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An Exposition of Intra-bush and Post-bush Experiences of Formerly Abducted Child Mothers in Northern Uganda: Issues in Rehabilitation, Resettlement and Reintegration

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**An Exposition of Intra-bush and Post-bush  
Experiences of Formerly Abducted Child Mothers  
in Northern Uganda**

**Issues in Rehabilitation, Resettlement and Reintegration**

**Eric Awich Ochen**

**A Thesis submitted to the University of Huddersfield in partial  
fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the degree of Doctor of  
Philosophy.**

**December 2011**

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## **Abstract**

This qualitative study explores the intra-bush and post-bush experiences of formerly abducted child mothers (FACM) in Northern Uganda. Critical events in the lives of young women who were abducted as young girls to join rebel soldiers in the recent civil war are examined. These critical events include sexual violation, training and participation in battles as child soldiers, motherhood, intra-bush trauma and, escape or release. The study also explores how the young women coped with life in the post-bush society they had rejoined. I examine approaches, resources and opportunities for the rehabilitation of returning FACM, their resettlement process and reintegration. The methodology borrows from narrative analysis, phenomenology and grounded theory with the main methods being in-depth interviews with FACM and key informants as well as focus groups with community members and agency staff. Structuration theory, African feminist theories, child rights discourse and a conceptual framework focusing on rehabilitation, resettlement and reintegration are utilized as lenses through which the experiences of the young women are viewed.

Findings suggest that while the FACM demonstrated considerable agency in managing the challenges they came across both in the bush and in the post-bush periods, this agency was significantly curtailed by social structures. The young women's experiences, both in captivity and post-captivity were influenced by structural factors which were embedded within social systems and relationships. These factors formed the context for the lived realities of the young women which were in turn impacted by gender and culture. The FACM had to assume a multiplicity of roles and identities as girls, mothers, 'wives', fighters, which interconnected with individual agency. This contributed to the strengths and resilience the young women possessed and also led to non-compliance with traditional cultural practices in some instances making reintegration more difficult.

The main contributions of the study are: in its demonstration that some African cultural traditions have points of convergence with the promotion of children rights; in increasing understanding of the role of patriarchal and matriarchal power in social life; and in the revelation of the agency of the young women and their resistance to structural violence, although this agency was not adequate for protection from abuse. The study isolates not only individual but social agency which can be utilized to support rehabilitation, resettlement and reintegration planning. It raises the significance of the quality of personal relationships in carrying out interventions for FACM, sheds lights on the issues surrounding social rejection of the young women, where this occurs, and argues for interventions that build on their strengths and considers not only post-bush but intra-bush experiences.

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## **Dedications**

Dedicated to the memory of my Beloved Dad (Lezi Olum Labwor 1919-1987);

To the memory of my dear Twin Brother Fred Opiyo Awich (28.04.1975-7.11. 2009), who passed on midway the course of this study; &

Charles Remy Opoka, Brilliant Cousin who too went too soon (31 August 2001- 1<sup>st</sup> May 2010)

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Eric Awich Ochen



## List of abbreviations

ACORD	Agency for Coordination and Research in Development
ACRWC	African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child
AIDS	Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
APRM	African Peer Review Mechanism
AU	African Union
CAR	Central African Republic
CBC	Children Born in Captivity
CBO	Community Based Organization
CBOs	Community Based Organisations
CDO	Community Development Officer
CFPU	Children and Family Protection Unit
CFs	Community Facilitators
CICL	Interventions and Services for Children in Conflict with the Law
CICL	Children in Conflict with the Law
CDO	Community Development Officer(s)
CORPs	Community Resource Persons
CPA	Concerned Parents Association
CPC	Child Protection Committee
CPU	Child Protection Unit
CRC	Convention on the Rights of the Child
CSO	Civil Society Organizations
CVC	Community Volunteer Counsellors
CWD	Children with Disability
DDR	Disarmament Demobilisation and Reintegration
DRC	Democratic Republic of the Congo
FACM	Formerly Abducted Child Mothers
FAC	Formerly Abducted Children
FAPs	Formerly Abducted Persons
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GUSCO	Gulu Support the Children Organisation
GOU	Government of Uganda

