs while encouraging can leave children in further despair.

TARGET HARMFUL PRACTICES

Community behaviour change campaigns against harmful attitudes enabled us raise awareness on negative practices and influence positive attitudes and actions to promote girl child enrollment and retention in school. One of the negative beliefs we addressed was "abuba"-( the belief that once a girl has her period she is ready to be married).

EMPOWER GIRLS TO REACH OTHERS

Working through a peer to peer network, more girls learn how to make reusable pads. The groups we started with became experts, championed making reusable pads and continue to teach others especially new students.

OPTIMISE SKILL DEVELOPMENT

Vocational skills were preferred because clients could already envision both the short and long term opportunities to earn money. When skills training was provided to smaller groups, clients appreciated both their peers support and ability to interact with teachers.
“EVERY CONTRIBUTION COUNTS”