



# Financing Early Childhood Development in Refugee settlements: Experiences from Kyangwari Refugee Settlement, Uganda

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**Abstract:** Sustainable financing is fundamental to the effectiveness of Early Childhood Development (ECD) programmes in humanitarian contexts, yet limited empirical evidence exists on how available funding supports service delivery in refugee settlements. This study examined the extent to which financial resources support Early Childhood Development programs in Kyangwari Refugee Settlement, Uganda, guided by Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems perspective. A descriptive cross-sectional design employing mixed methods was used to collect data from 236 stakeholders, including Centre Management Committee members, teachers, parents, settlement officials, and partner organizations. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, while qualitative data were subjected to thematic analysis. Findings revealed that available funding was found to be largely donor-driven, project-based, and insufficient to meet the expanding needs of ECD centres, particularly in relation to teaching materials, caregiver support, and inclusive services. Despite generally positive perceptions of funding adequacy, 2.5% of the respondents indicated that available financial resources were insufficient for teaching and learning materials, reflecting persistent resource gaps across ECD centres. The study concludes that while financial investments contribute meaningfully to ECD programme implementation in refugee contexts, their impact is constrained by structural funding limitations and weak integration between humanitarian and development financing. The study recommends the adoption of predictable, long-term, and integrated financing mechanisms aligned with national ECD frameworks to enhance sustainability and equitable access to quality early childhood services in refugee settings.

**Keywords:** Early Childhood Development, Refugee Education, Education Financing, Programme Sustainability, Uganda, Centre management committee and Refugee Settlement.

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## 1. Introduction

Early Childhood Development (ECD) is increasingly recognized as a critical foundation for cognitive, social, emotional, and lifelong educational outcomes. In humanitarian contexts, including refugee settlements,

quality ECD interventions are particularly important because young children are exposed to displacement-related risks such as trauma, food insecurity, interrupted caregiving, and limited access to early learning opportunities (Yoshikawa et al., 2018). Research demonstrates that investment in ECD during emergencies contributes significantly to resilience, school readiness,

psychological wellbeing, and long-term human capital development (World Bank, 2018).

Despite growing international commitment to refugee education, financing remains one of the most significant constraints affecting the delivery and sustainability of ECD programmes in humanitarian context. Effective ECD programmes require continuous investment in infrastructure, nutrition, teaching material, caregivers training, psychosocial support, and inclusive learning services. In refugee settlements, where needs are extensive and resources limited, inadequate or inconsistent financing directly affects programmes quality, accessibility, and continuity. Unlike mainstream education systems, refugee ECD programmes often depend heavily on short-term donor funding, making them vulnerable to interruptions in external support (UNICEF, 2017; World Bank, 2024).

In many refugee-hosting countries, including Uganda, ECD services are supported through partnerships involving governments, humanitarian agencies and international development organizations. These interventions have contributed to infrastructure development, caregiver training, community-based programme management within refugee settlements (UNHCR, 2015).

Previous studies have largely focused on the role of ECD programmes in promoting psychosocial wellbeing, school readiness, nutrition, and child protection in humanitarian backgrounds (Britto et al., 2021; Stevens et al., 2023; Beinomugisha et al., 2024). Other studies have examined the contribution of community participation and donor-supported interventions in sustaining refugee education programmes. However, much of the existing literature pays limited attention to how funding structures influence the sustainability, quality, and implementation of ECD services in refugee settlements, particularly in low-income host countries.

Uganda's progressive refugee policy framework has created opportunities for refugees to access education and social services; however, effective implementation depends heavily on local governance structures, particularly community management committees. These committees play an important role in mobilizing additional resources, advocating for funding, and supporting service delivery at the local level (Mugerwa-Sekawabe, 2022). The scale and diversity of refugee populations continue to place significant pressure on available financial resources, reinforcing the importance of community participation in sustaining ECD services in resource-constrained settings.

Although donor-supported ECD interventions are increasingly implemented in refugee settlements, there is limited empirical evidence on the adequacy, predictability, and utilisation of financial resources supporting these programmes in protracted displacement

contexts. In Uganda specifically, few studies have examined how funding mechanisms influence infrastructure development, teaching and learning resources, caregiver support, and programme sustainability within refugee ECD centres. Consequently, important questions remain regarding whether existing financing arrangements adequately support quality ECD service delivery in refugee settlements such as Kyangwali.

Despite increasing global recognition of the importance of Early Childhood Development (ECD) in humanitarian settings, financing for ECD programmes in refugee settlements remains largely donor-dependent, fragmented, and insufficient to support sustainable and quality service delivery (UNICEF, 2023; World Bank, 2022). In Kyangwali Refugee Settlement, ECD centres continue to face challenges related to inadequate teaching and learning materials, limited caregiver support, overcrowded facilities, and uneven access to inclusive services despite ongoing support from humanitarian and development partners. Although previous studies have emphasized the importance of ECD in promoting child wellbeing, resilience, and school readiness in crisis contexts (Yoshikawa et al., 2018; Britto et al., 2021), limited empirical attention has been given to how financing mechanisms influence the implementation, quality, and sustainability of ECD programmes in refugee settlements.