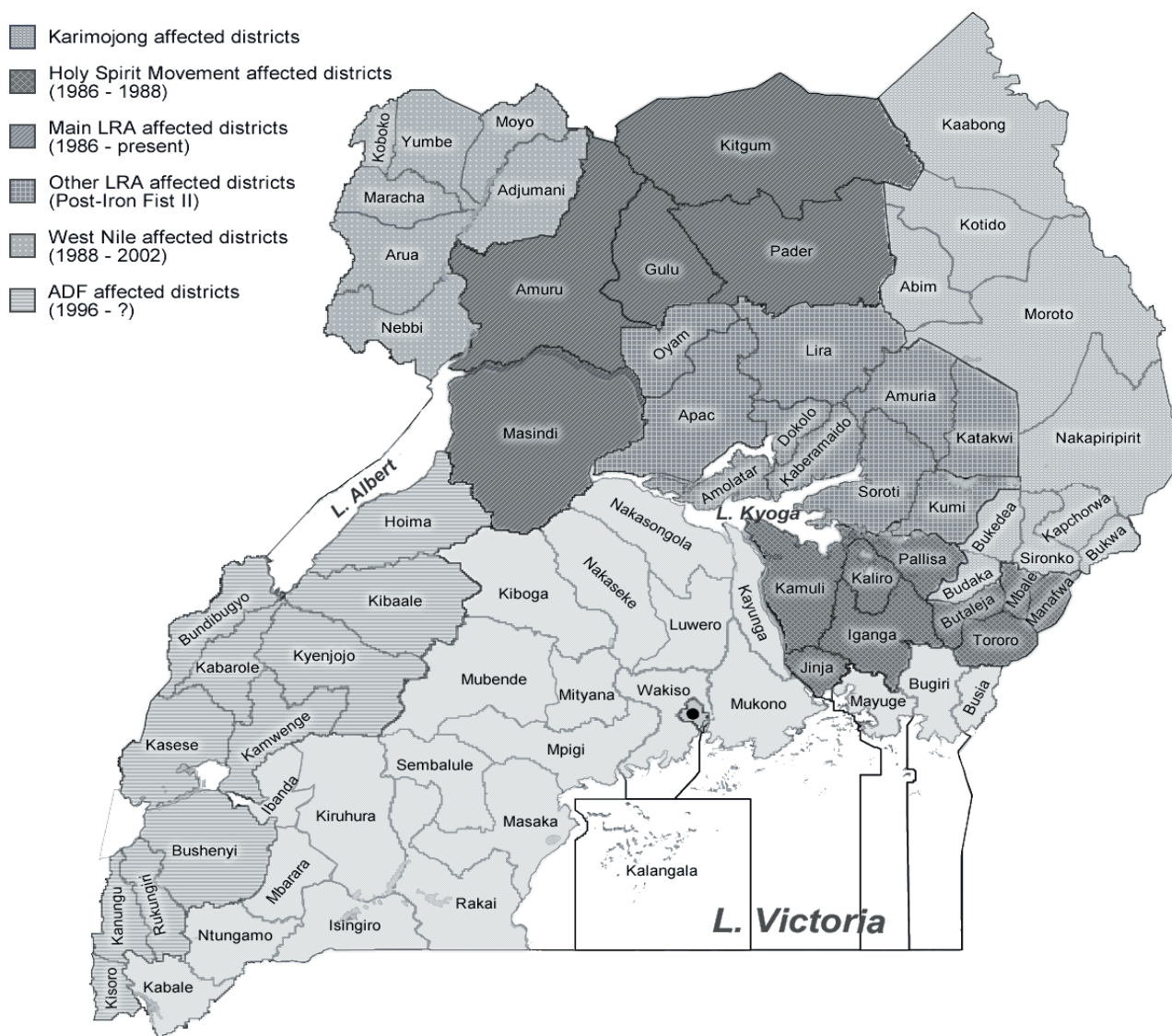
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
IDDRS	Integrated Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Standards
IDP	Internally Displaced Persons
IDPCs	Internally Displaced Persons' Camps
IEC	Information, Education and Communication
IGA	Income Generating Activities
ILO	International Labour Organisation
JLOS	Justice Law and order sector
KY	Kabaka Yekka
LCs	Local Councils
LG	Local Government
LRA	Lord's Resistance Army
MOFPED	Ministry of Finance Planning and Economic Development
MoGLSD	Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development
MoH	Ministry of Health
NDP	National Development Plan
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NGOs	Non Governmental Organizations
NRA	National Resistance Army
NRM	National Resistance Movement
NRC	Norwegian Refugee Council
OVC	Orphans and Vulnerable children
PRDP	Peace Recovery and Development Plan
PSG	Parents Support Group Representative
PSS	Psychosocial Support
PSSPs	Psychosocial support Practitioners
PTSDs	Post Traumatic Stress Disorders
RR	Resettlement and Reintegration
RRC	Reception and Rehabilitation Centre
RRR	Rehabilitation, Resettlement and Reintegration
SPLA	Sudan People's Liberation Army
TA	Template Analysis
UBOS	Uganda Bureau of Statistics

UCRNN	Uganda Child Rights NGO Network
UDHS	Uganda Demographic and Health Survey
UHRC	Uganda Human Rights Commission
UN	United Nations
UNCRC	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
UNCST	Uganda National Council for Science and Technology
UNFA	United Nations Population Fund
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNHS	Uganda National Household Survey
UNICEF	United Nations Children Fund
UNIDDRS	United Nations Integrated Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Standards
UNIFEM	United Nations Development Funds for Women
UNLA	Uganda National Liberation Army
UPC	Uganda Peoples' Congress
UPDA	Uganda Peoples Democratic Army
UPDF	Uganda People's Defence Forces
UPE	Universal Primary Education
US	United States
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
VSLA	Village Savings and Loan Associations
WAC	War Affected Children

## **List of Appendices**

1. Appendix 1: Table of Pseudonyms for child mothers interviewed
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## Map of Uganda Showing Conflict Affected Areas



Source: UN OCHA (2007)

# **CHAPTER ONE**

## **INTRODUCTION**

### **My Motivation to Conduct Research on Children in Armed Conflict**

This study has been motivated by my personal experiences over the last twenty three years. Growing up as a child in Northern Uganda; I saw the environment in which I was living change from a friendly and peaceful one to one defined as war-ravaged. I remember the war broke out when I was 11 years old and I witnessed personally how our community changed from tranquil stability to an environment of bombs, chaos, uncertainty, sporadic gunfire, and virtual incandescent turmoil. This situation left my family, like many others within the region, no option but to vacate our much cherished home and seek refuge in the safer urban centres such as Gulu town. Many families were, however, not able to migrate to towns and had to contend with the difficulties of life in the internally displaced person camps (IDPCs) within the villages. I lost many contemporaries and playmates to the war, some joining the rebel groups and others dying in the ensuing cross-fire.

