



David and Roger get to practice their dream at a rehabilitation center for street children.

Country strategy paper:

Uganda country programme 2023 – 2027

Introduction

The previous strategy (2019-2022) overall objective was to improve life chances of vulnerable children in Uganda by working with partner organisations to increase access to quality education, health, and protection, and to strengthen community and leadership structures for promotion and protection of children's rights within communities. The strategy further aimed to hinder detrimental norms and behaviors responsible for keeping children out of school and that promoted unhealthy practices such as pre-age marriages and Female Genital Mutilation (FGM).

The 2023-2027 strategy seeks to consolidate the gains achieved in the previous strategy, continuing to focus on education, health, protection, and community awareness over

rights of children and importance of their participation. Special interest groups in this strategy include street connected children, children affected by child labor and other forms of exploitation, children of refugee status, teenage mothers, and young adults in search of skills for self-employment. Like in the ending strategy, this new strategy will be implemented by working with and through partner organisations that are spread across the country, with new interventions especially in refugee affected districts and the oil exploitation regions of the Albertine where the population is fast growing along with potential vices and challenges to children and families. Humanitarian Assistance and resilience programming will also be of major attention through this strategy.

The number of Civil Society Organizations in Uganda has increased over the years, although there have been several Civil Society Organisations deregistered by government because of compliance issues. While the right for children to participate is clearly articulated in international Conventions such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), as well as in several national legal frameworks and policies to which Uganda is a signatory, children in Uganda face many challenges in exercising their fundamental rights. Challenges remain, with slow or limited implementation of policies, and a perpetual dearth of resources.

The National Action Plan for Child Wellbeing (2016–2021) closely relates with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 and 16 on child survival, development, protection, participation, and implementation. The National Action Plan for Children with Disabilities (2016/17–2020/21) seeks to ad-

dress the gaps in interventions for children with disabilities. This strategy relates to all the above three policy documents and has built its country analysis and strategic path on these and on other relevant UN related documents.

This strategy was developed through a consultative process that involved questionnaires for Partner Organisations on outstanding development issues affecting children and their communities, and the role of different players and duty bearers. Physical consultations with current Partner Organisations were held through field visits, and respondents included children (both girls and boys) especially through the rights clubs, moral and legal duty bearers. The Partner Organisations then analyzed the current strategy and prevailing trends, reviewed current interventions, and recommended areas for strengthening and inclusion through consultative meetings.

1. Background

ERIKS has supported projects in Uganda for more than 25 years. ERIKS has contributed to increasing access to education for vulnerable communities, strengthening child protection structures in schools and communities and reaching out to extremely vulnerable children like street connected children who are often neglected by other stakeholders because of the time requirement and complexity involved in the rehabilitation and reintegration processes. The previous Uganda Strategy (2019-2022) overall objective was to improve life chances for vulnerable children in Uganda by working with Partner Organisations to: increase access to quality health and education, to transform norms and behaviour responsible for limiting the capacity of children to enjoy their rights, to strengthen structures for protecting children, and to increase avenues for children's participation and decision making. This new 2023-2027 strategy will strive to achieve similar goals of improving the rights and life chances of vulnerable children in Uganda by working with Partner Organisations on increased access to quality education, strengthened child protection structures, improved health outcomes, increased community resilience and preparedness to hazards, and increased support to organisations dealing with push factors that increase numbers of street connected children in urban areas.

ERIKS shall further support environment and climate related activities, and humanitarian action and practices aimed at disaster risk reduction (DRR). ERIKS will also increase its advocacy role at various governance levels through partnerships with advocacy networks like UCRNN, CRANE and other Partner Organisations involved in advocacy work. The geographical focus for interventions in Uganda will remain nationwide, driven by need, and presence of capable partner organisations. However, priority will be put on areas of the North and North-Eastern Uganda where poverty is more prevalent compared to other regions of Uganda. Others will be the western shores of the Albertine region where new oil

exploration is already increasing vulnerability for children due to massive inflows of laborers, and in urban areas with street connected children, and children affected by child labor and all forms of child exploitation.

