

## GPE-KIX Tuseme: A voice for Internally Displaced and Refugee Children Project Report

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## SCOPING STUDY: The Enabling Factors, Barriers, and Limitations to an Adapted Tuseme Club in Refugee and Internally Displaced Communities in Ethiopia, Kenya, and Uganda

### Report Context and Aims

This report constitutes a scoping study into 12 refugee and internally displaced communities in Ethiopia, Kenya, and Uganda. The aim was to identify any contextual social, cultural, or economic factors which would support or hinder the deployment of a Tuseme gender empowerment club in the communities. Tuseme is a Kiswahili word meaning ‘let us speak out’ and constitutes an established school-based club across Sub-Saharan Africa, which has demonstrated its capacity to empower youth through the medium of theatre and arts. Using its 12-step approach, it amplifies the voices of young people and equips them with the skills they need to claim their educational and social rights. This report forms part of the second phase of a three-year applied research project, which aims to generate evidence on whether and how the Tuseme club can be scaled into refugee and internally displaced communities in East Africa and beyond. As such, the research aimed to identify evidence-based insights from the project’s target communities,

which can be used to adapt and scale the model.



### Methods

#### Research questions



1. What are the main socio-cultural barriers to the effective deployment of an adapted Tuseme club?
2. What are the main enabling factors for a successful deployment of an adapted Tuseme club?
3. What contextual adaptations need to be made to the Tuseme club to support its effectiveness?



#### Approach

The research used a case study approach to explore contextual factors that would support or hinder the deployment of the Tuseme gender empowerment initiative into target refugee and internally displaced communities in Ethiopia, Kenya, and Uganda.



