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SUPPORT 770 CHILDREN TO LEARN AND THRIVE IN KARAMOJA

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Project Title	Support 770 Children to Learn and Thrive in Karamoja
Implementing partner	Nascent Research and Development Organization Uganda-
Project location	Tapac Sub-county, Moroto District, Karamoja Sub-region, Uganda
Project beneficiaries	770 children, comprising 540 primary school pupils aged 5 - 13 years and 230 children aged 1 - 4 years, 814 households, 7 villages.
Project budget	200,000 USD
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1. BACKGROUND TO THE PROBLEM

Karamoja, in northeastern Uganda, is a culturally rich region whose communities have long relied on pastoralism and livestock to sustain their livelihoods. However, many households face persistent poverty, recurrent drought, unreliable rainfall, livestock losses and food insecurity, which constrain their ability to meet basic needs and invest in children's education and development. Limited access to essential services and livelihood opportunities compounds these challenges, particularly in underserved rural communities.

The 2026 report Growing up in Karamoja, Uganda: Understanding Child Marriage and Child Labour, by the Freedom Fund and the AfriChild Centre, provides important evidence of how these structural pressures shape children's lives. The study identifies poverty and hunger as primary drivers of child marriage and child labour, with drought, crop failure and livestock losses pushing families towards difficult survival strategies. It also highlights the consequences for children's safety, health and education, alongside gaps in the coverage and capacity of child protection services. These findings reinforce the importance of interventions that expand educational opportunities while responding to the material and social conditions affecting children and their caregivers.

In this context, access to education and early childhood development cannot be understood independently of household survival. When families struggle to secure food and income, children's education may be interrupted, delayed or deprioritised. Some children undertake work to contribute to household survival, while others face heightened risks of exploitation and early marriage. The Freedom Fund and AfriChild Centre research emphasises that protecting children requires locally grounded responses that strengthen access to education, engage communities and address the pressures that narrow families' choices.

Tapac Sub-county in Moroto District reflects these challenges. For years, Nascent RDO-U has worked alongside communities to expand opportunities and improve protection for underserved children and young people. Through community mobilisation involving 814 households, community members secured land and constructed a basic shelter to establish a school for their children. The community subsequently engaged government authorities and successfully lobbied for government-paid teachers. Today, 540 children aged 5–13 years attend the community-established school and are facilitated by 3 government-paid teachers.

This achievement demonstrates the community's determination to secure education for its children, even in the face of significant hardship. However, enrolment has outgrown the available infrastructure. The existing shelter is deteriorating and can no longer adequately accommodate the children. Pupils learn in overcrowded conditions, often seated in dust, without the dignity, safety and conducive environment necessary for effective learning.

Many parents and caregivers must leave home to seek casual work, food or other means of survival. In the absence of dedicated childcare and early learning services in their immediate community, they send their younger children to school alongside their older siblings. Consequently, approximately 230 children aged 1–4 years spend their days

around the school compound without structured early learning, age-appropriate play or dedicated supervision. Their older siblings often carry the additional responsibility of watching over them while attending lessons.

For most children, the school also represents an important opportunity to access food. Children arrive carrying empty plates or cups, hoping to receive a meal. For households experiencing severe food insecurity, a school meal can be an important source of nourishment. Yet the current school environment lacks the infrastructure and resources to respond adequately to the interconnected educational, nutritional and developmental needs of these children.

The situation presents an urgent opportunity to build on the community's achievements. By investing in safe classrooms, comprehensive early childhood development and nutritious meals, Nascent RDO-U and its partners can strengthen the conditions children need to learn, develop and thrive.

2. PROBLEM STATEMENT

Despite the community's successful efforts to establish a school and secure government-paid teachers, 540 primary schoolchildren in Tapac continue to learn in an overcrowded, deteriorating shelter that compromises their safety, dignity and learning environment. At the same time, 230 younger children aged 1 - 4 years accompany their older siblings to school because their caregivers must pursue livelihoods and there are no dedicated local facilities providing comprehensive early childhood development services. This poor learning environment demotivates learners, and over half of the learners tend to drop out of school in search of economic opportunities when they attain the age of 8 years.

