



**2023**



# **Annual Impact Report**

**WAR CHILD USA**

# A NOTE FROM OUR FOUNDER

2023 was a violent year. Our screens were flooded with images of civilians – and especially children – facing horrendous suffering. Over the last two years, War Child staff have witnessed an escalation in extreme armed violence across several of our countries of operation, including Sudan, Afghanistan, and the Democratic Republic of Congo. The struggles of children caught in these conflicts have only deepened because of international neglect and underfunding.

It is true that individuals, businesses, and many governments have made substantial contributions to the most visible crises. But this response has been accompanied by a steep decline in support for other humanitarian disasters. By the end of 2023, humanitarian appeals for crises beyond Ukraine and Gaza stood at less than 35% funded. This at a time when 50 million people face starvation and entire populations have been forced from their homes. South Sudan alone has seen 600,000 desperate Sudanese people arrive seeking sanctuary.

At times like this, foreign aid matters. It is an imperfect response to a violently imperfect world, but our staff see its impact every day. It is in the pride of children who were out of school for years and are now graduating from our catch-up learning programs. It is in the fortitude of the women we train in Afghanistan who continue to earn an income against enormous and uncertain odds. And it is there in the hope and expectation placed on us in the refugee camps in South Sudan. I visited one of those camps recently, and a woman turned to me and said, “I know War Child from Sudan. You were always there when others left. We knew you would not forget us. We knew you would come”.

I thank all of you who continue to believe that there is always hope when we stand together. It is your steadfast support that allows us to persevere where children need us most.

With sincere thanks and appreciation,

Dr. Samantha Nutt  
MD, MSc, CCFP, FRCPC, C.M.  
Founder and President  
War Child Canada and War Child USA



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## VISION

Accelerating peace by disrupting the cycle of violence

## MISSION

Driving generational change for the hardest hit by investing in the power of local communities

# How We Work



**W**ar Child’s model of humanitarian action is rooted in collaboration and is locally driven and locally led. We work to foster the capacity of children, their families, and their communities to develop resilience, self-reliance, and self-determination in overcoming the impacts of violence and displacement.

War Child USA Inc. is an independent New York not-for-profit corporation exempt from federal income tax under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code. Registered in 2001, War Child USA is affiliated with and provides financial support to the similarly named charitable organization in Canada, War Child Canada. Though independent entities, each organization is devoted to protecting children and their families in conflict zones and raising awareness about the impact of war on global communities.

While War Child USA regularly provides financial support to War Child Canada in the form of grants, please note that donations to War Child USA may not be earmarked for use by War Child Canada, or any other organization. Further, U.S. taxpayers may only deduct contributions to the U.S. organization for U.S. income tax purposes. If you have any questions regarding your donation, please contact us at [info@warchildusa.org](mailto:info@warchildusa.org).



## AFGHANISTAN

It has been just over two years since the Taliban took over Afghanistan following the US withdrawal.

Since then, the scale of the humanitarian crisis has grown considerably. More than 29 million people need assistance, over half of them children, while 15.3 million people are experiencing acute food insecurity. At the same time, restrictions by the Taliban have made it difficult to continue to support the most vulnerable. A decree, issued at the end of 2022, barring women from working for international aid organizations resulted in a temporary suspension of War Child's operations. However, a reputation, earned over two decades, allowed War Child's staff to successfully negotiate the resumption of most programs and the continued employment of women, who comprise 40% of War Child's staff in the country.

With growing needs, War Child's programming has expanded to include health and nutrition for women and girls. With financial support from the UN, War Child has created women-friendly health spaces across the country, offering life-skills training, psychosocial support, and community services. In addition to this work, War Child identified acutely vulnerable Afghan women and girls, including survivors of gender-based violence and those severely affected by poverty and extreme economic hardship, to provide them with opportunities for income generation through intensive vocational and entrepreneurship training.

War Child also empowers Civil Society Organizations to protect children from Bacha Bazi, a customary practice in which young boys are subjected to serial sexual exploitation. War Child provides survivors with trauma-sensitive interventions including mental health support, life-skills training, and income generation, helping them safely rebuild their lives.



## THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO

**T**he Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), the largest country in Sub-Saharan Africa, has extraordinary mineral wealth yet remains among the five poorest nations on Earth.

Since a civil war around the end of the last century left 5 million dead, the people of the DRC have not known a year without conflict and instability, as a multitude of militia have fought over control of mineral deposits, particularly in the east of the country.

