

# When being online turns creepy

By Umar Nsubuga

"One minute you are learning, the next you are dealing with someone who wants to make you feel small," Dorcas Byonanebye, a 15-year-old teenager, says.

Childhood is no longer shaped by only classrooms, playgrounds and village paths. For many children, a part of daily life now unfolds on phones, tablets and shared family computers and smart TVs.

## CHILDREN'S ONLINE EXPERIENCES

As internet access spreads, young Ugandans are learning, socialising and exploring a digital world that offers exciting opportunities accompanied by unsettling risks. For the children, the Internet feels like a double-edged space.

Shazad Rashid Nsubuga, a 14-year-old Senior One student at Kibuli Secondary School, describes it as "fun and helpful," especially for learning through videos, games and school discussions.

However, he admits that it can be frightening. "Cyber bullying is when someone uses internet to embarrass or scare another child," Nsubuga says.

AbdulRahman Kato, 17, says, the Internet supports

## EXPERTS **ADVICE**

Sheikh Abdul Mpindi, an Imam at Kisaasi Mosque, says the Internet has become a powerful learning tool for children. However, he warns that the same space exposes them to harmful content, online predators and exploitation risks faced by children both in Uganda and globally. George Turyasiima, a secondary school teacher, notes that pupils' experiences combine excitement with fear. "If a child says internet is fun, but sometimes creepy, adults must listen," he says, calling for early digital education. Sharon Tumwijkye, another teacher, urges schools to educate digital well-being lessons for children to manage peer pressure and online rumours. Rashid Kateregga, a lawyer, adds that stronger enforcement of laws against cyber bullying is needed, with clear reporting channels.



study, skills development and friendships, yet it sometimes feels "creepy".

Kato notes that young people are learning to protect themselves by blocking unwanted users and limiting what they share. For girls, the online space brings both empowerment and pressure.

Byonanebye says internet

allows her to research, write creatively and follow science pages that inspire her future dreams. But she notes how quickly the experience can change to being bullied.

Shared private information and toxic class groups, can affect emotions.

Miracle Asiiimwe, 15, says internet makes the world feel closer and gives young people, especially girls, a voice.

Yet she highlights quieter pressures, such as chasing likes, copying unrealistic trends or feeling obliged to respond to unknown people.

Some children may start to avoid school, because of what happens to them online.