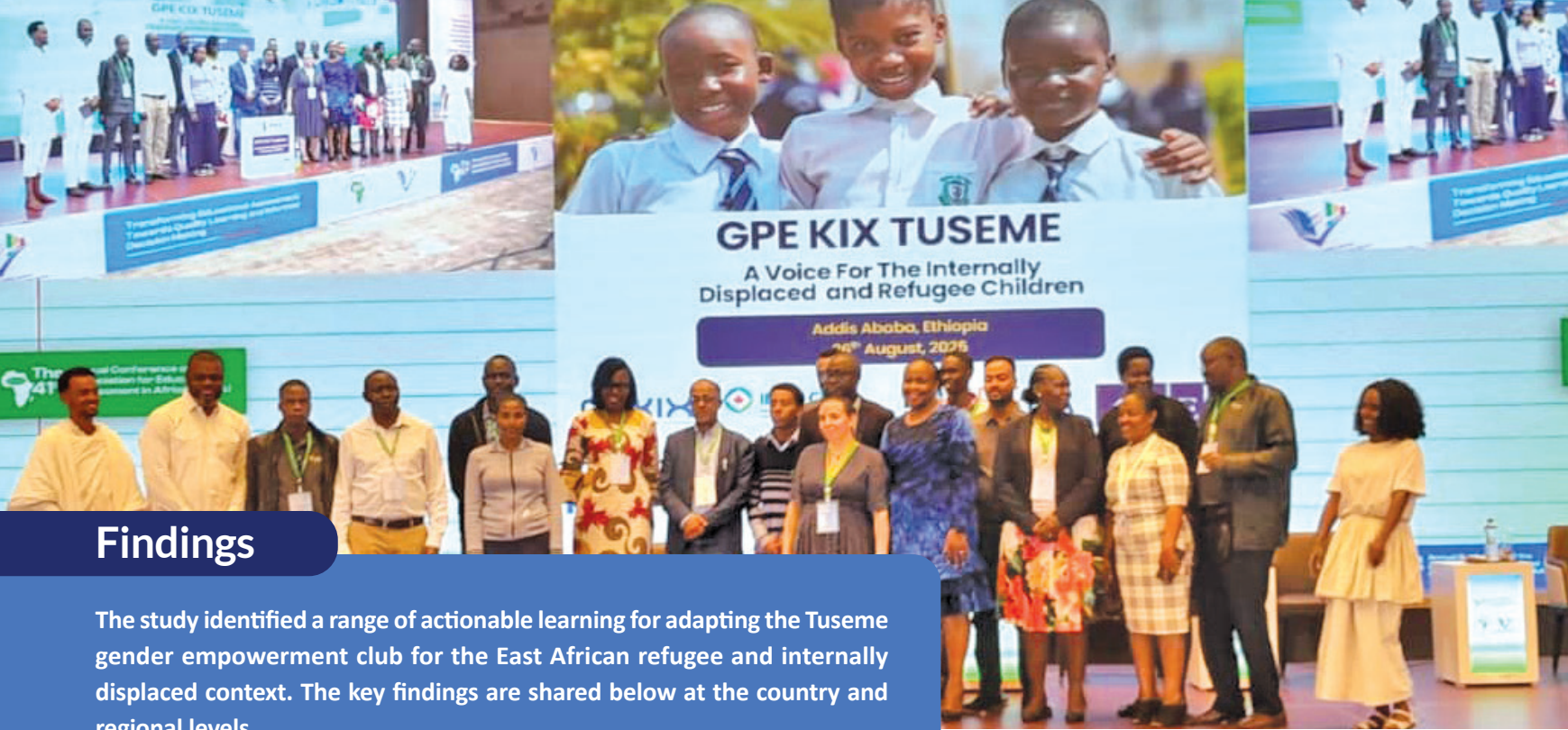
#### Sampling

12 schools were sampled across the target countries (4 per country) using purposive sampling. The key sampling variables considered were safety and accessibility, type and size of school, gender balance of school, and population type (refugee, IDP, mixed).



#### Data collection and analysis

The primary data collection method employed was qualitative via semi-structured focus group discussions and key informant interviews. This data was analysed using thematic coding. A range of quantitative data was also collected. This was primarily administrative data from the schools, and descriptive statistics were used to explore it. Evidence from all data sources was triangulated at the case study level, country level, and cross-country level to identify actionable insights for adapting the Tuseme model.



## Findings

The study identified a range of actionable learning for adapting the Tuseme gender empowerment club for the East African refugee and internally displaced context. The key findings are shared below at the country and regional levels.

### Ethiopia

The findings from Ethiopia provide an in-depth picture of the enabling and disabling factors affecting the implementation of Tuseme across four case study schools (Hailemariam Mamo, Fitawrari Gebeyehu, Sherkole, and Woumba secondary schools).

These schools represent diverse contexts, including IDP and refugee settings, and reveal that while Tuseme has strong potential to build student voice, agency, and resilience, its effectiveness depends on integration into a wider support system that addresses the holistic needs of learners. Addressing socio-economic needs, integrating psychosocial support, strengthening infrastructure, supporting teachers, and embedding the model within school and community systems are likely all essential for sustainable impact.

The most significant disabling factor across all schools was the pervasive socio-economic hardship, which limits students' ability to engage in schooling and, by extension, school clubs. Many students, particularly in Sherkole and Woumba, prioritised labour over schooling, such as gold mining or household work. This reportedly led to absenteeism and school dropouts. Girls were further disadvantaged by economic challenges linked to menstrual hygiene and early marriage. Furthermore, schools were unable to provide reliable support systems for their students due to inconsistent external aid. These realities illustrate that Tuseme cannot succeed in isolation; its voice and agency model should be complemented by tangible material support. For instance, feeding programmes, sanitary pads, and basic supplies.

Language and cultural barriers presented further challenges for the success of the Tuseme clubs. For example, refugee students at Hailemariam Mamo and Sherkole struggled with instruction in Amharic, which limited their participation in schooling and will have similar implications for clubs. This is perhaps unsurprising in culturally heterogeneous settings like schools, which tend to support host communities and refugees from different socio-linguistic

backgrounds. However, finding inclusive and low-cost solutions will be a challenge for the adapted model, yet likely crucial to its success. Deeply rooted gender norms also constrained student voice, particularly around issues related to early marriage and domestic burdens. This is particularly problematic considering the raison d'être of the clubs is to provide learners with confidence and skills to speak about gender-based challenges affecting their lives. As such, the findings highlight the need for culturally sensitive, multilingual facilitation and careful navigation of local norms. Additionally, the study noted a decline in motivation and hope among students, which was compounded by trauma from conflict and displacement. This highlights the need for psycho-social support in the target communities, suggesting that adaptations that incorporate trauma-informed care, hope-building activities, and career guidance could be beneficial.