Congolese women face significant barriers to economic opportunities, with less than 20% of women having completed secondary school. For girls in rural areas of eastern DRC, it is often too dangerous to make the long journey to school. For the militia who roam the countryside, rape as a weapon of war has become chillingly commonplace. To reach these girls, War Child empowers local organizations to deliver the curriculum through specially produced radio dramas. This distance learning approach means girls can safely attend lessons close to home, guided by teaching assistants trained by War Child.



## SOUTH SUDAN

2023 saw an influx of more than half a million refugees and returnees fleeing the worsening conflict in Sudan. This threatens to destabilize the northern regions of an already fragile country. Since gaining independence from Sudan in 2011 and the ensuing civil war, South Sudan has never known true stability. Although there is an erstwhile peace at present, sporadic violence continues to erupt throughout the country, disrupting access to essential services and creating food insecurity in a country which should be amongst the most agriculturally productive in Africa.

In this context, War Child's focus on education and agricultural improvements has been critical. In addition to ongoing instability, farming yields in South Sudan are threatened by poor farming methods that degrade the soil. War Child's FEEDII project addresses this by offering training in improved agricultural practices and literacy classes. The aim is to increase and stabilize food security and empower farming communities to increase their capacity for economic sustainability. Additionally, War Child offers comprehensive training and awareness programs on gender-based violence and women's rights, cultivating safe spaces where women and girls can seek education and economic participation without the fear of discrimination or violence. By integrating all these activities, War Child has been instrumental in improving the stability and resilience of communities whose lives have been shaped by violence and uncertainty.





## SUDAN

In April 2023, a violent conflict broke out between two rival military generals in Sudan, leading to one of today's most devastating humanitarian disasters.

Malign foreign actors, attracted by Sudan's vast gold deposits, have helped fuel the conflict. An estimated 10.7 million people have been newly displaced from their homes, and over 24 million people require humanitarian assistance. Despite the scale of the suffering, the international community has failed to meet more than 16% of the UN's funding request.

War Child has worked in the West Darfur region of the country for two decades. Since this latest outbreak of violence, Darfur has experienced some of the most intense conflict, with widespread attacks on civilians. Reports of ethnic cleansing in the region are mounting. The situation has made it impossible for War Child to safely continue programming at the present time – the area is physically inaccessible and the risk to local teams is too great.

More than half a million refugees and returnees from Sudan are now in need of assistance in South Sudan. War Child has a robust presence in that country, running education, food security, and livelihoods programming including in the north where most of the refugees and returnees are settling. Those activities are being expanded to assist newly displaced children and youth. This includes peacebuilding activities that will be crucial to ensure the influx of new arrivals does not further destabilize the region.



## UGANDA

**U**ganda currently hosts more than 1.5 million refugees who have fled conflict in neighbouring countries, most notably South Sudan and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC).

When children and young people are forced from their homes, their education is put on hold. When they finally settle, they are often years behind in their schooling. This presents a major barrier to their recovery from war, but this underlying lack of education, combined with intractable unemployment and poverty, also drives many towards armed groups.

With a long history in Uganda, War Child has been a leading agency working with the refugee and resettlement communities, aiming to ensure out-of-school children and youth have viable pathways to prosperity. This includes catch-up learning programs that allow young people who would like to return to school the opportunity to reintegrate into the local systems. Thousands of children have successfully graduated from the program since inception and have gone on to complete their studies.

Youth unemployment among refugees in Uganda is disproportionately high, with some estimating it to be as high as 80%. War Child's response includes business incubation "boot camps," enhanced support for youth business centres, financial aid for training and business start-up, and mentorship with local business leaders. In the coming years, this transformative initiative will be scaled up significantly, marking a significant expansion of War Child's operations and impact in Uganda.



## YEMEN

**T**he conflict in Yemen, the poorest country in the Middle East, has persisted for almost a decade, with hundreds of thousands killed.

It is a complex and volatile situation, with two separate and warring factions, one in the northern Houthi region (backed by Iran) and the other in the south of the country (backed by Saudi Arabia). Despite a UN-negotiated ceasefire, tensions remain high, with the Houthis' recent targeting of international shipping in the Red Sea delaying hopes of a sustainable peace deal.

Three quarters of the Yemeni population require humanitarian assistance, with more than half the country living in extreme poverty. Despite this, donors have gravely underfunded the humanitarian response, forcing two-thirds of UN programs to scale back or close.