This strategy is aligned with ERIKS' international strategic goals as outlined in the ERIKS global strategy for the period 2023-2026. In this Uganda 2023-2027 Strategy, ERIKS will continue to work with credible local, national, and international organisations that are well established and reputable within communities to help children acquire good education and health, and to promote positive behavioral change and address causes of children's vulnerabilities. ERIKS will focus on strengthening child rights-based approaches in all supported interventions with particular emphasis on child rights programming, child protection and child participation. These aspects will prevail in ERIKS interventions at all project cycle stages of planning, implementation, monitoring, evaluation, and learning. ERIKS' partnerships will be guided by continuous assessment of the poverty context, geographical location, and existing human and financial resources, and will align its priorities with national priorities and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). ERIKS is committed to working with communities to enhance gender transformation, community resilience, environmental sustainability, and conflict sensitivity.

During the strategy period, ERIKS will delve into humanitarian assistance wherever possible. ERIKS will opt to work with short-term partners or coalition to deliver humanitarian assistance where no established partner organisation is in position to deliver such assistance. Probable areas of need include effects of armed or ethnic conflicts, man-made disasters, large-scale hunger due to floods, droughts or displacements, absence of water and sanitation, shelter, emergency education and health, and other forms of protection for displaced or unaccompanied children.

2. Strategic direction

ERIKS has supported development projects in Uganda through some of its partners for over 25 years. The earlier work of ERIKS was needs-based, focusing on direct support through infrastructural development, rehabilitation, and re-integration of vulnerable children. Over the years, ERIKS has expanded its work with partners to address the root causes of vulnerability and poverty by strengthening child protection structures within communities and increasing awareness of child rights issues and accountability of legal, moral, and legal duty bearers. ERIKS will continue to promote the rights-based approach through its interventions, focusing on child rights programming in order to increase child participation all through its interventions.



Shadia got help at a center for street children. Now she wants to become a lawyer to help others.

ERIKS will use its' Global learning framework to promote learning among the Partner Organisations and other actors through organizing learning fora and documentation of best practices, research, and dissemination of knowledge and experiences. ERIKS will also work to strengthen its partners in gender mainstreaming, environment, role of religion, and conflict sensitivity. ERIKS shall support or seek to be part of various research initiatives in these areas aimed at identifying innovative approaches through which children's rights can best be guaranteed while implementing and monitoring programmes to address inequalities and discrimination.

So far, the East African region has experienced tremendous success in innovative approaches for child participation through child rights clubs, child parliaments and child-led advocacy through music, dance, and drama among others. The Partner Organisations have also been at the forefront

of promoting menstrual health, mental health/self-care and self-awareness and resilience through the production of menstrual products using locally available material within their intervention areas. In the new strategy period, partners will be encouraged to carry out conflict analyses before project interventions to understand the changing power dynamics which would influence results in the intervention areas. Religious actors will continue to be involved and recognized as critical stakeholders in the design of interventions within communities, their implementation, monitoring, and evaluations.

In addition, ERIKS will actively seek networking initiatives among Civil Society Organisations and development partners in Uganda. ERIKS will continue to promote environmental sustainability through its partners, including the promotion of climate-smart agriculture.

ERIKS will continue to provide resources to Partner Organisations in Uganda, build their capacity to implement interventions using the rights-based approach, and invest in research and advocacy to influence policy change. ERIKS will further invest in developing working methodologies to strengthen organizational effectiveness and intervention development to ensure that Partner Organisations become more effective in the overall delivery of programmes or interventions. ERIKS will also invest in strengthening organizational systems and internal controls. This will involve undertaking organizational capacity assessments and capacity development initiatives, carrying out internal and external project evaluations and audits for improved accountability, and effectiveness. In addition, the complaints response mechanisms will continuously be promoted to demonstrate ERIKS' commitment to integrity and accountability.

ERIKS will continue to advocate for participation of both girls and boys in the interventions and to address the barriers towards child participation through the proposed interventions. ERIKS will also continue to strengthen child protection structures so that the discriminatory and oppressive constructs can be identified and redressed through continuous awareness creation and advocacy.

The added value that ERIKS brings to its partnerships is its rich experience in child rights programming through the human rights-based approach. ERIKS also enhances capacity development through organizational capacity assessments which act as a foundation that partners can use to fill organizational capacity gaps. ERIKS will continue building its own capacity in order to be able to build capacity of its partners in improving gender equality and gender transformative approaches through its interventions, strengthening resilience (environment and climate change) programming, improving the capacity of partner organisations in conflict sensitive programming and Humanitarian Assistance. ERIKS will also bring on board other development actors who can offer support to the Partner Organisations in order to increase their ability to intervene comprehensively. Organisations whose institutional capacity has increased have been able to attract additional funding from other development partners.

