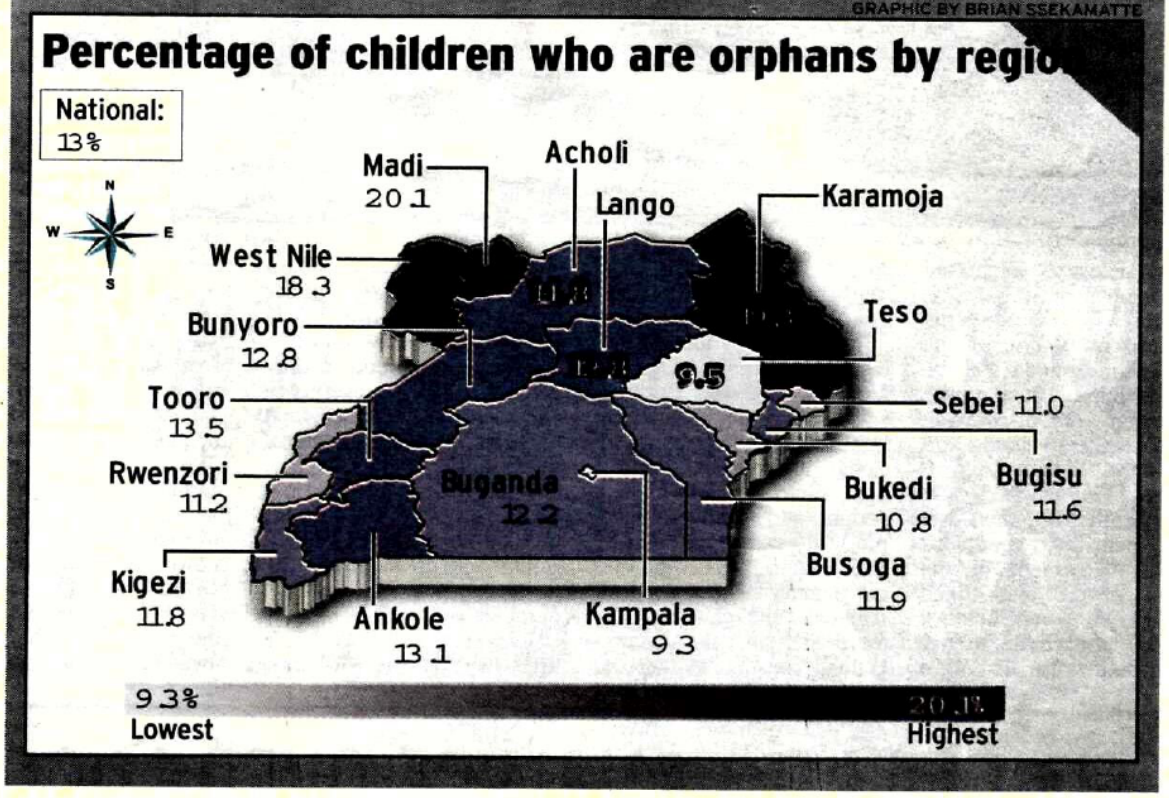
NUMBER OF ORPHANS, CHILD MOTHERS DROPS

THE FIGURES

Findings show that the Madi sub-region, comprising Moyo, Adjumani and Obongi, has the highest prevalence at 20.1% (about one in five children), followed by Karamoja at 19.3% and West Nile at 18.3%, writes **John Masaba.**

GRAPHIC BY BRIAN SSEKAMATTE



The national prevalence of orphans has slightly declined, a new government report has shown. According to the report released yesterday by the Uganda Bureau of Statistics (UBOS), orphans now make up 12.9% of the population, down from 13.2% in 2002. This means roughly 10 in every 100 children have lost one or both parents.

Despite the slight decline, the report highlights significant regional disparities and persistent vulnerabilities among children.

The report, titled *Orphans and Other Vulnerable Children Monograph 2024*, was unveiled during a dissemination workshop at UBOS headquarters in Kampala. Drawn from the 2024 national census, the monograph provides deeper insights into child deprivation to guide evidence-based policymaking and ensure targeted support for affected populations.

Findings show that the Madi sub-region, comprising Moyo, Adjumani and Obongi, has the highest prevalence at 20.1% (about one in five children), followed by Karamoja at 19.3% and West Nile at 18.3%. Kampala and Teso recorded the lowest rates at 9.3% and 9.5%, respectively.

The report also highlights gaps in education and employment among orphans. "Three in every 10 orphans aged three to five years are attending school and slightly over half of those aged six to 17 are in school," it notes. About 20% of orphans aged five to 17 are engaged in work.

