

UNICEF Unveils new plan for Uganda's children

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KAMPALA — UNICEF has launched a new five-year programme for Uganda, warning that millions of children remain exposed to overlapping risks including poverty, teenage pregnancy, malnutrition and disease outbreaks, even as the country's young population continues to grow.

The new Country Programme for Uganda, covering 2026 to 2030, was unveiled during a media briefing at UNICEF Uganda headquarters in Mbuya.

Developed jointly with the Government of Uganda, the strategy places child protection, nutrition, education, climate resilience and social protection at the centre of UNICEF's next phase of work.

The organisation says the plan marks a broader shift.

Instead of relying mainly on shorter, stand-alone projects, UNICEF says it will increasingly focus on strengthening Uganda's public systems so services for children can reach more families and continue over the long term.

For ordinary Ugandans, the issues UNICEF highlighted are deeply familiar.

They touch homes, schools, health centres and communities every day.

A child dropping out of school after becoming pregnant.

A family struggling with poor nutrition despite having food.

A district health team racing to contain an Ebola threat.

Or a vulnerable child facing abuse with few safe places to turn.

UNICEF Country Representative Dr Robin Nandy said Uganda's population



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structure makes those concerns urgent.

"Children in Uganda are facing multiple risks all around," he said.

"They face health risks, nutrition challenges, communicable diseases, climate shocks and poverty. Many are pulled out of school and pushed into labour, while girls are at risk of teenage pregnancy and early marriage."

Uganda remains one of the youngest countries in the world, which means policy choices affecting children now are likely to shape the country's workforce, economy and social wellbeing for decades.

Dr Nandy said UNICEF's work is designed to support national systems rather than replace them.

"We are not here to replace government systems or financing," he said. "Our role is catalytic, supporting policy reform, testing

innovations and strengthening systems so that government can deliver services more effectively."

One of the most pressing concerns raised during the briefing was teenage pregnancy.

UNICEF described it as a health, education and economic issue.

Dr Nandy said once girls become pregnant, many leave school and often struggle to return.

"This is not just a health issue. It is a social and economic issue," he said.

"When girls become pregnant, many drop out of school and rarely return."

He described keeping girls in school as one of the most effective ways to reduce teenage pregnancy and improve long-term outcomes.

"Keeping girls in school is a win-win intervention. It improves education outcomes and significantly reduces exposure to early pregnancy."

UNICEF also raised concern about malnutrition.

But officials said the challenge is not simply lack of food.

"There is no shortage of food in Uganda," Dr Nandy said. "The challenge is dietary diversity and household feeding practices. Children are not always eating the right kinds of food."

That distinction matters.

It means the concern is increasingly about nutrition quality, what children are eating and how families are feeding them, rather than food availability alone.

The agency also outlined how its child protection work will operate at household, community and national levels.

That includes supporting parents on positive parenting, working with local

leaders to challenge harmful practices such as child marriage and child labour, and strengthening institutions responsible for protecting children.

UNICEF also highlighted SAUTI 116, Uganda's national child helpline, which allows children and communities to report abuse and seek support.

The organisation also linked the strategy to Uganda's Ebola preparedness.

UNICEF says it is working with the Ministry of Health and other partners on risk communication, sanitation, hygiene and infection prevention.

Authorities are currently prioritising 37 high-risk districts, especially along the border with the Democratic Republic of Congo where movement between communities raises transmission risks.

"Community engagement is critical because early detection and behaviour change are key to controlling outbreaks," Dr Nandy said.

He also cautioned against misinformation, noting Ebola spreads through direct contact with bodily fluids and not through the air.

At the same time, UNICEF acknowledged financial pressure.

Dr Nandy said UNICEF Uganda reduced its workforce by about 25 percent in 2025 because of declining donor funding.

"Most traditional donors have reduced development financing," he said. "There is a global shift towards domestic priorities and trade."

Even with those cuts, UNICEF says investment in children remains essential.

"You cannot achieve sustainable economic development without investing in human capital," Dr Nandy said.

UNICEF Chief of Communication, Advocacy and Partnerships Yves Willemot said the programme is structured around five key sectors and remains focused on helping every child access essential services.

"This is a jointly agreed programme with the Government of Uganda," Willemot said. "Our focus is on building systems that ensure every child can access essential services."