



FAWE

FORUM FOR AFRICAN WOMEN EDUCATIONALISTS
FORUM DES EDUCATRICES AFRICAINES



POLICY BRIEF

Enhancing Education Access, Equity, and Leadership in Refugee and Host Communities in East Africa

Findings from Kenya, Uganda, and Ethiopia



CITATION: FAWE, HERS-EA, & ACER UK (2025). *Enhancing Education Access, Equity, and Leadership in Refugee and IDP Communities in East Africa. Findings from Ethiopia, Kenya, and Uganda. Policy Brief.*

2025



784

Participants from Kenya, Uganda and Ethiopia that were engaged in the research.

2.5 million

Number of refugees and asylum-seekers. (UNHCR Ethiopia, 2024; UNESCO, 2023)

I. Executive Summary

This policy brief synthesises key findings from a Phase 2 study on education in refugee and host-community contexts in **Kenya, Uganda, and Ethiopia**. The research, which engaged over 784 participants, examined persistent barriers to participation, gender dynamics, and youth leadership within a region that hosts over 2.5 million refugees and asylum-seekers (UNHCR Ethiopia, 2024; UNESCO, 2023)

Key Challenges:



- **Poverty and material shortages:** Limited access to school fees, learning materials, food, and sanitary products affects participation, especially for girls.



- **Cultural and gender norms:** Girls face early marriage, domestic burdens, and limited leadership opportunities.



- **Psychosocial stress:** Trauma, displacement, and insecurity reduce learning and participation.



- **Resource and infrastructure gaps:** Overcrowded classrooms, lack of sanitation, and insufficient teaching materials hinder learning.

Key Findings:

- Students are motivated to learn, participate, and lead when supported.
- Teachers and communities are willing to engage but need resources and training.
- Existing school clubs, PTAs, and NGO support provide a strong platform for interventions.

Recommendations and Call to Action



Governments and Education Authorities: Integrate peer-led models like Tuseme into school programs; support teacher training, psychosocial care, and gender-equity policies.



Schools and Educators: Establish inclusive clubs with rotating leadership, mentorship, and flexible schedules; integrate trauma-informed approaches.



NGOs and Partners: Provide resources, facilitation training, and community engagement support; link clubs to GBV, reproductive health, and psychosocial initiatives.



Donors: Invest in long-term capacity-building, scalable interventions, and cross-country learning.



Adapt Tuseme for refugee and host-community contexts.



Train facilitators, teachers, and mentors.



Monitor and evaluate outcomes with feedback loops.



Scale interventions regionally using lessons learned.



For me, why I get happy when I come here is that there are different hopes at home and school... So, when I come here, I get hope. I want to be a teacher."



II. Introduction and Background

Education in Crisis:

Uganda, Kenya, and Ethiopia host millions of refugees and displaced learners. These students face overlapping challenges: poverty, trauma, lack of teachers, poor infrastructure, and gender-based barriers. Girls and marginalised groups are disproportionately affected.

Gap in Student-Centred Approaches:

Most interventions focus on infrastructure or teacher deployment, overlooking student voice, agency, and participation. Learners lack platforms to share challenges or propose solutions.

Tuseme Model:

Tuseme, a Kiswahili word which means "Let us speak out", is a participatory empowerment program for students, promoting leadership, life skills, and advocacy. FAWE aims to adapt Tuseme to refugee and IDP contexts to enhance student agency, leadership, and gender equity.

Study Objectives:

- Assess the feasibility of adapting Tuseme for refugee/IDP settings.
- Identify enabling factors that could support its adaptation and disabling factors that might hinder its effectiveness.
- Provide actionable recommendations for schools, NGOs, and policymakers.



Methodology:

- Qualitative, multi-country study in 12 schools across Kenya, Uganda, and Ethiopia.
- **Participants:** 784 students, teachers, parents, government officials, and education stakeholders, with 4 schools per country (n=12), including 209 in Uganda alone, 236 in Ethiopia, and 341 in Kenya
- **Methods:** Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and Key Informant Interviews (KIIs).



III. Findings

Enabling Factors	Disabling Factors
 <p>Community and teacher support: Engaged teachers and parents enhance participation.</p>	 <p>Teacher capacity gaps: Lack of training in facilitation and psychosocial support.</p>
 <p>Existing clubs and initiatives: Student-led clubs provide platforms for voice, advocacy, and peer mentorship.</p>	 <p>Resource constraints: Schools lack funds for materials, club activities, and transport.</p>
 <p>Motivated students: Learners show enthusiasm for leadership when opportunities are available.</p>	 <p>Cultural resistance: Some communities are hesitant to allow girls to speak publicly or lead.</p>

IV. Discussion

Findings from Ethiopia, Kenya, and Uganda confirm that the Tuseme model has strong potential to empower refugee and IDP learners by enhancing voice, confidence, and leadership. However, its successful adaptation requires a context-sensitive approach that directly addresses systemic constraints and deeply embedded socio-cultural dynamics.