Teacher motivation and capacity also emerged as pivotal to the establishment and maintenance of the Tuseme clubs. While teachers displayed dedication to their role and students, they also reported being overburdened, underpaid, and lacking compensation for their extra work. This has the potential to reduce their ability to consistently support clubs. Therefore, activities like capacity-building, recognition, and potential incentives could be effective in retaining teacher engagement. Broader actors

in the educational ecosystems, including school management, parents, parent-teacher associations (PTAs), local government, and non-governmental organisations (NGOs), also played decisive roles.

School leaders were identified as critical for institutionalising Tuseme, parents and PTAs were found to influence attendance and attitudes, and NGOs were reported to provide essential (though often short-term) support. The evidence points to the need for stronger, long-term partnerships and more consistent community engagement.

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## Kenya

The findings from Kenya offer a nuanced understanding of how the Tuseme model could function within refugee and internally displaced school communities, with insights from four case study schools (Runyu, Central, Malakal primary schools, and Samali Bantu secondary school). The evidence demonstrates that while the core principles of voice and agency remain highly relevant, their application in the target communities requires deliberate contextual adaptation to address structural, socio-economic, and cultural barriers. By embedding the programme within broader socio-economic and policy frameworks, and by addressing the structural barriers faced by students and teachers alike, Tuseme can move from being an isolated club activity to a transformative, sustainable educational strategy.

The most prominent disabling factor likely to affect the successful deployment of a Tuseme club was the widespread lack of basic amenities. Poverty, hunger, and the absence of essential learning materials were consistently cited by participants across all four schools. This reportedly led to absenteeism, disengagement, and dropout, which will naturally lead to reduced learner engagement in the clubs and, in turn, a reduced overall impact. This suggests that Tuseme cannot be implemented in isolation, but instead, it must be linked to complementary support mechanisms. For example, school feeding programmes, provision of sanitary pads, and partnerships with NGOs for material aid.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, psychosocial support emerged as another critical area of need amongst the student population, which may act as a barrier to club participation and the wider empowerment process. Refugee and internally displaced learners reported high levels of trauma, depression, and emotional distress. While Tuseme clubs currently offer a degree of peer-based support and safe spaces, they cannot substitute for structured psychosocial services. This suggests that effective adaptation requires integration with professional counselling and other psychosocial support services, which could be implemented through NGO partnerships.

The study also highlighted the necessity of addressing issues most relevant to each school community. Each school community identified unique challenges. For instance, early



pregnancies linked to ‘disco matanga’ in Runyu primary school, early marriage and documentation issues in Central and Malakal primary schools, and FGM, GBV, and child prostitution in Somali Bantu secondary school. Tuseme clubs naturally embody this approach through their localised engagement processes, enabling learners to tailor their advocacy, performances, and activities to the specific concerns of their communities. This ensures that the clubs remain relevant, responsive, and impactful.

Teacher capacity, motivation, and consistency were found to be key factors influencing the club’s success, particularly in terms of sustainability. The findings highlight persistent teacher-related challenges, including underpaid or unpaid teachers, frequent transfers, layoffs, and limited professional development opportunities. These likely undermine both consistency and morale. Therefore, to support sustainable implementation, the model should consider incorporating factors such as continuous training, mentorship, and tangible incentives like professional recognition, resource provision, or financial support.

Community engagement and policy alignment emerged as enablers of long-term club sustainability. Leveraging local radio, community mobilisers, PTAs, and block leaders were found to be effective in raising awareness and challenging entrenched cultural barriers such as early marriage, FGM, and boy preference. Embedding these mechanisms into the Tuseme action planning and advocacy processes may help increase the reach and impact of the clubs. Furthermore, raising the profile of clubs with local and national government and integrating the club into their formal policies and processes, for example, through gender equality policies, could provide an institutional anchor which will support buy-in and increase scalability. Collecting evidence on attendance, retention, and empowerment outcomes will likely support securing policy buy-in and additional resources. One way to do this draws on FAWE’s Centres of Excellence model. Schools could adopt accountability measures such as audits, feedback loops, and PTA involvement to reinforce standards for gender equity, inclusion, and safety.

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## Uganda

**In Uganda, the findings highlighted the potential for the Tuseme model to empower learners through voice, agency and critical awareness within refugee and internally displaced school contexts, as well as a number of enabling and disabling factors that can support model adaptation. Evidence was drawn from four case study schools (Pagirinya, Arinyapi, Rwamwanja, and Ntenungi secondary schools).**

A central disabling factor identified is pervasive poverty and material deprivation, which was consistently reported as constraining learners' participation in education and, by extension, the Tuseme clubs. Girls in Pagirinya, for example, faced acute shortages of sanitary pads and school supplies, which directly undermined attendance and retention. For Tuseme to thrive and ensure participation, it will need to consider adaptations to address or mitigate these deficits. This could be achieved by linking clubs with external provision programmes or by embedding income-generating activities. For example, sanitary pad-making.