In addition to these urgent needs, Yemen is experiencing a crisis in education. Twenty-five percent of Yemen's schools were either destroyed, partially damaged, or are being used for non-educational purposes because of the war. In 2021, War Child began to rehabilitate war-damaged schools and provide training on children's rights and protection. War Child's improvements to school infrastructure, including water, sanitation, and power facilities, along with the provision of school supplies and teacher training, are helping to create safe-learning spaces for 500 primary students in both the north and south of the country. We are also responding to child protection concerns by organizing youth-led awareness campaigns on issues such as child labour, early marriage, child rights, and access to education.

## WAR CHILD IMPACT IN 2023

## EDUCATION

**G**lobally, a staggering 250 million children are out of school, with many denied their right to learn because of armed conflict.

For a quarter of a century, War Child has pioneered creative and innovative solutions to bring children back to the classroom. Recognizing that the complexity of war creates a wide array of barriers to education, War Child tailors its approach to meet the unique challenges that children face. From giving young refugees a chance to catch up on missed years, to providing distance learning when it is impossible to get to school safely, War Child believes that whatever it takes, every child should have the opportunity to learn.



## EDUCATION

**Breaking down barriers to learning in South Sudan**

Girls and young mothers in South Sudan face many barriers when trying to access education. Ongoing violence in the region, a large influx of refugees from neighbouring Sudan, and the disproportionate impact of the pandemic on women and girls have all taken their toll. As a result, there have been increasing rates of school dropouts, early marriage, and pregnancy, while incidents of gender-based violence have been on the rise.

War Child's "Breaking Barriers" program is focused on improving educational opportunities for girls and young women in Malakal County. At the core of the program are Mobile Learning Labs (MLL), developed by our partners at 60 Million Girls. The MLL comprises a small server, a set of tablets, and a solar panel. Students can access curated resources without requiring an internet connection. The program encourages self-directed learning, with teachers and assistants on hand to guide students when necessary.

To increase support for girls' education, parental group sessions discussed the importance of encouraging their daughters' studies. Several campaigns promoted female learning to the whole community, including men and boys. As a result, over 400 girls and out-of-school mothers were enrolled in MLL classes. Over 100 teachers, librarians, and volunteers were trained in MLL skills. And over 250 mothers took part in after school leadership and life-skills classes.

Participants made gains in English vocabulary, reading ability, and knowledge of geography and history. The digital tools that the students are exposed to boost their confidence and communication skills. Overall, "Breaking Barriers" is living up to its name, helping women and girls engage with the modern world and improve their personal and community well-being.

## EDUCATION

**Back to Learning in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)**

Many children in the DRC face having their education cut short by conflict. In parts of the country plagued by violence, the walk to school – often many kilometres away – can be incredibly dangerous. With armed militia patrolling many rural areas, the risk of sexual violence is a very real threat for girls, while boys face the possibility of being taken and forced to join the groups as combatants.

Over a decade ago, War Child recognized the need to create safe spaces for children to learn. The result was an innovative interactive radio-based program, with the national curriculum adapted into a series of radio dramas. The children learn close to home with the help of a trained teaching assistant, avoiding the dangerous journey. The program has significantly boosted literacy and learning engagement, especially among girls.

Learning from earlier iterations of the program, War Child recognized that to be successful, the students needed a stable cashflow to pay for future school fees. In 2023, a pilot project successfully offered seed funding for students to start small businesses, like running corner stores at school. War Child also trained local organizations in the program's methodology, equipping them to continue supporting children's long-term education.

The project successfully brought nearly 1,400 children back into formal education, double the target at the beginning of the year. Thanks to innovative strategies and community involvement, we're building stronger futures for children in the DRC.

## WAR CHILD IMPACT IN 2023

## OPPORTUNITIES

**W**ar and armed conflict directly affect families' ability to earn money and support themselves. Farmland becomes inaccessible, markets are destroyed, livestock is looted, manufacturing materials are unavailable, and banks are closed or inoperable.

These, and a host of other challenges, contribute to a cycle of poverty that is difficult to break.

In coping with intractable poverty, people turn to strategies of last resort, such as early and forced marriage, overuse of natural resources, reduced investments in children's education, and even criminality and corruption. For young men, the lure of armed groups becomes difficult to resist. These factors represent long-term, systemic challenges to the development of robust livelihood opportunities. War Child works to change that.

War Child provides vocational and skills training to parents and young people and offers guidance and financial support to help them establish sustainable businesses. By helping people lift themselves out of poverty, War Child empowers them to make positive decisions for themselves and their families and regain a sense of security and independence.