While sitting my Advanced Level (University Entry) examinations in a prominent school in Gulu, we had to be protected by tanks and heavy weaponry because there was a high possibility of being abducted as had happened in other schools such as the Sacred Heart Secondary School, St Mary's College Lacor and Sir Samuel Baker Secondary School, all of which are situated within the Gulu district. Studying on tenterhooks thus defined my two years at St. Joseph's College, Layibi. When we passed to join the university, the national newspaper ran stories of how children from war-torn Northern Uganda had also competed and made it to the university. Going to university was thus an exception than the rule since many good teachers had emigrated from Northern Uganda and the education infrastructure had virtually collapsed.

My background also influenced the degree course I chose to do at the university, which was social work. I wanted to give back to the community and support the many children who were suffering in the conflict. On completion of my first degree I worked with Gulu Support the Children Organisation, (GUSCO) and also with World Vision's Uganda Children of War Rehabilitation Centre. This work experience brought me into direct contact with children who had suffered the brutality of abduction as well as rights violations. Having lived in the region, I had a general overview of the situation of children, however, this was nothing compared to what I came to learn when I sat down to talk to the children and listen to their stories. The stories told were totally different from those I read about in newspapers, or other such reports. However, when I was working with the children there were issues which were not clear at all such as the issue of long-term reintegration of the children and especially of formerly abducted girls who returned with children conceived in the bush.

While most children had to think only about their own reintegration, the Formerly Abducted Child Mothers (FACM) had to grapple with the added issue of protecting and supporting children born in captivity. The issues of welfare, support, acceptance and reintegration of the latter were genuine concerns to the FACM. While working with GUSCO, Save the Children Denmark and as a programme consultant for many other psychosocial support (PSS) agencies, the feedback from the community was that the FACM were difficult, aggressive, rude, un-marriageable and isolated. Discussions with the FACM themselves suggested that they felt rather ostracised from mainstream society on account of their past experiences within the bush (rebel captivity).

I was motivated to explore these issues further as it was clear that the challenges of the FACM and children who had returned from the bush were issues that PSS agencies had been grappling with. There was need to explore at a more in-depth level the factors affecting the FACM and to unpack some of the assumptions about them. While musing over these issues I was also drawn to the stories of the FACM who were reportedly doing very well (socio-economically) and supporting their children within the community, as others were ostensibly struggling and reportedly experiencing significant difficulties adapting to community life. These were some of the issues that gave birth to this study.

## **The Statement of the Problem**

Africa is bedrock of internal political conflicts and wars of aggression. Between 1946 and 2006 there have been a total of 74 violent conflicts in Africa, compared to 68 in Asia and 32 in the Middle East and Europe and 26 in the Americas (Francis, 2008). The modern contemporary war is much more complex than the wars of the 1940s and the earlier period. Not only are there much more sophisticated weapons and technology in the execution of armed conflict, global forces and globalisation have had significant ramifications on the trajectory of such conflicts. Such is the complexity that a conflict being fought in the remote bushes of Northern Uganda; Democratic Republic of the Congo or the Sudan has significant geo-political connotations and international ramifications with attendant implications for conflict resolution dynamics (see Omach 2010a; Keen, 2008).

There is unequivocal agreement among scholars and commentators that contemporary conflicts have had far reaching consequences on unarmed civilians. It is suggested that while during World War II, civilian casualty made up 50% of all casualties, the Graca Machel study estimated that civilian casualties now take up 90% of all war casualties, many of whom are women and children (Harvey, 2003). In 2001, it was estimated that about 300,000 children (boys and girls) were serving as child soldiers in different parts of the world, with up to two million killed. A further six million children have been inflicted with deep physical and psycho-emotional wounds (Harvey, 2003). Millions more children have been displaced by conflict and had their lives disrupted including changes to the socio-cultural values of their communities (Machel 2001, 1996). It is suggested however that the situation varies in terms of the magnitude of the conflict and its effects on children. While in some countries, children have been forcefully conscripted into the armed forces and rebel ranks, in others they have been affected in other ways than direct conscription. Countries with a high record of involvement of children in armed conflict within Africa have been Uganda, Sierra Leone, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Liberia, Angola and Mozambique. Despite the reported resilience of children in armed conflict situation, the impact of war causes significant physical, social and psychological damage to them.



In Uganda, children have been used in armed conflict with alacrity. While the most prominent usage has been with the LRA, even the NRA in its quest to wrestle power from Obote's government in the early 1980s, used children as soldiers. Bainomugisha (2011) suggests that the conscription of child soldiers is not a new phenomenon in Uganda's history, with the involvement of children in armed conflict being traced as far back as 1972, and also to the 1978-79 wars of liberations against Idi Amin.

As with many contemporary conflicts, one key element of the Northern Ugandan conflict has been the problem of child abduction. Since the beginning of the conflict, between 25,000 and 30,000 children are estimated to have been abducted (Human Rights Watch, 2006). Between 2002 (the beginning of Operation Iron Fist<sup>1</sup>) and 2004 when the peace process started, up to 8500 children were said to have been abducted. McKay and Mazurana (2004) put the proportion of girls abducted at 30% of the total while Annan et.al. (2006) indicate a figure of 15%<sup>2</sup>. The abducted children (both boys and girls) were subjected to extreme brutality, including walking long distances on foot, trained to fight, forced to kill fellow children and other community members and made to witness several macabre incidents. The abducted young girls found themselves playing a multiplicity of roles within the rebel establishment: most of them were subjected to sexual abuse and forcefully made 'wives' to the rebel commanders, sexually abused and made to embrace motherhood at an age earlier than in the normal society (Mazurana and Carlson, 2006; McKay, 2004). Significantly, the young girls and child mothers within the bush had to fight to defend their positions, procure food and fend off their enemies. The situations of the girls and their individual experiences and construction of events around them during captivity presents a rich (though difficult) experience which is yet to be fully explored in the conflict literature.