Furthermore, little context-specific evidence exists regarding the adequacy, predictability, and utilization of financial resources supporting ECD programmes in Uganda's refugee-hosting settlements. Kyangwali Refugee Settlement provides an important setting for examining these issues because of its large refugee population, growing demand for ECD services, and reliance on externally funded humanitarian interventions (UNHCR, 2023; Plan International, 2022). At a time when global policy discussions increasingly emphasize integrated and sustainable financing within the humanitarian-development nexus (INEE, 2021; UNESCO, 2024), there is need for empirical evidence to inform policy and investment decisions for refugee ECD programmes. This study therefore examined the extent to which available financial resources support Early Childhood Development programmes in Kyangwali Refugee Settlement, Uganda.

Existing literature consistently demonstrates that financing remains one of the major constraints affecting the sustainability and quality of ECD programmes in humanitarian contexts (UNICEF, 2023; World Bank, 2022). However, while some studies emphasize inadequate funding volume as the primary challenge, others argue that the problem lies more in fragmented financing structures and short-term donor dependency rather than absolute resource scarcity (Bassett & Bradley, 2022; Stevens et al., 2023). This suggests that sustainability challenges in refugee ECD programmes are

not solely financial in nature, but also structural and institutional

While donor-supported interventions have improved access to ECD services in refugee settlements (UNICEF, 2023), several scholars argue that externally driven financing models often undermine local ownership and long-term sustainability (Dryden-Peterson, 2020; Plan International, 2022). Conversely, other studies suggest that community participation and local governance structures can partially mitigate the effects of funding instability in resource-constrained settings (Waluyo et al., 2018). These contrasting perspectives indicate continuing debate regarding the most sustainable financing approaches for ECD in humanitarian environments.

This study was guided by Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, which explains child development as a product of interactions between individuals and multiple environmental systems (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2019). The theory is relevant to Early Childhood Development (ECD) financing because the availability and allocation of financial resources influence the different environmental systems that shape children's developmental experiences within refugee settings. At the microsystem level, financing directly affects children's immediate learning environments, including classrooms, caregivers, nutrition services, and teaching materials. Adequate financial support enhances the quality of interactions between children, teachers, and caregivers, which are critical for cognitive and socio-emotional development (Bronfenbrenner, & Morris, (2023).

The mesosystem refers to the interrelationships between institutions and social actors involved in child development, such as families, schools, community management committees, and humanitarian agencies. Financial resources influence the coordination and effectiveness of these relationships by supporting community participation, school management, and service integration. The exosystem includes broader institutional and organizational structures that indirectly affect children, such as donor agencies, refugee policies, implementing organizations, and settlement governance systems. Funding priorities, donor policies, and programme management decisions within these structures significantly shape the availability and sustainability of ECD services, (Bronfenbrenner, & Morris, 2023; UNICEF (2024).

Bronfenbrenner, & Morris, (2023), maintains that at the macrosystem level, broader political, economic, and policy environments influence financing arrangements for refugee ECD programmes. International humanitarian frameworks, national refugee policies, and global development priorities determine how financial resources are mobilized and distributed within refugee settlements. The theory therefore provides a useful

framework for understanding how financial systems at multiple levels influence the implementation, quality, and sustainability of ECD programmes in Kyangwali Refugee Settlement.

Although previous studies have examined the importance of ECD interventions in humanitarian settings, limited empirical attention has been given to the adequacy, predictability, and utilization of financial resources supporting ECD programmes in refugee settlements, particularly within low-income host countries such as Uganda. Existing literature has focused largely on access, psychosocial wellbeing, and infrastructure development, while insufficiently examining how financing structures influence programme sustainability, quality of service delivery, and institutional management in protracted refugee contexts. Furthermore, few studies have explored these issues from the perspectives of multiple stakeholders including funders, implementers, community members, and Centre Management Committees. This study therefore sought to address this gap by examining the extent to which available financial resources support Early Childhood Development programmes in Kyangwali Refugee Settlement, Uganda.

### **3. Methodology**

#### **3.1 Study Design**

The study adopted convergent mixed-methods research design, integrating both quantitative and qualitative approaches. The design was considered appropriate because it enabled the researcher to obtain comprehensive information regarding financing of ECD programmes by combining numerical data with participants' experiences and perceptions. Quantitative data provided measurable patterns and trends, while qualitative data generated deeper insights into contextual and operational realities within Kyangwali Refugee Settlement.

#### **3.2 Target Population and Participants**

The target population comprised stakeholders directly involved in the financing, management, implementation, and utilization of ECD programmes in Kyangwali Refugee Settlement. Participants included representatives of non-governmental organizations (NGOs), refugee settlement administrators, Centre Management Committee members, parents or caregivers, ECD teachers, health practitioners, social workers, and community leaders. Inclusion of these stakeholder groups enabled the study to capture multiple perspectives on the flow, adequacy, and effectiveness of financial resources supporting ECD programmes. Institutional stakeholders, including NGO representatives and settlement officials, provided information on funding sources, allocation mechanisms, and policy-level considerations. Centre Management Committee members offered insights and

experiences into financial planning, resource mobilization, and expenditure practices at the centre level. Service providers and beneficiaries, including teachers, parents, and community members, contributed experiential perspectives regarding the extent to which financial resources translate into improved educational and developmental services for children. This multi-stakeholder approach enhanced the comprehensiveness of the analysis by integrating both supply-side and user perspectives.