## OPPORTUNITIES

**Sustainable Farming in South Sudan**

Years of conflict, a large influx of refugees and returnees from neighbouring Sudan, and the worsening impact of climate change has made food security a priority for communities in South Sudan.

In 2023, War Child's FEED II program, funded by the Government of Canada, worked with farmers to improve farming techniques and business practices, increase food preservation, and provide alternative vocational opportunities for young people. It did this with a core objective of reducing inequalities between men and women in terms of access to and control over resources to enhance food security.

FEED II benefitted over 10,000 people in 2023, two-thirds of whom were women. Over 7,500 women and men participated in farmer field business schools, where they were taught improved agricultural techniques and basic business skills. Almost 9,000 women and men received meteorological information to mitigate the effects of climate change with improved agricultural planning. Twenty-four hundred women and men joined women-led savings groups to improve financial security. Cumulatively, 287 million South Sudanese Pounds was held by the groups, the equivalent of around 3 million CAD. Women and men were also trained on best feeding practices to improve the health of mothers and infants.

As in many of the post-conflict areas where War Child works, gender-based violence is a brutal reality for women and girls. As part of its programming, War Child organized awareness-raising community events, attended by over 7,500 women and men, while 3,000 community members were engaged in conversations about women's rights.

Through this comprehensive program, South Sudanese communities are building resilience and self-sufficiency, with women given the agency to dictate their own futures.



## OPPORTUNITIES

**Employment Opportunities for Refugee Youth in Uganda**

Youth unemployment is disproportionately high among young people in Uganda. This is especially true for refugee youth, where up to 80% are without a job. This is damaging to community cohesion and can lead to life decisions that can be calamitous, such as early or forced marriage and recruitment into armed groups.

War Child is seeking to address this crisis of joblessness by creating real-world employment opportunities for young adults. This initiative provides pathways to meaningful employment to young people through a combination of quality secondary education, life-skills, and vocational training. Implemented in partnership with 10 local civil society and refugee-led organizations, the program supports 34 lower secondary Alternative Education Program centers and host community schools, including secondary, technical, and vocational education and training institutions. By December 2023, the initiative reached nearly 8,000 young people, with 748 transitioning to employment.

Concurrently, War Child's innovative Youth Social Impact Fund supported 1,500 adolescents to attend bootcamps that were designed to nurture creativity and practical problem solving. This gave the participants transferable skills they needed to design and launch social impact projects that addressed challenges faced by their communities. One hundred and fifteen teams of youth were given start up capital to launch their businesses. The Youth Social Impact fund was launched to reinforce community service organizations. It is designed to build their capacity to support ongoing youth-led initiatives. The program not only provides young people with practical skills, but also engages them in meaningful socio-economic progress. It positions them as pivotal contributors and agents of change within their communities.

## WAR CHILD IMPACT IN 2023

## PROTECTION

**T**he rights of women and children can only be protected if everybody knows what they are. This is why War Child spends a lot of time and energy promoting them within communities.

This can take many forms, from youth-led initiatives on peace and conflict management, to radio broadcasts on the rights of children, to programming that gives women a lead role in both the design and implementation of the work.

We seek to empower women and children with the skills and tools to advocate for themselves and build the capacity of the whole community to be their champions. A population-wide understanding of women and children's rights is the most powerful way to ensure they become the bedrock on which a more secure and peaceful future can be built.



## PROTECTION



### Strengthening Protection for Congolese Children

The Democratic Republic of Congo is among the most unstable countries in the world, having known conflict for three decades. Sexual violence as a weapon of war is commonplace, as is the use of children as active combatants. In such an environment, protection of children is a matter of extreme urgency.

In 2021, War Child began a three-year project in the east of the country, aimed at strengthening the local human rights framework, with a specific focus on child protection. It was designed to be as adaptable and responsive to local needs as possible.

Over the course of the project, multiple training sessions were conducted with local organizations, government officials, and service providers on children's rights, advocacy, and community engagement. The work also included listening sessions with children to understand their challenges and aspirations, and training sessions on child rights within school and community settings.

These efforts led to increased awareness and advocacy for the rights of children. Radio campaigns and community awareness initiatives boosted understanding and engagement on the issues. By the end of the project, community capacity to advocate for and protect children's rights had been significantly strengthened, setting a strong foundation for continued work towards a safer environment for Congolese children.