Nearly 1% of children (0.7%) – equivalent to about 192,000 – do not know the survival status of their parents.

CHILD MOTHERS

Despite dropping from 4% in 2002 to 1.5% in 2026, child motherhood remains a concern according to the report. A child mother typically refers to an adolescent girl (aged 10–19) who has given birth regardless of whether the baby is alive or deceased.

According to the report, Bunyoro had the highest prevalence of child mothers at 2.2%, followed by Lango at 1.9%, while Kampala recorded the lowest at 0.7%.

Responding to the report, the permanent secretary at the gender ministry, Aggrey Kibenge, said the findings come at a critical time as Uganda adopts a more inclusive approach to child vulnerability.

"The National Child Policy 2020 broadened our perspective by recognising that all children are inherently vulnerable and require comprehensive protection and support," he said.

Kibenge noted that children in extreme situations – including orphans, refugees, street-connected children and those with disabilities – remain a key focus.

"These challenges are increasing the risk of vulnerabilities such as child marriage, teenage pregnancy and neglect, which calls for urgent targeted intervention," he said.

Kibenge emphasised the importance of the report in guiding policy and planning, describing it as a critical tool for evidence-based decision-making.

"This publication provides the granularity of data required to guide targeted prioritisation and equitable service delivery," he said, adding that the Government is working to develop a social registry to better track and support vulnerable populations.

SPECIAL GRANTS

Kibenge also revealed plans to introduce a special grant for families raising children with disabilities.

"We are engaging the finance ministry to put in place a special grant targeting households with children with disabilities," he said, noting gaps in existing support systems.

On street children, Kibenge acknowledged the growing challenge, particularly among children from Karamoja.



Women said to be from Karamoja, carrying babies while begging on the streets of Kampala

"A significant number of street children come from Karamoja sub-region and we are working on a comprehensive strategy to address both the causes and the phenomenon," Kibenge said.

He reaffirmed the Government's commitment to using data to improve service delivery and policy reforms.

"We are committed to ensuring that the findings from this monograph translate into tangible results that improve the lives of vulnerable children," Kibenge said.

Ronald Kasule, an official of the United Nations Population Fund, welcomed the report's recognition of disability as a form of vulnerability, but noted gaps in coverage.

"The monograph does not mention children below five. How can we trace them? How can we cater for their needs?" he asked.

Prof. Jovan Lubaale, a project co-investigator, said the report goes beyond orphanhood to examine multiple forms of child vulnerability, including child marriage, refugee children, lack of birth registration and children without parental information.

"All of these are forms of vulnerability affecting children," he said, adding that some aspects – such as disability – were excluded from the presentation due to methodological limitations.

He highlighted the scale of the issue, noting that "about three million children were orphans in 2024," and emphasised that even small percentages represent large numbers. "0.7% is about 192,000 children," he said.

On child marriage, he said progress has been made among girls aged 10–17, dropping from about 4% to 1.49%.

However, "the number for boys went up a bit," partly due to COVID-19-related disruptions. "More boys dropped out of school than girls. Boys who got jobs refused to go back to school," he explained.

Lubaale stressed that the report provides "both the percentages and the absolute numbers" to help policymakers understand the scale and drivers of vulnerability. He also called for a national vulnerability index to better guide interventions, highlighting the importance of focusing on children facing multiple risks. "The most vulnerable are those who have more than one vulnerability," he said.

The chief of social policy and social protection at United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), Dr Moses Sichei, described the report as a critical tool for advancing children's rights under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, which emphasises survival, development, protection, and participation. "It helps us answer who these children are and where they are, so that we do not leave any child behind," he said.

SCALE AND DISTRIBUTION

Sichei praised the report for mapping the scale and distribution of vulnerability and highlighting the challenge of "multiple violations" affecting children across regions. Speaking on behalf of UNICEF and the wider UN system, he underscored the importance of data in policymaking.

"Without data, there's no way we can do policy support," he said, adding that such evidence is essential for tracking progress under frameworks like the Sustainable Development Goals.

He reaffirmed UNICEF's commitment to supporting child-focused data and interventions, citing ongoing efforts such as the Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey and continued work to address violence against children, which he described as "a big problem."

Dr Allen Kabagenyi, a UBOS board member who represented the chairperson, Dr Albert Byamugisha, hailed the report, saying it is crucial for targeted interventions that can significantly improve the welfare and strengthen advocacy for the needs of orphans.

"Data is a strategic asset for the Government to make informed decisions," he said.