The profound impact of abduction and the repertoire of experiences the children in Northern Uganda were subjected to have been devastating for their psychosocial functioning and development (Corbin, 2008; McKay, 2004). These have raised moral and ethical problems for the children with the resultant feeling of hopelessness,

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<sup>1</sup> In early 2002 the government of Uganda got permission from the government of Sudan to pursue the rebels inside Sudanese territory. The operation was codenamed "Iron Fist" and had far reaching consequences for the direction of the war, especially escalation of abduction of children.

<sup>2</sup> The disparity could be a result of methods used in the estimation of the number. It should be noted here that data gathering and management in Uganda, especially by local and central government authorities is rather weak.

desperation, confusion and emotional turmoil. The immediate problems that formerly abducted child mothers' face in the communities are lack of basic needs such as access to health facilities, educational opportunities, and food. Other related problems include child abuse and inadequate social support from the families and communities. Indeed social rejection of the FACM has been reported (e.g Burman and McKay, 2007; Mazurana et al., 2008). These factors have constituted some of the key impediments to reintegration into normal societal lives.

The situation appears to be much worse for formerly abducted children who have become mothers (Annan et al., 2007; Frerks et al., 2005). When abducted child mothers began returning from captivity, a lot of excitement was generated among the Acholi tribe and other neighbouring communities as parents were being reunited with their children. Soon however, this excitement was replaced by anxiety and uncertainty about the effective and holistic reintegration of these children. The major issues of concern were: how will these young child mothers effectively be integrated in the community? Does the FACM's bush experience present any obstacle to reintegration? How would they be perceived by the community and local authorities? Are people ready to accept genuine reconciliation with these children? What about their long-term future and marriage prospects? There was thus much concern as to whether community members and families would welcome these children, peacefully co-exist with them and forgive them for any atrocities against their own communities (Okello and Hovil, 2007). Agencies were also concerned with how best to provide RRR support to the FACM.

While some information was known about the experiences of the child mothers while in the bush, it was also realised that there were a whole range of grey issues which were unknown as most of these experiences were individualised and there was need to widen knowledge on how these individual experiences were constructed by the FACM and their effects on the resettlement and reintegration process. Understanding and contextualising these experiences is important in establishing interventions for the young women. It is these issues around the rehabilitation, resettlement and reintegration of the FACM that the thesis examines.

## **Contribution of the Study to Scholarship**

This study makes important contribution to the reintegration body of knowledge, feminist scholarship and children's rights discourse. It also advances new arguments about hitherto taken for granted development assumptions and sheds new lights on the experiences of FACM both within the bush and outside the bush as they try to rebuild their lives.

To Feminist Scholarship, the study contributes to a new understanding of gender relational issues, showing that the issues are much more complex than just pitting men against women (and children) even in situations of conflict. The study has expanded knowledge about the dynamics of agency of the FACM in the bush and outside the bush and demonstrated how that agency was constrained by structural forces within both the rebel establishment and other social organizations within the normal Acholi community. On children's rights discourse the study suggests that children rights as known and practised were potentially present in the Acholi traditional society, although the concept of "rights" was not vocalised as such. The Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Acholi cultural and traditional child protection aims are thus not antithetical to each other. These revelations thus raise the need for interventions to build on local conceptualisations and understanding of rights and child welfare so that socio-cultural harmony is maintained and potential challenges addressed. Furthermore, the importance of traditional knowledge in the reintegration process becomes even more critical.

In terms of resettlement and reintegration (RR) programming, the study argues for an intervention approach which builds on the agency and strengths of the FACM while keeping adequate attention on the influence of structure in exercising such agency. This study shows the significance of building child protection interventions around local self-renewing structures serving other but relevant functions, for the purpose of sustainability and community ownership. The study sheds new insights into the importance of the quality of the FACM's personal relationships for reintegration. This insight should inform programme design as relationship building as a concept and intervention strategy has rarely been utilised in efforts to resettle and reintegrate the FACM.

## **Research Methodology**

This qualitative study, underpinned by interpretivism and phenomenology, (Smith, 2008, p.3; Schwandt, 2003, p.299) focused on the lived experiences of FACM and their

interpretation of their social world. Full ethical approval was obtained from the University of Huddersfield (UK) Ethics Committee and the Uganda National Council for Science and Technology. The study was conducted in Gulu and Amuru districts in Northern Uganda between September 2009 and March 2010. Using a purposive and snowball sampling approach, in-depth narrative interviews were carried out with 21 young women aged between 20-27 years. All had been abducted as young children, had subsequently given birth to children in the bush, and had then returned to their communities. Additional data were gathered through interviews with seventeen key informants (local government staff, community leaders, and civil society actors) and seven focus groups variously comprising social workers, NGO staff and community members (between 8-12 participants per group) were held to explore views on the efficacy of support for the reintegration of FACM. Interview schedules and focus group discussion topics were derived from a comprehensive review of the literature.

All interviews and discussions were tape-recorded and transcribed. Transcripts were analyzed thematically using Template Analysis (TA) and an interpretative framework drawn from feminist and children's rights perspectives was applied. TA is a useful method in analyzing textual data emerging from fieldwork (King, 2004). The technique involves reducing large amounts of data into manageable clusters of themes (King, 2004).

## **Main Thesis Argument**

This study foregrounds a number of key arguments in line with its theoretical framework. I argue that the rehabilitation, resettlement and reintegration experiences and prospects for the formerly abducted child mothers (FACM) is deeply influenced by their intra-bush experiences, which made them return with children to face a different environment from the one they left behind as young girls. The child mother experiences as child soldiers is particularly important as ability to cope outside the bush could be directly related to the bush experience and the appropriateness of support mechanism provided to the FACM.