### **3.3 Sampling Procedures and Sample Size**

Purposive sampling was used to select key informants such as NGO officials, settlement administrators, and Centre Management Committee members because of their direct involvement in ECD programme implementation and financing. Simple random sampling was used to select caregivers and parents to minimize selection bias and ensure equal participation opportunities.

### **3.4 Data Collection Methods**

A mixed-methods approach was adopted to generate complementary quantitative and qualitative evidence on financial support for ECD programmes. Integration of methods enhanced analytical depth and strengthened the validity of findings through triangulation. Quantitative data were collected using structured questionnaires to generate measurable indicators of funding support, including the availability of instructional materials, adequacy of infrastructure, teacher support, and nutrition services. Likert-scale and closed-ended items enabled respondents to evaluate the extent to which financial resources met the operational needs of ECD centres. Qualitative data were obtained through structured interviews with key stakeholders, including Centre Management Committee members and institutional representatives. Interviews facilitated in-depth exploration of funding dynamics, including resource mobilization strategies, budgeting practices, donor support, disbursement challenges, accountability mechanisms, and sustainability concerns. The complementary use of questionnaires and interviews enabled systematic examination of both the magnitude and practical implications of financial support for ECD programmes.

Several measures were implemented to ensure the reliability and validity of the data. Research instruments were pretested to assess clarity, relevance, and internal consistency. Research assistants received training in data collection procedures to ensure uniform administration of instruments and adherence to ethical standards. Continuous supervision during data collection ensured accuracy and completeness of responses. Given the sensitivity of financial information, particular attention

was paid to maintaining confidentiality and minimizing response bias. Interviews were audio-recorded with participants' consent and subsequently transcribed verbatim to preserve the accuracy of respondents' perspectives. These procedures enhanced the credibility and dependability of qualitative findings.

Reliability of the questionnaire was established through a pilot study conducted among respondents with characteristics similar to those of the actual study participants. Internal consistency of the instrument was tested using Cronbach's Alpha coefficient. The overall reliability coefficient obtained was above the acceptable threshold of 0.70, indicating that the instrument was reliable for data collection (Cronbach, 1951).

Ethical approval for the study was obtained from the relevant institutional research ethics committee and authorization to conduct the study was sought from local authorities and administrators within Kyangwali Refugee Settlement. Before data collection, participants were informed about the purpose of the study, procedures involved, and their right to voluntarily participate or withdraw from the study at any stage without penalty. Informed consent was obtained from all respondents prior to participation.

Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained throughout the study by ensuring that respondents' identities were not disclosed in questionnaires, interview transcripts, or research reports. Data collected were used strictly for academic purposes and securely stored to prevent unauthorized access. Special consideration was given to the vulnerable nature of refugee communities by ensuring respectful, non-discriminatory, and culturally sensitive engagement during the research process.

### **3.5 Data Analysis**

Quantitative data obtained through questionnaires were coded, entered, and analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 27. Descriptive statistics including frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations were used to summarize respondents' perceptions regarding the financing of ECD programmes. Where necessary, inferential statistics such as correlation analysis were used to examine relationships among study variables.

Qualitative data obtained from interviews and open-ended responses were transcribed, organized, and analyzed thematically using NVivo software. Thematic analysis involved coding data into categories, identifying emerging themes, and interpreting patterns related to financing, programme sustainability, and community participation in ECD programmes. Direct quotations from respondents were used to support and enrich interpretation of findings, providing contextual depth and ensuring that participants' perspectives were accurately

represented.

## 4. Results and Discussion

Responses to each statement were measured using a five-point Likert scale, with values assigned as follows: 1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Not Sure, 4 = Agree, and 5 = Strongly Agree. These values were used to

calculate the mean and standard deviation for each item, providing a quantitative measure of participants' perceptions. Summary of results with weighted interpretation of scores ranging from 1 to 5 where; 1-2.4 = Low agreement (Poor performance), 2.5-3.4 = Moderate agreement (Room for improvement), 3.5-4.4 = High agreement (Strong performance) and 4.5-5.0 = Very high agreement (Excellent performance).

