

# Lira's vulnerable learners seek aid

The organisation that has been funding their education says it is financially constrained and not able to support them after they complete Primary Seven.

For years, the life of Barbra Awor, a Primary Six pupil of Ambalal Primary School in Lira City has been one of struggle.

Her life has been marked by misery and uncertainty ever since her mother allegedly dumped her when she was just three days old.

Awor, now aged 14, has been struggling to imagine what parental love looks like.

She has never met her mother or father, who is said to have disappeared before Awor was born, having denied any responsibility for her mother's pregnancy.

"They used to tell me that my mother abandoned me after birth, even my father," Awor told *Daily Monitor*.

She added: "I don't know where they are now."

Awor lives with her uncle, Mr Mike Opio, a boda boda rider at Akwoyo Cell, Omito Ward in Lira City East, who she said, paid for her education before she dropped out in Primary One after he failed to raise enough money to feed them and pay for her education.

It was at this time that a Good Samaritan started paying for her education from Primary One up to Primary Six.

Mr Opio said Awor's mother died, when she was two years, leaving behind three children, whom he has been struggling to look after amidst hardship since his occupation cannot adequately sustain them.

"There was no clothing, food, medical care, or school fees. Sometimes they can send us home for school fees, but because we have no money at all, we miss out on lessons," Awor said.

Awor, who hopes to one day become a member of the clergy, is among 53, mostly vulnerable children at Ambalal Primary School in Lira City, whose education is now being supported by Flare International Foundation, a local NGO working in Lira. However, she is uncertain about joining secondary school since the NGO said it cannot support them beyond Primary Seven due to a lack of resources.

"But when I'm at school, I feel better... I want to be an Anglican priest tomorrow and I do request them to support us because we are going to be the ones to replace them tomorrow," she said.

Timothy Ameto, 15, a Primary Five pupil at the same school, is also facing the same predicament. His father reportedly deserted his family three years ago.

"I was 12 years old when my father abandoned home in 2022. He disappeared from us but we are told he is still alive. We were completely deprived. We survived at the mercy of well-wishers since my mother did not have money," Ameto said.

Flare International Foundation helped him to go back to school last year, after he dropped out in 2022.

"When I finish my Primary Seven, I didn't know who will pay my fees since my mother doesn't have money to pay my tuition," Ameto said.

He added: "I want to study and become a doctor in future. I don't know how I will reach that goal."

Mr Rafael M Kelly Opio, the founder of Flare International Foundation, explained that they started the organisation to address some of challenges in Lango Sub-region, especially after the end of the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) insurgency in the early 2000s.

"The post-LRA conflict left behind a lot of gaps in the education sector, in the health sector, and in the economy. A lot of youth, a lot of young children, a lot of people remain very vulnerable. Young children remain without parents. Most of them had nowhere to go," Mr Opio said.

Flare International Foundation has enabled about 500 children in the sub-region who had dropped out of



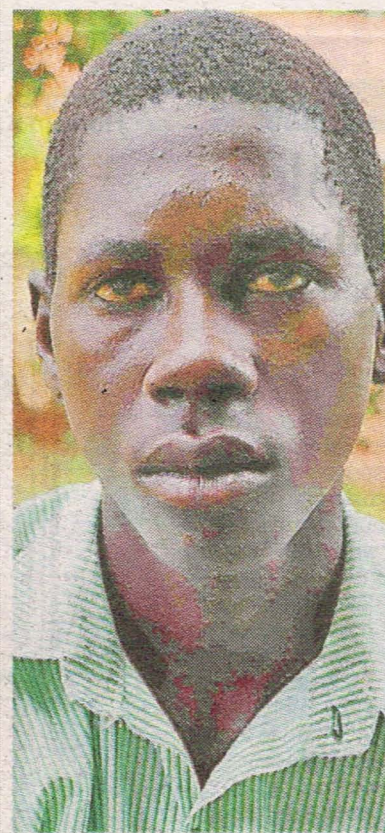
Barbra Awor, a P.6 pupil of Ambalal Primary School. PHOTOS/ CHARITY AKULLO

## BARBRA AWOR'S CASE

Her life has been marked by misery and uncertainty ever since her mother allegedly dumped her when she was just three days old. Awor, now aged 14 and in Primary Six, has also never met her father, because he disappeared before she was born. She appealed for funds to enable her to go to secondary school.

school to resume studies.

But Mr Opio is concerned that these children may not be able to study be-



Timothy Ameto, 15, is a P.5 pupil at Ambalal Primary School in Lira City.

## TIMOTHY AMETO'S CASE

He dropped out of school in 2022 after his father reportedly abandoned him and other family members three years ago. Flare International Foundation helped him return to school last year. He is appealing to the public to sponsor his secondary school education.

yond Primary Seven.

"I have been using my personal resources to support these children, but we are not in position to continue sup-

porting their secondary education," Mr Opio said.

He added: "I'm appealing to charitable organisations to take over from us so that these vulnerable children can also have hope of achieving their dreams."

Mr Opio said at the primary level, they have paid fees for the children to study at government-aided schools and also provided them with scholastic materials.

"We have over 300 children who are skilled in carpentry [and] shoe making. And the youth, who have not got a chance of going back to education, [have] the skill," he said.

Mr George Ongom, the director of studies at Ambalal Primary School, a government-aided school in Lira City, said they have 560 pupils, the majority of whom are girls, but the school has had a number of challenges.

He explained that about 400 pupils are vulnerable children who do not have scholastic materials and some do not have where to go during holidays but remain at school.

"Some of these children are dumped at the school without any essentials and some are even sick, but we struggle to feed and treat them," Mr Ongom said.

He added: "Those who do not know who their parents are are 74. But those with single parents, and the vulnerable are about 400."

Mr Ongom said since 2019, Flare International Foundation has supported 53 most vulnerable children to study at Ambalal Primary School.

"But our worry is that from here when they complete Primary Seven, they will drop out unless Good Samaritans come out to support their secondary education," Mr Ongom said.

He added: "We request other organisations like Unicef, Plan Uganda, and the like, at least to come in. I would also like to thank the government. They are doing their best to support the schools, but what they are giving is not enough."