One critical factor in the rehabilitation, resettlement and reintegration of the FACM which has often been much overlooked is relationship. The FACM are involved in a

multiplicity of relationships with their children, families, peers, community members, local leaders and community resource persons. I argue that effective management and quality of these relationships significantly influences the intervention outcomes. This has, however, been a key limitation in current interventions where there have been little considerations for personal relationship in the programme strategies and development assumptions utilised.

I discuss the issue of agency of the FACM and show that it is a complex issue determined by many contextual factors other than just the will-power of the young women. This agency is contextualised and situated within the socio-cultural and politico-economic context that FACM find themselves in. The strong will of the FACM was thus necessary but not always sufficient for the effective demonstration of agency because the latter is significantly bounded by structure. I utilise the theory of structuration to explain the agential experiences of the girls to indicate how forces within and outside an individual can have significant effect on such a person's quality of life.

I also critically explore the intra-bush experiences where the situation of the girls is analysed against the background of personal agency and resilience. I show that although the FACM demonstrated some agency and resilience in captivity, the girls were simply powerless to prevent their rights from being violated: a predominance of structural issues against the agential powers of the young girls.

The study suggests that girls who returned home directly and those who passed through reception centres have different reintegration experiences, indicating that centre-based PSS work makes important contribution to the RRR process. In the post-bush period, I have argued that the initiative of the young women to pursue romantic relationships with their suitors is an agential decision. But still in these relationships as in others there were still structural constraints of factors which prevailed upon it.

I argue that the fundamental problem with the interventions is that the FACM have been visualised as “problem being” rather than active agents, in the process of their rehabilitation and post-reinsertion socio-economic development and psychosocial support. These assumptions also curtailed the efforts of PSS agencies in effectively utilising the traditional and indigenous structures within the community.

## **Structure of Thesis**

This thesis is divided into three parts and further sub-divided into several chapters. Part I introduces the thesis and its focus, justifying the methodology and theoretical framework applied. This has five chapters: Introduction; Theoretical Framework; Background to the conflict in Northern Uganda and the political history of Uganda; literature review; and methodology. Chapter one introduces the study and my motivation for researching on children in armed conflict. It also provides the statement of the problem and definition of key concepts used throughout the thesis. In Chapter two, I present the theoretical framework for the study. I discuss feminist perspectives on gender and power relations and draw on African feminist scholarship; children rights discourse, and structuration theory to situate the study findings. Conceptualisation of the post-war rehabilitation, resettlement and reintegration of children associated with armed forces is also made. In Chapter three, I present information with regard to background to the conflict in Northern Uganda and the political history of Uganda. Here I discuss the political economy of Uganda, and the nature of domestic politics how they have contributed to the incessant conflict within the country, suggesting that the whole issue can be traced to colonial legacy, politics of ethnicism and weakness of the State. I also outline the nature of wars and armed conflict in Northern Uganda and discuss how they have produced and reproduced FACM. I further make an analysis of the Juba peace process and discuss whether it has factored in RRR of the FACM.

In chapter four I present the review of the key literature on situations of children in conflict situations. The literature review contextualises the experiences of children in conflict situation, drawing on research and case studies from Africa, Asia, Latin America, Europe and elsewhere. It also reviews the interventions that have been implemented in these countries and regions and discusses their strengths and limitations and the potential for advancing the body of knowledge. Chapter five concludes part I by discussing the research design, methods, data collection and data analysis as well as a reflection on the research process.

Part II focuses on the presentation of findings. Chapter six presents findings with respect to the experiences of the girls while with the rebels in the bush. Chapter seven looks at relational issues in the post-return period and other factors affecting the RR process. In

this chapter the nature of the return process among the FACM and how this affects reintegration is discussed as well as the interaction between the FACM and their children, peers, family and the general community and the significance of these factors on the reintegration process.

In chapter eight the community structures for reintegration of the FACM are discussed. Perception of what constitutes reintegration; a description of the child protection structures and regimes utilised over the years; the roles and support of local leaders to children affected by armed conflict; and the role played by social capital in the reintegration process are elaborated. The chapter also discusses child protection and children rights in a traditional and 'normal; Acholi society vis-a-vis the changes arising out of the war.

In chapter nine, community and stakeholder perspectives on the current interventions are presented and the role played by the development agencies in the rehabilitation, resettlement and reintegration process is elaborated. This concludes the presentation of findings.

In Part III, a critical analysis of the findings is undertaken. Part III has three chapters: ten, eleven and twelve. Chapter ten draws together the main themes of the study and uses the theoretical framework to discuss the emerging issues pertaining to structures and agency. It draws heavily from feminist scholarship, the literature on RRR as well as child rights literature. In this chapter the main themes explored are the FACM experiences of rebel captivity and manifestations of agency both in the intra-bush situation and post-bush period. Other issues explored include the intersection between gender, children's rights and socio-cultural factors.

Chapter eleven analyses the contextual factors affecting the rehabilitation, resettlement and reintegration process including community structures developed to support FACM in the community. This chapter also discusses the interventions that have been developed to support the FACM and other children affected by war, weighing their strengths and limitations.

Chapter twelve concludes the thesis, summarising the main findings and making a case for new models of intervention for children in post-conflict communities. I also outline the contribution the study makes to knowledge creation within the fields of reintegration and children's rights and feminist literature.

### **Concept Definitions**

**Formerly Abducted Child Mother (FACM):** A young girl below the age of eighteen who is abducted by the rebels, taken to the bush and forcefully taken up as a sexual partner of an older rebel soldier and later produces children when she is still young; and still in the bush. This definition therefore refers to young women with such characteristics who have returned from the bush having escaped, been released by the rebels or rescued by the government forces. In my case, however, I have used the concept to refer to all young women who had such characteristics but some could have been beyond 18 at the time of the interview, which was done retrospectively.