**Table 1. Perspectives of ECD Programme Funders on the Sufficiency of Available Funding to Sustain ECD Interventions in the Kyangwali Refugee Settlement, Uganda**

Items	SD	D	NS	A	SA	Mean	STD
There is sufficient funding allocated specifically for ECD programmes in Kyangwali.	0	6 (11.8%)	8 (15.7%)	11 (21.6%)	26 (51.0%)	4.12	1.070
The funding for ECD programmes is consistent and predictable across financial years.	2 (3.9%)	0	1 (2.0%)	25 (49.0%)	23 (45.1%)	4.31	0.860
Donor funds allocated for ECD programmes are used efficiently and transparently.	1 (2.0%)	3 (5.9%)	4 (7.8%)	21 (41.2%)	22 (43.1%)	4.18	0.953
Available funds are enough to cover the infrastructure needs of ECD centres (classrooms, sanitation facilities, etc)	0	2 (3.9%)	3 (5.9%)	34 (66.7%)	12 (23.5%)	4.10	0.671
The funds available are adequate for procuring learning and teaching materials for your children	5 (9.8%)	6 (11.8%)	11 (21.6%)	21 (41.2%)	0	3.63	1.496

**Source: Primary data, 2025**

The findings indicate that funders generally perceive financial allocations for Early Childhood Development (ECD) programmes in Kyangwali Refugee Settlement as adequate, although variations exist across specific funding components. Responding to perceptions regarding the adequacy of financial allocations specifically designated for ECD programmes reflect an overall positive assessment. A substantial majority of respondents (72.6%) either agreed (21.6%) or strongly agreed (51.0%) that sufficient funding is allocated to ECD initiatives, suggesting a high level of confidence in the availability of targeted financial resources. Nevertheless, a minority of respondents expressed reservations, with 11.8% disagreeing with and 15.7% indicating uncertainty. The mean score of 4.12 (SD = 1.07) indicates a generally favourable evaluation, although the relatively large dispersion suggests uneven experiences across implementing contexts.

Qualitative findings through interviews with key informants reinforce these results by highlighting the predominance of donor-supported financing structures. One financial administrator from an international non-governmental organisation noted that "...funding for ECD programmes is primarily derived from United Nations agencies, international NGOs, and faith-based organisations, with limited contributions from local communities due to prevailing socioeconomic constraints" (KM009/21/05/2025). This dependence on external funding underscores both the strengths and vulnerabilities of ECD financing in refugee settings.

Results reveal that the consistency and predictability of

funding across financial years were particularly favourable. An overwhelming majority of respondents (94.1%) either agreed (49.0%) or strongly agreed (45.1%) that funding flows are stable and predictable, while only a small proportion expressed disagreement (3.9%) or uncertainty (2.0%). The high mean score (M = 4.31, SD = 0.86) indicates strong consensus among funders that financial resources are sufficiently stable to support programme planning and implementation. Predictable funding cycles are especially critical in humanitarian settings, where interruptions in financing can significantly disrupt service delivery.

Respondents also reported favourable perceptions regarding the efficiency and transparency of donor fund utilization. Majority (84.3%) agreed (41.2%) or strongly agreed (43.1%) that funds are managed efficiently and transparently, reflecting considerable confidence in financial accountability mechanisms. Nonetheless, a small proportion of respondents expressed concerns, with 5.9% disagreeing, 2.0% strongly disagreeing, and 7.8% indicating uncertainty. The mean score of 4.18 (SD = 0.95) indicates strong overall agreement, although moderate variation in responses suggests that some stakeholders may have limited access to financial information or differing experiences with accountability processes.

Regarding infrastructure development, funders expressed strong agreement that available resources are generally sufficient to meet infrastructure needs. A total of 90.2% of respondents agreed (66.7%) or strongly agreed (23.5%) that funding adequately supports

essential infrastructure components such as classrooms and sanitation facilities. Only a small proportion of respondents expressed disagreement (3.9%) or uncertainty (5.9%). The mean score of 4.10 (SD = 0.67) and the relatively low dispersion indicate a high level of consensus that infrastructure financing is comparatively stable.

In contrast to other funding dimensions, perceptions regarding the adequacy of financial resources for learning and teaching materials were more varied. Although 62.8% of respondents agreed (21.6%) or strongly agreed (41.2%) that funding for instructional materials was sufficient, a notable proportion expressed dissatisfaction, with 25.5% indicating disagreement and 11.8% reporting uncertainty. The lower mean score (M = 3.63) and relatively high standard deviation (SD =

1.50) indicate considerable variation in perceptions, suggesting uneven distribution of pedagogical resources across ECD centres.

Overall, the findings suggest that while funding for ECD programmes in Kyangwali Refugee Settlement is generally perceived as adequate, predictable, and reasonably well managed, important disparities remain across funding categories. Funders perspectives reveal that there is relatively weaker support for instructional materials indicates a need for more balanced resource allocation to ensure that financial investments translate into improved learning conditions and developmental outcomes.

**Table 2. Perspectives of ECD Programme Recipients/Parents/Community on the Sufficiency of Available Funding to Sustain ECD Interventions in the Kyangwali Refugee Settlement, Uganda**

Items	SD	D	NS	A	SA	Mean	STD
There is sufficient funding allocated specifically for ECD programmes in Kyangwali.	13 (11.8%)	3 (2.7%)	19 (17.3%)	48 (43.6%)	27 (24.5%)	3.66	1.221
The funding for ECD programmes is consistent and we often meet the funders across financial years.	7 (6.4%)	8 (7.3%)	17 (15.5%)	64 (58.2%)	14 (12.7%)	3.64	1.011
Donor funds allocated for ECD programmes are used efficiently and transparently.	5 (4.5%)	3 (2.7%)	13 (11.8%)	23 (20.9%)	66 (60.0%)	4.29	1.078
Available funds are enough to cover the infrastructure needs of ECD centres (classrooms, sanitation facilities, etc.).	0	1 (0.9%)	10 (9.1%)	53 (48.2%)	46 (41.8%)	4.31	0.674
The funds available are adequate for procuring learning and teaching materials for young children.	1 (0.9%)	0	1 (0.9%)	95 (86.4%)	13 (11.8%)	4.08	0.452