## PROTECTION

**Healthcare for Afghan women and children**

Healthcare for women and children in Afghanistan is in a dire state, and this has been exacerbated by increasing restrictions placed on women by the government. Natal and post-natal care, reproductive health, and even cancer screening has seen access all but vanish, especially as international funding has dried up in the wake of the Taliban takeover in 2021.

War Child has responded to the crisis by launching health and protective programs for vulnerable populations, with a particular focus on women and children. War Child established Women Friendly Health Spaces and Mother & Child Healthcare Centres providing a comprehensive range of services such as mental health and psychosocial support, reproductive health care, and general medical services. These centres also offered life skills education and emergency referrals, reaching over 5,000 people, primarily women and girls, with psychosocial support and health services.

War Child set up Multipurpose Youth Centres, supporting 1,700 adolescents and youth with mental health and psychosocial counseling, life skills education, and vocational training. War Child also trained 400 community members in child protection and child rights. A further 4,000 community members attended awareness sessions on healthy lifestyles, reproductive health, and other important public health issues.

With these initiatives, War Child is addressing the unique needs of especially vulnerable groups in Afghanistan, providing essential services to improve their health, protect their rights, and enhance their economic opportunities, despite challenging conditions and strict local restrictions on program implementations.



### GETTING YOUNG PEOPLE IN THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO BACK INTO LEARNING

“I am very grateful to War Child for giving me the chance to be in school today.”

Esther is 17 years old. When she was younger, she was forced to drop out of school because her parents could no longer afford the fees. For years she was stuck at home helping her mother while her old school friends continued their education. One day she heard about War Child’s Back to Learning program through a community awareness campaign. It was finally a chance to return to education. She thought she would be too old, but she was accepted into the program.

Today Esther learns through radio lessons that are facilitated by a teaching assistant. Through the lessons, her French has improved to such an extent that she is now working towards attaining a diploma. She is happy that War Child can continue supporting her and her classmates who may not otherwise be able to afford further academic studies. She sees the program as the second chance at education that she never thought would be possible.



### LIFTING UP AFGHAN WOMEN THROUGH ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT

“I sew clothes and with the money I earn, I can address my family’s problems. My children are now able to attend school. I am thankful to War Child for providing the training and materials that have allowed me to stand on my own two feet and support my family.”

Sabira is one of thousands of refugees who were forced to return to Afghanistan from Pakistan in 2023. She and her children were in dire circumstances. She had no money and no opportunity to work. Fortunately, she discovered War Child’s Women’s Economic Empowerment program. It provides women and girls with vocational, literacy, and numeracy training, alongside business development support and seed funding to start their own businesses. Sabira was given tailoring equipment and supplies, training, and a small business grant which enabled her to start a clothing production business. The income she is generating has transformed her life and given her hope for her children’s future.



### SUSTAINABLE FARMING IN SOUTH SUDAN

“These animals help me a lot. When they reproduce, I can sell some of them and use the money to buy a few things that I need to improve my life.”

Sara is a small-scale farmer in South Sudan. She has always supported herself by cultivating crops to sell at the market, but South Sudan has been unstable since its foundation just over a decade ago. Sara’s livelihood has often been disrupted by violent clashes. Eventually she was forced to move from her ancestral village to safer ground, leaving behind her land and crops. When she finally settled, she came face to face with the effects of global warming. While she continues to attempt to farm as she did before, prolonged droughts have meant she cannot rely on a sustainable yield.

In 2023, War Child gave Sara two goats – a buck and a doe - through its FEED II program, which aims to improve women’s food security. She says the goats have come in handy for her household as an extra source of income. She can take the milk to market and when the goats reproduce, she can sell the kids. The goats will also improve her general livelihood even if she finds herself on the move again.



### CATCHING UP ON MISSED EDUCATION

“When I heard about the program and its free benefits, I thought it was too good to be true. I was happy to have the opportunity to continue my formal education and so I enrolled without hesitation. It has been the best decision of my life.”

20-year-old Sheria fled violent conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo with his family in 2012 and now lives in a refugee settlement in Uganda. At first his parents were able to use what scant resources they had to pay for his education, but the pandemic was devastating and once it had passed, they no longer had the money. For Sheria, it felt like life had come to a standstill. He believed that education was the key to a bright future.

He was out of school for two long years but then became aware of War Child’s Accelerated Education Program. By studying a condensed curriculum, students are able to catch up on their missed years. It has been challenging, but Sheria’s teachers encourage him to keep going and work with him to ensure he makes progress. He now believes that when he finishes the course he will be set up for success.



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