**Rebels:** The rebels are a group of people under the leadership of Joseph Kony, the main protagonist in the war, who claim to have taken arms to fight for the overthrow of the government of Uganda and establish a government based on the "ten commandments". Most of the rebel soldiers were once young children (boys and girls) abducted from their families. Many were taken as children and grew up in the bush

**Reunion:** The process of reuniting the formerly abducted child mother with her family/relatives or those that have expressed willingness to support her in a post-abduction life.

**Rehabilitation:** This is the process of providing psychosocial support to the FACM to enable them come to terms with their captivity experience and embrace post-bush situations. It involves a series of activities aimed at treating the individual to achieve psychosocial wellbeing and restore social functioning (see Barenbaum et al., 2004; Ochen and Okeny, 2010). The focus of rehabilitation is the individual, before she is supported to resettle within the community.

**Resettlement:** This is used here to refer to the process of returning a child back to her home or to another location after she is supported by a psychosocial support agency.



Whereas reunion normally involves bringing the child back to the family he/she was uprooted from; resettlement can still occur even when immediate and extended family members cannot be located.

**Re-insertion:** The process of returning a child to the community. It is often used to refer to the initial (normally material support) provided to a returnee to rejoin the community. It is normally taken as the first stage in the actual reintegration process. United Nations (2006, p.7) provides the following definition: Reinsertion is the assistance offered to ex-combatants during demobilization but prior to the longer-term process of reintegration. Reinsertion is a form of transitional assistance to help cover the basic needs of ex-combatants and their families and can include transitional safety allowances, food, clothes, shelter, medical services, short-term education, training, employment and tools. While reintegration is a long-term, continuous social and economic process of development, reinsertion is short-term material and/or financial assistance to meet immediate needs, and can last up to one year.

**DDR:** Used to refer to programmes targeting the Demobilisation, Disarmament and Reintegration of ex-combatants, their spouses, and followers (Green and Rynn, 2008, p.4). While I acknowledge this definition of DDR, this study has focused on the “R” (Reintegration) component. This is because the categories of the ex-combatants we are dealing with were not the main perpetrators in the armed conflict. The target group were also (in some of the cases) not resettled using standard DDR processes: many escaped on their own haphazardly, and their resettlement and reintegration programmes occurred in a context of active conflict rather than in the aftermath of the war ending or a peace agreement being signed. Furthermore, some of the FACM avoided direct contact with the military and government DDR processes and mechanisms. It is important to note, however, that disarmament and demobilisation concepts and approaches are intertwined with reintegration processes and influence each other.

**Disarmament:** Disarmament is the collection, documentation, control and disposal of small arms, ammunition, explosives and light and heavy weapons of combatants and often also of the civilian population. Disarmament also includes the development of responsible arms management programmes (United Nations, 2006, p.7).

**Demobilisation:** Demobilization is the formal and controlled discharge of active combatants from armed forces or other armed groups. The first stage of demobilization may extend from the Processing of individual combatants in temporary centres to the massing of troops in camps designated for this purpose (cantonment sites, encampments, assembly areas or barracks). The second stage of demobilization encompasses the support package provided to the demobilized, which is called reinsertion

**Reintegration:** This is the process of a formerly abducted child/ girl living normally in society after going through the traumatic experiences of abduction and all that it entails. It is always used to refer to the post reunion situation where the child settles down and participates in community activities as would any other child/young person who had not go through the abduction experience. There are different types if reintegration: social, economic, spiritual, political, etc. According to United Nations (2006, p.7) Reintegration is the process by which ex-combatants acquire civilian status and gain sustainable employment and income. Reintegration is essentially a social and economic process with an open time-frame, primarily taking place in communities at the local level. It is part of the general development of a country and a national responsibility, and often necessitates long-term external assistance.

**The Bush:** This concept is used here to refer to life away from home, with the rebels in the jungle. The bush is not one locality but it symbolizes the period that the children spends in captivity usually in a hidden and socially isolated location (e.g. in forested areas, hills or the jungle).

**Reception and Rehabilitation Centre (RRC):** A place where children who return from the bush are received, given basic care and support and provided with psychosocial support in preparation for reunion/resettlement.

**RRR: refers to Rehabilitation, Resettlement and Reintegration**

This concept gives the freedom to conceive support to FACM and their children affected by war beyond the scope of the DDR framework. It is the underling approach utilised throughout the thesis although references are also made to DDR at specific points.

**Community:** In this study community is used to refer to a location where people who are bound by socio-cultural and economic characteristics live together. The settlement patterns in Acholi before the war are that villages, parishes and sub counties, are often determined by the clans that they belong to. A uniformity of practices and kinship ties thus often characterise these communities. Even within the current displaced camp situations, people have more or less settled along these clan lines. For the avoidance of doubt therefore community here refers to the camps, parishes and villages to which the former child soldiers return.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **THEORETICAL AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**

#### **Introduction**

In this chapter, I discuss the theoretical approaches and perspectives underpinning the investigation of the experiences of formerly abducted child mothers in Northern Uganda. A systematic presentation and discussion of pertinent issues which are crucial in understanding and making sense of the data is made. In developing an interpretive framework for interrogating the situation of formerly abducted child mothers, I draw on children's rights discourse and feminist perspectives on gender and power. I provide a critique of children's rights discourse to illustrate the complexity and limitations of the children's rights movement and although I argue that dominant children's rights discourse is heavily predicated on particular constructions of childhood, I nevertheless suggest that in the absence of an alternative paradigm, this provides a useful policy tool for improving the lives of children in conflict situations.