3. Main Learning from Uganda Country Strategy 2019-2022

Civil Society Organisations have improved their gate keeping role and are working with child protection structures in communities and at different governance levels to ensure that children's rights are observed, protected, and included in relevant decision-making processes. Furthermore, child rights clubs have spearheaded debates on their participation and safeguarding which has lessened child exploitation and abuse both in schools and out-of-schools. Awareness efforts to government structures that handle child-related cases have also helped in streamlining procedures for dealing with minors. Livelihoods programs and humanitarian interventions have improved food security, nutrition and retention rates of children in schools.

Nevertheless, there are still a number of challenges which need to be addressed as a result of new and emerging threats. As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, many children stopped going to school for two years resulting in an increase in child pregnancies and high levels of school dropout. Child trafficking and child labour have also been on the rise, especially for children that are trafficked from rural places to streets to beg for unknown individuals. Labour export of teenagers and youth to middle east countries has also increased, perpetuated by poverty and unemployment in the country. Other emerging threats include unreliable rain patterns due to climate change leading to food insecurity and economic stress.

3.1. Strategic Choices for Uganda Country Programme 2023-2027

Geographic focus: In Uganda, vulnerable children are not located in only one geographical area, although communities in Northern and Eastern Uganda are more vulnerable. ERIKS will continue to work across the country as per need and Partner Organisation capacity, though emphasis will be placed on Northern and Northeastern Uganda due to increased vulnerabilities in the region. This region is usually affected by prolonged spells of drought, and a bigger population being pastoralists, food shortages are a common phenomenon. In addition, influx of refugees from the DRC and South Sudan have increased vulnerabilities along the Northwest and parts of Western Uganda, exacerbated by the recent oil extraction ventures. ERIKS will therefore prioritize working with host communities around refugee camps and oil exploration regions to deal with the influx of migrants in communities and the strain on social services within host communities by contributing to interventions which seek reduce vulnerabilities of communities affected by crisis through skilling of youth and children, child protection, advocacy for improved access and quality of education and humanitarian assistance. Children with disabilities and street connected children are often marginalized in every community. These will be targeted through ERIKS interventions. As a result of this stratification, ERIKS will continue working with its current partners who have running agree-

ments while identifying new Partner Organisations who have the ability to radically reduce vulnerabilities of children within the identified communities in targeted areas. ERIKS will consider phasing out partners who are not in line with the new strategic direction¹.

Thematic focus: ERIKS will continue to focus on child participation, child protection structures, and quality and access to education and leisure, using the rights-based approach. Health intervention will include Sexual Reproductive Health and Rights, Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene, mental health, health education for adolescents and young mothers, and primary health care addressed to target communities. The Head Office sets aside funds for emergencies, supporting Humanitarian Assistance activities at regions. The opportunity to engage in emergency response interventions should therefore be tapped into, through capable partner organisations or part-time coalitions with experienced agencies.

This strategy will further support activities aimed at increasing community resilience and disaster preparedness. Interventions will need to address climate change by weaving environmental aspects through our programming and building capacity of partner organisations in environmental sustainability and climate smart agriculture which is part of resilience building; since it has profound implications on children and wider populations. Instances of poor environmental protection have been those of prolonged droughts, floods, and increasingly unpredictable seasons which affect timeliness of planting thus good harvests. Women and girls in particular walk long distances to find the increasingly scarce food, water, and firewood due to changing climatic trends. As a result of food insecurity, children, even non-school-going children age, are sent to schools where limited school feeding programmes exist to fill the gap of hunger in households. Most of the school feeding programmes are temporary and have been supported by World Food Programme. ERIKS will continue to back partner organisations in integrating environmental and societal objectives related to climate change mitigation and adaptation.



Hope Studio produces music songs together with children to raise opinion on children's rights.

¹ As outlined in ERIKS Position Paper on Partnership, changes in strategic choices and priorities are one out of three grounds for phasing out existing partnerships. However, it shall always be done with great care and ensure enough time for the partner to prepare for the discontinuing of funding.

Regarding national legislation and policy framework, the Uganda program will continue to support partner organisations advocating for improvement of the learning environment and provision of other social services such as health units, medical personnel, teachers, agricultural extensionists, and social protection staff and enforcement officers by engaging parliament and other duty bearers. Further, work with partners to facilitate the transition from nationalized care for children to home care within communities shall continue. Uganda has a number of policy frameworks that include the Children Act, Prevention of Trafficking in Persons Act, Prevention and Prohibition of Human sacrifice and the Female Genital Mutilation Act among others but are sometimes not fully utilized. ERIKS will support their application where needed and contribute to their review when appropriate.