Deeply entrenched gender and cultural norms emerged as another critical barrier to the Tuseme club's success. The study found that in Pagirinya, Arinyapi, and Rwamwanja, girls were still perceived as marriage assets, while boys' education and leadership were concurrently prioritised. Such pervasive social norms are likely to impact how the Tuseme club and the gender views it promotes are received by students and the wider community, which will likely impact both participation and the wider ability of the club to influence positive change. As such, for Tuseme to be effective, the model needs to strengthen its community sensitisation strategies to shift norms around early marriage, girls' leadership, and equitable participation. Key groups to work with include faith leaders, mothers, PTAs, and Boards of Governors (BOGs). Building "safe spaces" for girls to develop voice and agency would likely also help to counteract these socio-cultural pressures.

Like in Kenya and Ethiopia, the psychosocial impact of displacement was identified as a consistent challenge amongst learners, negatively affecting their engagement in schooling. This will likely have implications for participation in the club. Trauma and low motivation were reported in Pagirinya, Rwamwanja, and Ntenungi, with teachers often acting as informal caregivers despite lacking training. This implies that for Tuseme to support empowerment and ensure consistent learner participation in the clubs, it should be adapted to provide psychosocial support. This could be achieved through multiple routes. For instance, collaboration with NGOs, trained counsellors, or health providers could ensure that the existing peer-support aspect of clubs is complemented by professional interventions. Without such adaptation, the model risks being undermined by the emotional burden learners face.

At the structural level, the study identified resource scarcity and weak infrastructure as major barriers to club sustainability. Overcrowded classrooms, lack of club budgets, and untrained teachers were particularly acute in Arinyapi, Rwamwanja, and Ntenungi, with students expressing frustration at poorly resourced clubs. This suggests that adaptation cannot be limited to content. It must also ensure resource provision, teacher training, and systemic support.

## Cross-country

The cross-country findings indicate that the Tuseme model's success in IDP and refugee communities depends on coordinated engagement across multiple levels, from individual learners to local and national government authorities. At the micro-level, learners are central to the club's mission and success, with the club's focus on voice and agency empowering students to identify problems and emerge as peer leaders. Across Ethiopia, Kenya, and Uganda, students reported valuing safe spaces for confidence-building, emotional support, and expression. Teachers and head teachers are crucial enabling actors for learners, acting as guides, mentors, and informal caregivers. However, they face consistent barriers, which limit their motivation and ability to support their students. Examples include heavy workloads, poor housing, and limited resources. As such, an adapted Tuseme model should consider how to support teacher capacity and agency, perhaps through the provision of targeted training, mentorship, and psychosocial support.

At the meso-level, parents, community members, and NGOs provide vital support, acting as mobilisers for education and partners in student development. Engaging PTAs and BOGs has the potential to enhance school-based initiatives and increase impact. Conversely, informal influencers can reinforce harmful practices, such as early marriage. Therefore, culturally sensitive and targeted community sensitisation was identified as a key area to focus on for the successful deployment of the club. NGOs and aid partners are critical in this regard and were identified as key partners in supporting girls' education and shifting attitudes. However, inconsistent and uncoordinated aid remains a widespread challenge, emphasising the need for long-term collaboration among humanitarian and development actors, sustaining engagement in the clubs and preventing student and community disengagement.

At the macro-level, government bodies and education authorities are essential for institutionalising Tuseme and ensuring long-term sustainability. Introducing the model through formal education structures and aligning it with national plans will likely help to ensure consistent resource allocation and sustained teacher capacity-building over time. Without systemic integration at this level, even well-functioning local initiatives risk remaining fragmented and unsustainable. Overall, the study highlights that Tuseme's effectiveness relies on the interplay of micro-, meso-, and macro-level actors, with coordinated support across these levels essential for sustainable impact in complex internally displaced and refugee contexts.

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***Across Ethiopia, Kenya, and Uganda, students reported valuing safe spaces for confidence-building, emotional support, and expression.***

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