In my discussion of feminist theory, my intention is to utilise the framework provided by feminist perspectives in understanding the experiences of girls and child mothers within a conflict setting; a setting in which issues of power and gender relations are significant. I, however, borrow heavily from African feminist scholarship in understanding the experience of the African women in conflict situation and I analyse these experiences within the socio-cultural context in which the women live. I have also utilised structuration theory and the agency structure debate to contextualise the experiences of the young women both within the bush and outside of it and drawn on the literature on post-conflict RRR to situate and appreciate the experiences of the FACM.

## **Theoretical Perspectives and Philosophical Framework**

### **Children Rights Discourse: a framework for studying children affected by armed conflict**

The concept of children's rights has been at the forefront of programmatic and policy interventions for children for over two decades with the United Nations championing the promotion of the rights of children globally. However, there are both proponents and critics of the dominant discourse on rights. Wald (2004) observes that while there has historically been a movement since the latter part of the 1850s to provide children with rights, the notion of children's rights is a controversial one which has its limitations. Wald notes that some of the issues embedded in rights should actually be framed as a moral obligation of parents towards their children, and questions heavy state proscriptions and interventions in regard to some of the rights articulated. Wald argues against granting children unlimited rights. His arguments seem to imply that unlimited rights devoid of accountability might lead to deviant behaviour among children. This suggests the need for a balance between children's rights and responsibilities when carrying out child protection programming. Contributing to the rights discourse, Gadda (2008) observes that the children's rights movement was championed by non-child activists who wanted to make sure that children enjoyed their childhood as a period of innocence, play and protection from abuse. In 1924 a Declaration of Children Rights was issued by the League of Nations (present day United Nations) and this was further emphasized in the 1959 Declaration of the Rights of the Child (Gadda, 2008).

The 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) effectively replaced the earlier declarations and has been ratified by all countries except the United States and Somalia. Lachman et al (2002) argue that while substantial progress has been made in the developed countries, children in the developing world often find themselves disadvantaged by structures which do not guarantee effective protection. These structures include child protection policies and legislation, implementing institutions such as the police, social welfare services and other government departments. While these structures exist they are often not well facilitated and resourced. So, while on the surface the framework for addressing children rights is in place, its effect in guaranteeing rights are limited. Both the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC) and the CRC make a case for family and community involvement in child protection. In

many instances the stability of the family and the community structures which used to ensure the protection of children has been shattered by the HIV/AIDS pandemic, escalating poverty and a resultant atrophy of African traditional social institutions. In making this point, it is important to note that some African practices, for example, female genital cutting are harmful to rather than protective of children (Skaine, 2005; Ladjali, 1993). In countries affected by armed conflict, social support inherent within extended families has also been eroded.

The 1996 Machel study<sup>3</sup> on the protection of children affected by armed conflict makes a number of observations, arguing for culturally specific interventions to protect children's rights. However, the study was also criticised for its universal assumptions and prescriptions. Moreover, it is unclear whether some of the culturally sensitive interventions suggested in the study would promote the best interests of the child. Boyden (1994) opines that care should be taken to avoid universal interpretations of children's experiences of conflict and suggests that children's resilience be considered. Significantly, while the Machel study was cognizant of the uniqueness of diverse contexts interventions that are culturally sensitive are not necessarily universally applicable in different cultural contexts. At the same time, the argument can be made that developing culturally sensitive interventions might enhance the acceptability of the message of children rights. Recent studies in Northern Uganda indicate that emphasizing rights as a concept foreign to the local culture rather than integral to it could cause communities to misinterpret the philosophy and purpose of child rights observance (Abola et al. 2009; Ochen-Awich, 2009). When children's rights are presented as something new that requires a realignment of socio-cultural organisations, this alienates children from their socio-cultural reality and affects family and community cohesion (Ochen-Awich, 2009).

In working with young people in post-conflict Sierra Leone, Shepler (2005, p2) acknowledged the limitations of a rights discourse that perceives children as "innocent" and "apolitical" and developed a model for supporting a reintegration process "informed by the global human rights regime but created in everyday practice at the intersection of

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<sup>3</sup> A seminal study on the effects of armed conflict on children, commissioned by the United Nations to provide a more in-depth information on the magnitude of the effects of armed conflict on children and thereby support the development of concrete mitigation agenda.

the global and the local.” This kind of approach enables the contextualization of children’s rights within local socio-cultural situations.

Houston (1992) refutes the assertions that the current focus on children rights promotes conflict as it cannot handle differences. He also dismisses the so-called individuality focus of the child rights discourse and argues that if anything, the promotion of rights, for example in a school system, promotes social cohesiveness. On the criticism that children’s rights do not provide any political advantage to children as the latter are heavily dependent on their parents, Wald (1992) argues that the issue of dependency is a social construct which can be deconstructed and reconstructed. Drawing from a feminist framework, Wald argues that conferring rights helps to crystallise the position of those hitherto viewed as property (women and girls). Critiquing Wald, Glass (1992) observes that Wald writes mainly on legal rights though political rights are implied. On the strategic issues raised by Wald, Glass (1992) agrees on the uncompromising nature of rights and also supports the observation by Wald on issues of individuality that rights are bounded. He further notes that while non-political advantages might be available to children as a result of rights, right talk should not be set aside without an effective alternative discourse. Glass also observes that in situation of child abuse, the problem goes beyond mere violation of rights to the overall moral epitome of a child’s existence.