Student empowerment:

Evidence from Ethiopia, Kenya, and Uganda shows that peer-led clubs increase students’ confidence, leadership skills, and participation, particularly for girls and marginalized learners. The creation of safe spaces for dialogue and expression aligns with participatory education models that emphasize learner voice and agency (Freire, 1970; Oduro & MacBeath, 2003; Bali & Mbise, 2018).



Gender-sensitive approaches are essential:

Programs must explicitly consider household responsibilities, early and forced marriage risks, and entrenched cultural norms that disproportionately affect girls’ participation. These findings mirror existing literature demonstrating that gender-responsive strategies are critical to improving access, retention, and empowerment outcomes for girls in marginalized communities (Sifuna & Chege, 2006; Parkes et al., 2016; UNESCO, 2018).



Partnerships matter: collaboration improves outcomes:

Collaboration between schools, NGOs, and local authorities strengthens program sustainability and supports scale-up. Such partnerships enable resource mobilization, community buy-in, and institutional legitimacy, reinforcing findings that multi-stakeholder engagement is essential for effective education interventions in fragile and low-resource contexts (Unterhalter & Heslop, 2011; Grant & Unterhalter, 2012; Unterhalter et al., 2019).



Context-specific adaptation is critical

Refugee and IDP settings require flexible schedules, trauma-informed pedagogies, and the provision of safe spaces for girls. Adapting empowerment models to address psychosocial distress and systemic constraints is consistent with evidence from education-in-emergencies research emphasizing context-responsive and system-embedded approaches (Tikly et al., 2020; Darling-Hammond et al., 2017).

V. Recommendations

1 For Governments and Education Authorities:

1. Integrate participatory empowerment models (like Tuseme) into school curricula.
2. Provide teacher training on gender-sensitive facilitation and psychosocial support.
3. Ensure safe, girl-friendly learning environments, including sanitation and transport solutions.
4. Develop policies promoting student leadership and participation in decision-making.



Though it is changing, still a lot of awareness needs to be done to the community on how the girls, how equality can be achieved and how this equality can be of good benefit to the whole community."

2 For Schools and Educators:

1. Establish inclusive student clubs with rotating leadership and mentorship.
2. Schedule activities to accommodate household responsibilities and gender needs.
3. Provide psychosocial support and safe spaces for students to express themselves.



3 For NGOs and Partners:

1. Support resource provision for clubs, training, and learning materials.
2. Engage parents and communities to support girls' education and leadership.
3. Align club activities with GBV, reproductive health, and psychosocial programs.



4 For Donors:

1. Invest in scalable, evidence-based student empowerment programs.
2. Fund cross-country learning and adaptation initiatives.
3. Monitor long-term outcomes to guide policy and resource allocation.



5 For Scaling Tuseme:

1. Package learnings into a replicable toolkit for schools in refugee and IDP contexts, including facilitation guides, leadership frameworks, and monitoring tools.
2. Advocate for the inclusion of Tuseme within national and regional education strategies.
3. Facilitate exchange visits and learning forums between schools across countries to share best practices and successes.



4. Continuously refine the model based on monitoring data and feedback to ensure responsiveness to cultural, linguistic, and socio-economic differences.
5. Promote community ownership through parent engagement, local mentorship, and institutional support from education authorities and NGOs.



VI. Call to Action



- **Adaptive implementation:** Deploy the adapted Tuseme model with a focus on inclusive participation, addressing vulnerabilities related to disability, gender, and health.



- **Capacity building and training:** Train teachers, school administrators, and community mentors in inclusive pedagogies, trauma-informed approaches, and gender-sensitive leadership facilitation.



- **Community engagement:** Strengthen partnerships with parents, local leaders, and faith-based organisations to reinforce gender equity messages and inclusive participation.



- **Monitoring, evaluation, and learning (MEL):** Implement a robust MEL framework to track progress, identify gaps, and adapt interventions in real-time. Use cross-country learning to inform scalable approaches suitable for other refugee and IDP contexts.



- **Policy integration and advocacy:** Advocate for the integration of findings into national education policies in Uganda, Kenya, and Ethiopia.



- **Knowledge dissemination and scale-up:** Develop a replicable toolkit for Tuseme implementation in similar contexts, combining lessons on gender equity, leadership, psychosocial support, disability inclusion, and environmental resilience.

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- Supported/Funded by GPE KIX

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Disclaimer:

This work was carried out with the aid of a grant from the International Development Research Centre (IDRC), Ottawa, Canada. The views expressed herein do not necessarily represent those of IDRC or its Board of Governors.