Partners: ERIKS will continue to seek partnership with grassroots, national and international organisations that work towards improving the child rights situation. In line with ERIKS global strategy, working with a mix of organisations ensures that interventions are delivered in a more cost effective and efficient manner. Local organisations are closer to the communities they serve, while national and international organisations have a unique platform for advocacy. ERIKS will actively seek opportunities for networking and collaboration with other child rights organisations to enhance an effective and coordinated response to child rights issues. ERIKS will encourage its Partner Organisations to join national networks in order to improve on the advocacy role of Civil Society Organisations in the country.

During this strategy, ERIKS will prioritize working with Partner Organisations that seek to end child trafficking right from the source of the children that end up on the streets, over those that work to address the symptoms. Children on the streets in need of care, rehabilitation and integration,

refugee children and children in host communities, children with disabilities and vulnerable children in poor regions of the country will also be targeted. Schools, Vocational training institutions, faith-based organisations and community groups will continue to act as entry points for partnerships to provide solutions to the challenges of the vulnerable children and their communities.

Implementation strategies and approach:² ERIKS will ensure that the strategic approaches such as the child rights-based approach, child participation, resilience and partnership are put in practice through projects and organisational assessments, regular monitoring visits, online and physical partnership meetings and organisational audits among others. The risk matrix of partner organisations will be reviewed regularly in order to mitigate conflict in areas of instability. Furthermore, ERIKS will ensure that it has access to early warning mechanisms in order to be able to address humanitarian crises in the intervention areas.

Strategic development of ERIKS in the country: The previous strategy focused on increasing access to education and rehabilitation and reintegration of vulnerable children on the streets. The new strategy will attempt to go beyond this scope by improving the quality of education within intervention areas through the rights-based approach and addressing the push factors in communities responsible for increasing vulnerability of children. ERIKS will endeavor to advocate for interventions on environmental sustainability and community resilience. ERIKS expects that the new direction will halt the cycle of violence against children in the areas of intervention, prevent future spread and change social norms, which affect children within communities of intervention. Conflict analysis will also be integrated at all levels of programming in order to identify and mitigate any negative effects of interventions within the communities.



Nalubanjwa Barshivah, fourth grade in high school, dreams of becoming a doctor.

² ERIKS' position papers and policies may serve as a resource and inspiration when defining ERIKS' strategic approach based on strategic choices. These are found in Teams, under ERIKS' Global Team.

4. Country Outcomes

The following outcomes have been defined for ERIKS' work in Uganda during this strategy period.

OUTCOME AREA 1: Partnership

- 1.1.1 Partner Organisations apply a child rights-based approach, increase child participation, and contribute to advocacy efforts of child protection issues within the country.
- 1.1.2 Partner Organisations have increased organisational capacity with the ability to integrate learning into their work.
- 1.1.3 Interventions supported by ERIKS are evidence based, relevant and sustainable.

OUTCOME AREA 2. Intervention – Long-term development and humanitarian assistance

- 2.1.1 Girls and boys are enjoying improved access and quality education of education and leisure in intervention areas.
- 2.1.2 Girls and boys are accessing quality health services and safe spaces for psychological health and wellbeing.
- 2.1.3 Girls and boys are accessing child friendly information on protection.
- 2.1.4 Girls and boys are accessing child friendly Disaster Risk Reduction information.

LEGAL DUTY BEARERS

- 2.2.1 Legal duty bearers take appropriate measures to protect children from abuse, negligence, and all forms of exploitation.
- 2.2.2 Legal duty bearers are fulfilling their obligation to provide quality education and leisure to children from poor and vulnerable communities.
- 2.2.3 Legal duty bearers are protecting and facilitating vulnerable children to receive the good quality health care and relevant health information.
- 2.2.4 Government is taking the lead in promoting disaster preparedness, response and recovery, mitigation, and coordination of relevant actors.

MORAL DUTY BEARERS

- 2.3.1 Parents and Caregivers are defending and advocating for the right of children to protection from abuse, negligence, and exploitation.
- 2.3.2 Parents and Caregivers in areas of intervention are promoting and advocating for the right of the children to quality education and health.
- 2.3.3 Parents and Caregivers are advocating for and contributing to promoting the right to protection and peaceful co-existence during emergencies.