*Source: Primary data, 2025*

A total of 75 respondents, accounting for 68.1%, expressed a positive opinion 48 respondents (43.6%) agreed and 27 respondents (24.5%) strongly agreed that the available funding is sufficient. This indicates a generally favourable perception of financial support for ECD initiatives. The findings suggest that a majority of community members and Centre Management Committee (CMC) representatives perceive consistent financial backing for ECD programmes. This perceived adequacy likely facilitates key programme functions such as effective service delivery, access to learning materials, and development of essential infrastructure in ECD centres.

Nevertheless, a considerable proportion of respondents,

comprising the remaining 31.9%, expressed either disagreement or uncertainty. Specifically, 19 respondents (17.3%) were unsure about the sufficiency of funding, which may point to gaps in communication, lack of transparency, or inconsistent experiences regarding how funds are utilized. Others who disagreed may be concerned about uneven distribution of resources or unmet needs in areas such as teacher training, nutrition, or recreational materials. Meanwhile, 13 respondents (11.8%) strongly disagree, and 3 respondents (2.7%) disagree, signaling that approximately 14.5% of the sample perceive funding as insufficient. The mean score of 3.66, slightly above the neutral midpoint, alongside a relatively high standard deviation of 1.221, reflects diverse opinions and variability in the perceived adequacy of funding.

Regarding the consistency of funding for ECD programmes across financial years, the responses show that 78 respondents (70.9%) generally view the funding as stable and regular. Of these, 64 respondents (58.2%) agree and 14 respondents (12.7%) strongly agree that funding is consistent and that regular engagement with funders occurs. This reflects confidence in the continuity of financial support, which is crucial for programme planning and sustainability. On the other hand, 15 respondents (13.7%) express negative views 7 respondents (6.4%) strongly disagree and 8 respondents (7.3%) disagree suggesting challenges or irregularities in funding consistency for a significant minority. Additionally, 17 respondents (15.5%) are not sure, which may indicate some respondents have inconsistent experiences or lack clarity about the regularity of funds. The mean of 3.64 and a standard deviation of 1.011 illustrate a moderate positive perception with some variation.

The perception of how donor funds allocated for ECD programmes are used shows an even stronger positive response. A substantial majority of 89 respondents (80.9%) believe that funds are used efficiently and transparently. Specifically, 66 respondents (60.0%) strongly agree, and 23 respondents (20.9%) agree with this statement, indicating strong trust in financial management practices. Nevertheless, a small but important minority expresses reservations: 5 respondents (4.5%) strongly disagree, 3 respondents (2.7%) disagree, and 13 respondents (11.8%) remain unsure about the transparency and efficiency of fund use. With a mean score of 4.29 and a standard deviation of 1.078, this indicates an overall high confidence in financial stewardship, but also some differences in perception.

When asked whether available funds are enough to cover the infrastructure needs of ECD centres, such as classrooms and sanitation facilities, respondents overwhelmingly agree. A combined 99 respondents (90.0%) perceive funds as adequate, with 53 respondents (48.2%) agreeing and 46 respondents (41.8%) strongly agreeing. Only 1 respondent (0.9%) disagreed, and none strongly disagreed with the statement, while 10 respondents (9.1%) were not sure. The high mean score of 4.31 and the low standard deviation of 0.674 suggest a strong consensus and minimal variation, highlighting that funding for infrastructure is largely seen as sufficient. The extent to which available funds support the procurement of learning and teaching materials for young children in ECD programmes is rated very positively. A dominant majority of 108 respondents (98.2%) either agree or strongly agree 95 respondents (86.4%) agree and 13 respondents (11.8%) strongly agree. There is almost no dissent, with only 1 respondent (0.9%) strongly disagreeing, and very few neutral responses (1 respondent, 0.9%). This near unanimity is reflected in

the high mean score of 4.08 and the very low standard deviation of 0.452, suggesting respondents are largely confident in the adequacy of funds dedicated to learning materials, which is critical for the effective delivery of ECD programmes.

However, qualitative evidence through interviews suggests that infrastructure adequacy does not necessarily translate into comprehensive service provision. A senior caregiver observed that "...financial resources often fall short of covering key elements of quality service delivery, including instructional materials, feeding programmes, and teacher incentives...". According to the respondent, these funding gaps affect enrollment, retention, and staff motivation (KM011/21/05/2025). This perspective highlights the distinction between physical infrastructure provision and the broader requirements for effective ECD programming.