These 770 children face interconnected barriers to learning, nutrition, care and healthy development. Without urgent investment in adequate classrooms, a dedicated ECD centre, trained ECD personnel, supervised play and nutritious meals, children risk missing critical opportunities for educational progress and early development. When they drop out of school, they are at risk of exploitation either as child labourers, or trafficked or forced marriage for girls. The project will address these gaps through an integrated, community-owned intervention that strengthens the existing education initiative while extending support to children in their earliest years.

3. OBJECTIVES

The goal of the project is: To improve access to safe, inclusive and developmentally appropriate learning, care and nutrition for 770 children in Tapac Sub-county, Moroto District, enabling them to learn, grow and thrive.

1. To improve the learning environment for primary schoolchildren by constructing and equipping four permanent primary classrooms within a five-classroom facility, providing safer and more dignified conditions for 540 pupils.
2. To expand access to comprehensive early childhood development by establishing and equipping a dedicated ECD centre, including an outdoor play hub, for 230 children aged 1–4 years.
3. Strengthen early learning and childcare provision by recruiting two professional ECD teachers to deliver age-appropriate activities, early stimulation, supervised play and nurturing care.
4. Improve children's nutrition and wellbeing by providing nutritious midday meals to all 770 children, contributing to improved wellbeing and readiness to participate in learning.
5. Strengthen community ownership and sustainability by building on Nascent RDO-U's established presence, community relationships, existing programmes and collaboration with local government to support continued engagement and responsible management of the facilities.

4. PROPOSED PROJECT ACTIVITIES

4.1 Construction and Equipping of Five Permanent Classrooms: The project will construct five permanent classrooms to replace the deteriorating community-built shelter and respond to growing demand for education. Four classrooms will serve primary schoolchildren, while one will accommodate the ECD centre. The facilities will be designed to provide safe, weather-appropriate and child-friendly learning spaces, with suitable furniture and essential learning materials.

The construction will build on the community's existing investment in establishing the school. The intervention will therefore strengthen an existing education initiative rather than create a parallel structure. Appropriate construction standards, accessibility, ventilation, sanitation considerations and child safety will be incorporated into the final design and budget.

4.2 Establishment of a Dedicated Early Childhood Development Centre: The project will establish a dedicated centre for the 230 children aged 1 - 4 years who currently spend their days around the school compound without structured early learning or dedicated childcare. The centre will provide age-appropriate learning experiences and respond to children's developmental needs through an integrated ECD approach.

The project recognises that early childhood development extends beyond preparing children for primary school. It encompasses responsive caregiving, early learning, play, health, nutrition, safety and opportunities for social, emotional, physical and cognitive development. Activities will be adapted to children's ages and developmental stages, creating an environment where young children can explore, interact, learn and develop in safety.

4.**3 Development of an Outdoor Play Hub**: The first of its kind in the district, an outdoor play hub will complement the ECD classroom by providing space for supervised play, physical activity, exploration and social interaction. Play-based activities will help children develop language, coordination, creativity, problem-solving abilities and relationships with peers.

The play hub will be designed around children's safety and developmental needs, using appropriate play materials and equipment. ECD teachers will facilitate activities that encourage participation and learning while ensuring that children are adequately supervised.

4.4 Recruitment of Two Professional ECD Teachers: The project will recruit two professional ECD teachers to provide structured early learning and care for children aged 1–4 years. The teachers will plan and facilitate developmentally appropriate activities, support early stimulation, organise supervised play, observe children's developmental progress and engage caregivers in promoting children's wellbeing.

The existing primary school already benefits from three government-paid teachers. The proposed ECD staffing will complement this public investment by addressing the distinct needs of younger children, whose care and learning requirements cannot be adequately met through the primary school arrangement alone.

