

A MERGER OF EDUCATION, HOUSEHOLD WELFARE AND SOCIAL PROTECTION

By Joseph Bahingwire

A partnership between Kampala Capital City Authority (KCCA) and UNICEF has transformed the lives of more than 4,000 vulnerable adolescent girls in Kampala through a combined model of cash transfers and structured mentorship.

The Girls Empowering Girls (GEG) initiative, launched in 2019 with funding from the Government of Belgium, was designed to address the root causes of school dropout and social vulnerability among girls living in urban informal settlements.

By integrating financial support with life-skills training and mentorship, the programme has emerged as a promising model for urban female social protection.

Under the initiative, approximately sh2.6b was disbursed to vulnerable households, easing economic pressure and enabling families to keep their daughters in school. The cash transfers were complemented by regular mentorship sessions, psychosocial support and community engagement activities aimed at building confidence and resilience among the girls.

Speaking about the impact of the programme, KCCA executive director Sharifah Buzeki described the intervention as a game-changer in addressing urban poverty and inequality.

"This programme has shown us that when you combine financial support with mentorship and community involvement, the results are not only immediate but also sustainable," Buzeki said. "Empowering girls is not a single intervention—it requires

KCCA, UNICEF MENTORSHIP EMPOWERS OVER 4,000 GIRLS



Programme participants attending a training session

a holistic approach that addresses education, household welfare and social protection at the same time."

THE PARTNERS

The programme was implemented by Trailblazers Mentoring Foundation Uganda in partnership with Uganda Youth Development Link, targeting high-risk groups such as teenage mothers, girls with disabilities and refugees.

Diana Kamwada, a peer mentor under the programme, noted that the transition from primary to secondary school remains one of the most critical stages.

"Many girls fall through the cracks during the transition to secondary school because of financial constraints, lack of guidance or social pressures," Kamwada explained. "Through mentorship, we were able to walk with them, build their confidence and

help them see a future beyond their immediate circumstances."

On the global development front, UNICEF Country Director Robin Nandy said the programme has delivered measurable results, particularly in improving school retention and transition rates.

"We have seen a 95% transition rate from primary to secondary education among girls supported under this initiative," Nandy said.

EMPOWERMENT

According to programme data, more than 800 girls who had previously dropped out of school were successfully re-enrolled into formal education. In addition, 211 girls completed vocational training in skills such as tailoring, hairdressing and catering, while at least 35 beneficiaries have since started small businesses, providing them with a pathway to economic independence. Mentors played a central role in guiding the girls through personal and academic challenges.

"This demonstrates that targeted investments in adolescent girls can yield significant returns. However, we must not lose sight of the broader challenge—multidimensional child poverty in Uganda remains high, affecting about 44% of children."

Building on its success, the GEG model is now being expanded to 11 additional districts, including regions in West Nile and Acholi, with new funding support from the European Union, Iceland and the Netherlands, with an aim to reach at least 15,000 more vulnerable girls nationwide.

"What we are leaving behind is not just impact, but evidence. This model provides a strong foundation for scaling urban social protection programmes that are responsive to the unique challenges faced by adolescent girls," Sheila Birungi Gandhi, the programme coordinator, explained.