Qualitative findings further illustrate how resource gaps are sometimes addressed through local initiatives. A Centre Management Committee chairperson described how community members mobilized food supplies to sustain feeding programmes during periods of delayed external funding, demonstrating the role of community-based coping strategies in mitigating short-term financial constraints (KM012/21/05/2025). Such initiatives illustrate the importance of local participation in enhancing programme resilience, even in contexts characterized by limited financial capacity.

The comparative analysis of Table 1 and 2 reveal a broad convergence between funders and recipient/community/parents regarding the perceived sufficiency of funding for ECD interventions in Kyangwali Refuges Settlement. Both groups express positive insights with mean scores consistently above the neutral midpoint across most indicators. In particular, there is strong alignment on the adequacy of funding for infrastructure and the efficient use of donor funds. Recipients report slightly higher confidence in infrastructure funding (Mean = 4.31) compared to funders (Mean = 4.10), while both groups rate transparency and efficiency highly (Means = 4.29 and 4.18 respectively). This consistency suggests a shared recognition of accountability mechanisms and visible outputs of funding, reinforcing institutional trust and perceived programme effectiveness.

However, notable differences emerge in perceptions of funding adequacy and predictability. Funders exhibit stronger confidence in the consistency and predictability of funding across financial years (Mean = 4.31) compared to recipients (Mean = 3.64), indicating a possible information asymmetry where funders are more aware of long-term financial commitments than beneficiaries. Conversely, recipients demonstrate higher agreement regarding the sufficiency of funds allocated specifically to ECD programmes (Mean = 3.66) than

funders (Mean = 4.12 but with more variability), suggesting that while funders may adopt a more cautious or strategic perspective, recipients assess sufficiency based on immediate, observable service delivery.

The most pronounced divergence is observed in perceptions of funding adequacy for teaching and learning materials. Recipients report very high satisfaction (Mean = 4.08, low variability), whereas funders express comparatively lower confidence (Mean = 3.63, high variability). This discrepancy may reflect differences in evaluation criteria: recipients may base judgments on availability relative to prior scarcity, while funders may assess adequacy against broader quality standards or long-term sustainability benchmarks. Overall, while both groups acknowledge the relative sufficiency of funding, the variations highlight critical gaps in perception related to sustainability, predictability, and quality thresholds issues that warrant further policy attention for strengthening ECD financing frameworks in refugee contexts.

The comparative findings reveal broad convergence between funders and community respondents regarding

the overall importance and positive contribution of financing to ECD service delivery in Kyangwali Refugee Settlement. Both groups demonstrated strong confidence in infrastructure development and financial accountability, indicating shared recognition of the visible outcomes generated through donor-supported interventions. This consistency suggests that funding mechanisms have strengthened institutional trust and enhanced perceptions of programme effectiveness across stakeholder groups.

However, important differences emerged regarding funding predictability and adequacy for teaching and learning materials. Funders expressed greater confidence in long-term funding stability, while recipients evaluated adequacy primarily through immediate service availability and observable programme benefits. These differences suggest the existence of information asymmetries between funding agencies and programme beneficiaries. The findings therefore highlight the importance of improving communication, participatory planning, and transparency regarding long-term financing commitments within refugee ECD programmes.

**Table 3. Perspectives of ECD Programme Teachers/staff/implementers/CMC members on the Sufficiency of Available Funding to Sustain ECD Interventions in the Kyangwali Refugee Settlement, Uganda**

<b>Extent to which available funds support ECD programmes</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>NS</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>SA</b>	<b>Mea n</b>	<b>STD</b>
The funds available are used to improve ECD services in our community.	12(16.0%)	6(8.0%)	7(9.3%)	43(57.3%)	7(9.3%)	3.36	1.248
Funding has led to better classrooms, sanitation, and facilities at ECD centres.	12(16.0%)	4(5.3%)	10(13.3%)	41(54.7%)	8(10.7%)	3.39	1.240
Teaching and learning materials have improved due to donor and government support.	4(5.3%)	10(13.3%)	7(9.3%)	39(52.0%)	15(20.0%)	3.68	1.105
ECD teachers and caregivers are supported financially to improve service delivery.	4(5.3%)	16(21.3%)	11(14.7%)	42(56.0%)	2(2.7%)	3.29	1.010
Funds are managed in a way that benefits both children and the wider community.	4(5.3%)	8(10.7%)	7(9.3%)	50(66.7%)	6(8.0%)	3.61	0.971

*Source: Primary data, 2025*

The data illustrates a generally positive perception among respondents regarding the utilization of available funds to improve Early Childhood Development (ECD) services in their community. A significant majority, 57.3% (43 respondents), agreed that the funds are being used to enhance ECD services, while an additional 9.3% strongly agreed. Despite this, there is a notable segment of the population 16.0% (12 respondents) who strongly disagreed, alongside 8.0%

who disagreed, and 9.3% who were unsure. The mean score of 3.36, coupled with a relatively high standard deviation of 1.248, signals moderate agreement but also reflects disparities in perceptions about the effectiveness or visibility of fund usage. This disparity may suggest that while many implementers are witnessing positive changes, others may either lack sufficient information or believe that the allocation and expenditure of funds are not fully transparent or

equitably implemented. It underscores the importance of improving communication around budget utilization, as well as involving more stakeholders in planning and evaluation processes.