4.5 Provision of Nutritious Midday Meals: The project will provide nutritious midday meals to all 770 children. In a context where food insecurity affects household wellbeing and children arrive at school with no food, school feeding will provide an important source of nourishment and support participation in learning. Meal planning and delivery will be guided by available resources, age-appropriate nutritional needs, food safety and locally feasible sourcing arrangements. Where practical, local procurement will be explored to support community participation and strengthen the sustainability of the feeding arrangement.

4.6 Community Engagement, Caregiver Participation and Local Ownership: Nascent RDO-U will continue working with caregivers, community leaders, school representatives and local government to support implementation and management of the facilities. Engagement will include community participation in project oversight, dialogue on children's developmental needs, and strengthening caregivers' understanding of the importance of early learning, responsive care, nutrition and school attendance. These activities will build on existing relationships and community structures, ensuring that the project remains responsive to local priorities and that families see the facilities as a shared community asset.

4.7 Monitoring, Learning and Accountability: Nascent RDO-U will establish a monitoring framework to track construction progress, facility use, enrolment and participation, ECD activities, meal provision and children's learning and developmental outcomes. Community feedback will inform implementation and help identify emerging needs. The project will apply appropriate child safeguarding measures throughout construction, staffing, service delivery and community engagement. Children's participation, privacy, dignity and safety will guide the design and delivery of activities.

5. IMPLEMENTATION APPROACH

The project will adopt an integrated, community-led and locally grounded approach that recognises the interconnected nature of education, nutrition, care and child development.

- **Community-led implementation**: The intervention builds on the community's existing efforts to establish the school, mobilise households, secure land and advocate for government teachers. Nascent RDO-U will sustain community participation in implementation and oversight, reinforcing local ownership and shared responsibility.
- **Integrated programming**: Rather than treating classrooms, early childhood development and nutrition as separate interventions, the project will bring them together within one community-based initiative. This approach responds to the realities of children and caregivers while building on Nascent RDO-U's wider programming in the area.
- **Developmentally appropriate ECD**: The centre will use a comprehensive early childhood development approach that integrates early learning, responsive caregiving, play, nutrition, safety and child wellbeing. Activities will be appropriate to children's ages and capacities, recognising the importance of the early years for lifelong development.
- **Government collaboration:** Nascent RDO-U will build on its memorandum of understanding with local government and existing collaboration around education and community development. This will support coordination, alignment with local priorities and opportunities for continued public-sector engagement.
- **Evidence-informed programming:** The project will draw on Nascent RDO-U's experience in education and ECD, as well as evidence on children's experiences in Karamoja. The Freedom Fund and AfriChild Centre report highlights the need to strengthen educational access and respond to the structural pressures that undermine children's wellbeing. The proposed intervention contributes to this agenda by improving learning conditions and providing early childhood services within an underserved community.
- **Safeguarding and accountability:** The project will maintain child-centred safeguards, safe recruitment and supervision of personnel, appropriate reporting and referral procedures, and accessible channels for community feedback. Monitoring will support transparent use of resources and continuous learning.

6. NASCENT RDO-U'S COMPARATIVE ADVANTAGE

Nascent RDO-U is well positioned to implement this project because of its established presence in Tapac sub-county, strong community relationships, experience in Uganda's education sector and commitment to integrated, sustainable development. Its vision is "Transformed lives of underserved children and youth." The proposed project directly advances this vision by addressing barriers that prevent children from accessing safe learning environments, early childhood services and essential support for their development.

Established presence and sustained engagement since 2018: Nascent RDO-U has implemented interventions in the same location since 2018. This long-standing engagement has enabled the organisation to build relationships, understand local priorities and develop practical knowledge of the social and economic realities affecting children and their families. The project will build on existing strengths, relationships and resources, supporting continuity rather than establishing a stand-alone intervention with limited prospects for sustained engagement.

Community trust and ownership: Nascent RDO-U has worked with local communities to identify needs and support initiatives that respond to their priorities. The proposed project has been jointly designed with affected community members, reflecting their experience of the inadequate school shelter and the absence of dedicated early childhood services. This participatory foundation strengthens the likelihood that the facilities will be valued, used and supported by the community.

