

# Address the issue of child-headed homes

Uganda is confronting a quiet but devastating crisis, one that is unfolding not in headlines, but in homes where childhood itself has been replaced by responsibility. A new report by the Uganda Bureau of Statistics reveals that more than 12 percent of households are now headed by children and youth aged 15 to 24. This statistic is not merely a number; it is a stark indictment of systemic social and economic failure.

At the heart of this trend lies a dramatic rise in the number of orphans, which has more than doubled over the past two decades. Behind this surge are familiar drivers such as poverty, disease, and fragile family structures. Their cumulative effect is producing an alarming generational shift. Children who should be in school are instead thrust into the role of breadwinners, caregivers, and decision-makers long before they are prepared.

The implications are profound. Child-headed households often struggle with food insecurity, limited access to education, and exposure to exploitation. Earlier studies have shown that such children frequently drop out of school to care for sick parents or younger siblings, sacrificing their futures in the process. Without parental guidance or adequate social protection, they are left vulnerable to cycles of poverty that are difficult to break.

## The issue:

Family life.

## Our view:

Strengthening families through poverty alleviation, access to healthcare, and education is the most effective way to reduce the number of children forced into premature adulthood.

The regional disparities in the report further indicate the urgency of the situation. Areas such as the Bugisu Sub-region record higher rates of adolescent household heads, reflecting localised vulnerabilities that demand targeted interventions. A one-size-fits-all policy response will not suffice. What is needed is a nuanced approach that addresses both national and regional realities.

Government has acknowledged the problem, with the Gender ministry proposing measures such as a national child disability grant and expanded support for struggling families. These are steps in the right direction, but they remain insufficient unless backed by sustained funding, effective implementation, and community-level engagement. Social protection programmes must move beyond policy documents and translate into tangible support for the most vulnerable households.

Equally critical is prevention. Strengthening families through poverty alleviation, access to healthcare, and education is the most effective way to reduce the number of children forced into premature adulthood. Uganda cannot afford to normalise a reality where children become heads of households. It must treat it as a national emergency.

This is ultimately a moral question as much as it is a policy challenge. A society that compels its children to grow up too soon risks eroding its own future. If Uganda is to secure long-term development, it must invest decisively in protecting its youngest citizens, not only because they are vulnerable, but because they are the foundation upon which the nation's future depends.