In addition, the impact of funding on infrastructure, specifically the improvement of classrooms, sanitation, and facilities, the response is again favourable, though with a similar pattern of mixed perceptions. Over half (54.7%) of the respondents agreed that funding has led to better infrastructure at ECD centres, and 10.7% strongly agreed. However, a notable minority expressed dissenting or uncertain views, with 16.0% strongly disagreeing, 5.3% disagreeing, and 13.3% indicating uncertainty. The mean score of 3.39, accompanied by a standard deviation of 1.240, suggests a moderate level of consensus on the issue. Nonetheless, the data also reveals that a portion of the respondents either lack sufficient information or are dissatisfied with the current state of infrastructural developments. This suggests that while positive outcomes have been observed, the benefits may not be evenly distributed across all centres or communities. Further assessments could be useful in identifying underserved areas, and funders and implementers should prioritize equity in resource distribution to avoid reinforcing existing inequalities within refugee settlements.

Furthermore, responses on teaching and learning materials are somewhat more positive. A combined 72.0% of the respondents reported improvements, with 52.0% agreeing and a substantial 20.0% strongly agreeing that donor and government support has enhanced the availability and quality of teaching and learning resources. Meanwhile, 5.3% strongly disagreed, 13.3% disagreed, and 9.3% were unsure. The mean score of 3.68 and a slightly lower standard deviation of 1.105 compared to other items reflects a higher level of agreement and more consistency in responses. These results imply that teachers, and other implementers have experienced tangible improvements in materials such as books, visual aids, and play equipment, which are critical in fostering early learning. Nonetheless, the dissenting voices point to possible gaps in coverage or quality, suggesting that programme implementers should conduct regular needs assessments and ensure timely distribution and replenishment of learning materials in all ECD centres.

In contrast, the financial support provided to ECD teachers and caregivers presents a less favourable picture. While a majority (56.0%) agreed that teachers and caregivers are supported to improve service delivery, only 2.7% strongly agreed, and a notable proportion disagreed or were uncertain 21.3% disagreed, 5.3% strongly disagreed, and 14.7% were unsure. The mean score of 3.29 and a standard deviation of 1.010 suggest relatively lower agreement

and less satisfaction compared to other funding-related aspects. This could indicate concerns over inadequate stipends, delayed payments, or insufficient training opportunities tied to financial support. Since caregivers and teachers play a central role in the delivery of ECD services, their motivation and welfare are crucial. Therefore, this finding underscores the need for more consistent and robust financial support mechanisms such as salary top-ups, performance incentives, and continuous professional development to enhance the effectiveness and sustainability of ECD programmes in refugee settings.

The responses concerning fund management practices show a relatively high level of approval. An impressive 66.7% of respondents agreed and another 8.0% strongly agreed that funds are managed in a way that benefits both children and the wider community. Only a small portion, 5.3%, strongly disagreed, 10.7% disagreed, and 9.3% were unsure. The mean score of 3.61 and the lowest standard deviation in the table (0.971) suggest a generally favourable and consistent perception regarding accountability and community benefit. This indicates that in many areas, fund management structures are trusted and deliver positive outcomes. However, given the earlier evidence of disagreement in other aspects of funding, it is also clear that maintaining and strengthening transparency, community involvement in financial decision-making, and regular public reporting are essential to sustaining trust and improving the overall effectiveness of fund usage.

### **Discussion of findings**

The findings suggest that ECD financing in Kyangwali Refugee Settlement reflects a transitional humanitarian financing model characterized by relative operational stability alongside persistent structural vulnerabilities. While stakeholders generally perceived funding as sufficient for maintaining basic programme operations, deeper analysis reveals important inequalities in the distribution and sustainability of financial support across critical components of quality ECD service delivery. These findings highlight the complex relationship between financial availability, programme quality, and long-term sustainability within protracted refugee settings.

The relatively positive perceptions regarding infrastructure financing are consistent with studies indicating that humanitarian education financing often prioritizes visible and measurable investments such as classrooms, sanitation facilities, and physical infrastructure (UNICEF, 2023; Save the Children, 2022). However, the findings also reveal comparatively weaker support for instructional materials and caregiver welfare, supporting arguments by Yoshikawa et al. (2018) and Britto et al. (2017) that quality ECD outcomes depend more substantially on caregiver-child

interactions, pedagogical support, and learning resources than on infrastructure alone.

The findings can further be interpreted through Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory, which emphasizes that child development outcomes are shaped by interactions across multiple environmental systems. At the microsystem level, insufficient funding for instructional materials and caregiver incentives directly affects children's daily learning experiences and developmental interactions within ECD centres. At the mesosystem level, the study demonstrates that relationships among families, Centre Management Committees, humanitarian agencies, and schools are influenced by financial coordination and resource allocation processes. Furthermore, donor funding structures operating within the exosystem and macrosystem significantly determine the sustainability, quality, and accessibility of ECD services in refugee settlements.