Government collaboration and local legitimacy: Nascent RDO-U has a memorandum of understanding with local government and experience collaborating with authorities to advance children's wellbeing. The existing community school's three government-paid teachers demonstrate the value of community mobilisation and

government engagement. Nascent RDO-U will build on this relationship to support coordination, alignment with education priorities and opportunities for continued institutional support.

Relevant education and ECD experience: Nascent RDO-U has reliable experience in Uganda's education sector and has piloted an ECD model in another rural context in Busoga. The experience provides a foundation for adapting approaches to Tapac sub-county while remaining attentive to local needs, resources and circumstances. Rather than transferring a model without adjustment, Nascent RDO-U will draw on lessons from its previous work to develop a contextually appropriate, comprehensive ECD service.

Deep understanding of Karamoja's social and economic realities: Nascent RDO-U's sustained work in the region has generated practical knowledge of household livelihoods, community relationships, social norms and the pressures affecting children's education and protection. This contextual understanding is essential in a setting where education cannot be separated from food insecurity, climate shocks, family responsibilities and the search for livelihoods. It positions Nascent RDO-U to engage communities respectfully and design interventions grounded in local realities.

Integrated programming and sustainability: Nascent RDO-U's approach brings together community engagement, child protection, education and broader support to children, young people and caregivers. The proposed project will build on this integrated programming to sustain relationships with families, connect the facilities with existing community resources and encourage continued engagement beyond the construction phase. This is a key advantage over interventions that focus exclusively on infrastructure without addressing the social relationships and local capacities needed to sustain its use.

Evidence-based and accountable practice: Nascent RDO-U values research, local knowledge, partnerships and mutual accountability. Its implementation approach will combine monitoring of measurable results with community feedback and learning. The organisation's child safeguarding commitments will guide all activities, ensuring that children's dignity, safety and best interests remain central to project delivery.

7. EXPECTED RESULTS AND LONG-TERM IMPACT

The project will improve access to safe education, early childhood development and nutrition for 770 children in Tapac Sub-county, Moroto District. The expected results are summarized below.

Results Level	**Expected Results**
Outputs - What we deliver	• Five permanent classrooms constructed and equipped (four primary and one ECD) • One functional ECD centre with an outdoor play hub • Two qualified ECD teachers recruited • Nutritious midday meals provided to 770 children during project-supported school days • Community engagement in school management.
Outcomes - What changes	• Improved school attendance, participation and retention among 540 primary schoolchildren • Improved access to early learning, nurturing care and developmental opportunities for 230 younger children • Improved nutrition and wellbeing among 770 children • Strengthened community ownership of children's education and development.
Long-Term Impact - The lasting difference	Children in Tapac Sub-county, Moroto District, have improved opportunities to learn, develop and thrive through sustained access to safe, inclusive education, comprehensive early childhood development and improved nutrition, contributing to better educational outcomes and long-term wellbeing.

8. BUDGET

BUDGET FOR THE CONSTRUCTION OF TOBITAK PRIMARY SCHOOL INTERGRATED WITH ECD						1USD=	4,383.60	27/10/2026
Item	**Budget Line**	**Unit**	**Quantity**	**Unit price in USD**	**Total in USD**			
School (5 blocks)	1	Each block	5	19,390	96,950			
School Latrine	2	Lumpsum	1	8,609	8,609			
School Furniture	3	Lumpsum	1	13,687	13,687			
School Uniforms	4	Lumpsum	1	11,406	11,406			
Scholastic materials	5	Lumpsum	1	6,844	6,844			
ECD Furniture	6	Lumpsum	1	4,562	4,562			
Play materials (Indoor & Outdoor)	7	Lumpsum	1	17,109	17,109			
Feeding costs at the school	8	Lumpsum	1	11,406	11,406			
ECD Teachers	9	Lumpsum	2	2,737	5,474			
Utilities (Water and Electricity)	10	Lumpsum	1	9,125	9,125			
Other project costs (Transport, Mobilisation, & Coordination)	11	Lumpsum	1	14,828	14,828			
TOTAL					**200,000**			