

# Learning crisis, rising poverty and child brides in Uganda; Covid school closures blamed

Children in Uganda head back to the classroom this week as the world's longest school closure ends - but lost learning may lead to high dropout rates in the coming weeks without urgent action, [Save the Children](#) said.



Source: [Borgen Project](#)

In March 2020, all schools across the country shut down as the Covid-19 pandemic took hold. Since then, Uganda has kept schools fully or partly closed, putting some children's education on hold for 83 weeks.

Last November, Save the Children revealed that up to one in five children in fragile countries, including Uganda, had dropped out of school because of rising poverty, child marriage and child labour, which have been exacerbated by the pandemic.

The agency is now warning of a 'second wave' of dropouts as returning students who have fallen behind in their learning fear they have no chance of catching up.

## Tackling the learning crisis

To tackle the learning crisis in Uganda, Save the Children has launched Catch-up Clubs -- an innovative approach to accelerate the recovery of lost learning during the pandemic and help children successfully return to school.

The clubs assess children and teach them at the required level to help them regain literacy and other learning, with child-protection support and cash assistance for families struggling to send them to school.

Despite efforts to provide remote learning, many children were unable to access online lessons during the pandemic because they had no computer or a poor Internet connection.

The Catch-up Clubs provide the boost that vulnerable students like Ben\*, 11, need to avoid having to repeat a year or drop out forever.

"\*Before I joined Catch-up Clubs, I didn't know how to use letter sounds. I was [confused] by very long words [in books]," explained Ben, who is enrolled in a Catch-up Club in Wakiso, Uganda. "\*Games and songs helped me learn how to pronounce and read long words. I am now able to understand those words whenever I find them in my homework and storybooks."\*



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## Targeting children from Grade 3 to 5

Catch-up Clubs are specifically aimed at children falling behind in Grades 3-5, when their learning can be accelerated relatively easily. After about 12 weeks, at least 80% of participants can read and write to a standard that allows them to learn independently.

Edison Nsubuga, Head of Education at Save the Children in Uganda, said: "As schools begin to reopen across the country, it is critical that all girls and boys have access to the support they need to successfully return to the classroom.

"Many children have fallen behind in school as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. Children who are behind in their learning are less likely to unlock their potential as adults. However, when children receive the learning boost they need and have access to quality education, they can reach their full potential."

## A lifeline for children

"The Catch-up Clubs program is a holistic approach to education that benefits all levels of the community. The clubs have been a lifeline for many children in Uganda while the majority of schools remained closed for nearly two years. Without the clubs, some of these children may not be returning to school today."

Save the Children has also been working with the Ministry of Education and Sports in Uganda to encourage families across the country to prepare and take their children back to school, including pregnant girls and teenage mothers.

## Great need in Myanmar, Malawi, Bangladesh, the DRC and Nigeria

Alongside Uganda and Colombia, Save the Children plans to launch Catch-up Clubs in Myanmar, Malawi, Bangladesh, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Nigeria in the coming months, with further countries to follow in an effort to reach over a million children by the end of 2022.

As schools begin to reopen in Uganda and elsewhere around the world, Save the Children is calling for governments and donors to support every child's return to class, to ensure families and teachers are supported to make up for lost learning, and build back better and more resilient education systems.

The organisation is also calling for governments to keep learning alive through inclusive distance learning if schools close their doors again.

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