The findings also reflect broader shifts within the humanitarian-development nexus, where refugee education programming is gradually transitioning from short-term emergency responses toward more integrated and development-oriented financing approaches. The relative predictability of funding observed in Kyangwali may indicate increasing adoption of multi-year financing frameworks and institutional partnerships designed to improve continuity of service delivery in protracted displacement settings. Nevertheless, the study demonstrates that despite this transition, ECD financing remains heavily donor-dependent and insufficiently integrated into long-term national education financing systems.

Although donor financing has significantly expanded access to ECD services within Kyangwali Refugee Settlement, the findings expose underlying structural vulnerabilities associated with externally driven financing systems. Heavy reliance on international donors creates uncertainty because programme sustainability remains vulnerable to shifting global priorities, funding reductions, and geopolitical changes. Similar concerns have been raised by World Bank (2022) and UNESCO (2024), which argue that donor-dependent education systems often struggle to sustain long-term developmental outcomes once external support declines.

The study further suggests that current financing arrangements may support operational continuity without necessarily guaranteeing long-term programme sustainability. While infrastructure development and basic programme delivery have improved, inadequate investment in caregiver welfare, instructional materials, and inclusive support services threatens the overall quality and developmental effectiveness of ECD interventions. Sustainable ECD systems require balanced financing models that prioritize both physical

infrastructure and quality-enhancing pedagogical inputs.

Community participation emerged as an important coping mechanism during periods of financial constraint, particularly through local food mobilization and voluntary support initiatives. However, the findings suggest that community resilience mechanisms function primarily as complementary survival strategies rather than sustainable substitutes for institutional financing. Given the socioeconomic vulnerability of refugee populations, overreliance on community contributions risks transferring financial responsibility to already marginalized populations.

The findings carry important policy implications for governments, humanitarian agencies, and development partners involved in refugee education programming. First, there is need to shift from fragmented short-term project financing toward integrated multi-year funding frameworks that support continuity and strategic planning for ECD services. Second, financing policies should prioritize equitable allocation across infrastructure, caregiver support, instructional materials, nutrition, and inclusive education services. Finally, strengthening community participation and localized financial governance structures may improve accountability and responsiveness to context-specific needs within refugee settlements.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that ECD financing in Kyangwali Refugee Settlement reflects both important progress and continuing structural challenges within humanitarian education systems. While donor-supported investments have strengthened infrastructure and programme access, persistent dependence on external funding and uneven allocation of financial resources continue to constrain programme quality and long-term sustainability. The study therefore reinforces growing international calls for integrated humanitarian-development financing models capable of supporting resilient, inclusive, and sustainable ECD systems in protracted refugee contexts.

## **5. Conclusion and Recommendations**

### **5.1 Conclusion**

This study examined the extent to which available financial resources support Early Childhood Development (ECD) programmes in Kyangwali Refugee Settlement, Uganda. The findings demonstrate that existing financing mechanisms have played an important role in sustaining basic ECD service delivery, particularly in relation to infrastructure development, programme coordination, and access to early learning opportunities. Stakeholders generally perceived funding as relatively predictable and transparently managed, reflecting the positive contribution of donor-supported humanitarian interventions in strengthening ECD

systems within protracted refugee contexts.

However, the study further reveals that the apparent adequacy of funding masks important structural limitations that continue to constrain programme quality and long-term sustainability. Significant gaps remain in financing critical quality-enhancing components such as instructional materials, caregiver motivation and support, nutrition services, and inclusive learning provisions. The heavy dependence on external donor financing also exposes ECD programmes to sustainability risks associated with shifting global priorities and unstable humanitarian funding environments. From a bioecological perspective, these financing dynamics directly shape the quality of developmental environments available to young children within refugee settlements.

The study therefore concludes that sustainable improvement in refugee ECD programmes requires financing approaches that move beyond short-term humanitarian assistance toward integrated, multi-year, and development-oriented investment frameworks. Strengthening community participation, improving local financial governance, and ensuring balanced allocation of resources across all dimensions of ECD service delivery are essential for enhancing programme resilience and developmental outcomes. The findings contribute important empirical evidence to the growing discourse on financing Early Childhood Development in humanitarian settings and provide policy-relevant insights for governments, humanitarian agencies, and development partners seeking to build more inclusive and sustainable ECD systems in displacement contexts.

## 5.2 Recommendations

1. Development partners and governments should adopt multi-year financing frameworks that support long-term planning and sustainability of ECD programmes. Predictable funding cycles would enable ECD centres to move beyond short-term operational planning toward strategic development of comprehensive services
2. Funding frameworks should place greater emphasis on quality-enhancing inputs such as teaching and learning materials, caregiver training and incentives, nutrition support, and inclusive education services. Balanced investment across these components would ensure that infrastructure development translates into improved developmental outcomes.
3. Centre Management Committees should be more actively involved in financial planning and budgeting processes. Strengthening local decision-making structures would improve responsiveness to community priorities,

enhance accountability, and promote sustainability. Capacity-building initiatives should focus on financial management and resource mobilization skills.

4. Financing strategies by NGOs and Government agencies should support integrated ECD service models linking to education, health, nutrition and child protection. Integrated financing mechanisms would improve efficiency and support holistic child development.

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