Francis (2007, p.222) analyses the discourse on rights and suggests that it has its roots in the industrialised northern characteristics of western societies, where childhood itself is “heavily influenced by the field of developmental psychology”. He suggests that age and physical appearances are inadequate to the definition of who a child is but childhood is not universal and is conceptualised differently by different communities, within the same country and across individual societies. He raises the challenges of labelling some people as children simply because they fall within that age bracket when the social construction of childhood in a particular community might perceive such people as adults. These thus encumber the development of meaningful interventions address challenges of childhood or children in developing countries, a fact not helped by the western philosophies of many humanitarian agencies. According to Francis, the African Charter instead of recognising the rich diversity of the African cultural situation in its definition of childhood still utilised the age-based definition enshrined within the UNCRC. Francis (2007, p.223) concludes that “the African social construction of childhood does not

correspond to the globally accepted age limit of under 18 years because this is largely influenced by the traditional socio-cultural systems and even economic contexts.”

Gadda (2008) summarises the major critique of the UNCRC (embodiment of the children rights discourse) as a western model, which imposes a new moral code on developing world’s children. The question to ask here is: are the rights, as enshrined in the CRC, really new and do they require State Parties to make interpretations which African societies had earlier not considered at all or it is just a call to action to preserve the future generation? But as I show in chapters eight and ten it appears as if what is taken to be children rights were to some extent already being provided for by Acholi socio-cultural prescriptions and practices, only that they were not called rights. The messages of rights should, however, not clog the emphasis on children’s responsibility which the traditional construction of childhood tends to put strong emphasis on.

As I have argued throughout this chapter, the rights discourse might have limitations but it is not purely western, the African Union had also pronounced itself on the issue of rights of children while many developing countries had through a number of initiatives been recognising the importance to protect the welfare of children. Critiques have however, also been labelled on the African Charter’s conceptualisation of children’s rights and its definition of both childhood and who is a child (Francis, 2007). While a monitoring framework for compliance to the CRC has been set up by the UN, the organisation does not at present have judicial powers to prosecute and punish countries that are deemed to have breached the provisions of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. However, just like the earlier declarations, the UNCRC has also been criticised for being insensitive to the cultural differences across countries and its tendency to premise the CRC on the western conceptualisation of childhood although childhood is a social construct (Gadda, 2008, p4).

The CRC has been further criticised for taking moral stances on issues of childhood and expecting every country to comply with these western ideals. This is potentially problematic due to differing accessibility to resources and other socio-cultural issues which can affect the realisation of certain types of rights. Noting that the CRC has three different types of rights: rights to provision; rights to protection and rights to participation; Gadda (2008) argues that right to participation in development activities



(Article 12) might stand out as a problematic right as there is no guarantee that participation will be achieved for all children because many children's (especially children in the developing world) access to information about this and other rights might be a big hindrance. However, much as Gadda's argument is premised on some truisms about the CRC, most of the provisions including the right to participation are only a framework which is intended to guide state parties, civil society agencies, the local government structure and all other actors in ensuring that the best interest of the child is taken into consideration.

Despite its limitations, the CRC and the Children rights discourse is still a very useful framework for understanding child protection intervention and it forms a framework of analysis for the emerging research data. Although the western model/rights discourse informs the framework, its limitations are considered and other socio-political and cultural perspectives and construction of childhood from the perspectives of the local community are also taken into consideration. Applying an adapted form of the CRC is justified because the Ugandan legal framework (Children Act, 2000) is premised on addressing issues raised by the UNCRC. I, however, also endeavour to reflect the emergent socio-political and cultural issues and their implications for this study, data analysis and presentation of findings.

The position taken in this study is that while childhood can be constructed differently in different context and the social construction of childhood could be totally different from the legal, the legislations and perspective on rights take precedence over these constructions. It is important to note that individuals within society can reconstruct and deconstruct abuse if it suits their interest.

The current study suggests that certain aspects of children rights as known and practised were present and recognised in the case study area. These rights were however not called so but all indications are there that the aim was protection of the African child. This is a significant in clarifying the points of convergence which exists between African and western construction of children's rights. It is suggested that African indigenous social institutions embedded rights into the everyday life and relationship among the Acholi, with child protection an important responsibility of parents and community members. The CRC (rights discourse) and the Acholi cultural tradition and social institutions are

thus not antithetical to each other, except for differences in conceptualisation of childhood. Child rights violations were not normative but a deviation from morally and socially accepted positioning. This thus raises the necessity to rethink child protection interventions around socio-cultural institutions and resources (see also Wessels, 2009; Shepler, 2005; Bisell et al., forthcoming).

### **The implications of Feminist Perspectives for Researching Children in Armed Conflict**

Considering that the formerly abducted child mothers are first of all girls and women interacting in a complex relationship with the men in their lives from captivity up to the post-reinsertion communities; it is important to place the outcome of the analysis against a feminist lens and research perspective. There is suggestion that the power imbalances inherent in the Acholi community, where women and girls take a backseat (Okello and Hovil, 2007), is one of the fundamental reasons for their apparent exploitation in the current system. Although it is also worth pointing out that boy children have equally been the target of exploitation by fighting and competing forces, the dynamics of the experiences of the girls and young women in the context of the war merits special attention. It is also important to note that the majority of the girl children were also abducted by male rebel soldiers. As I show further in chapter ten, culturally and historically war has been a male (adult) affair in most of the cases.

Recent studies on children affected by armed conflict have indicated that the greater composition of the rebels as well as its top leadership is male. Therefore from both their bush/captivity experiences and their efforts at reconstituting their lives in the community, gendered power imbalances are at play. Studies from Eastern Uganda, Sierra Leone, Angola and Mozambique both point out the gendered power imbalances and exploitation of the girl children (Frerks et al. 2005; Mazurana and McKay 2004; De Berry 2004). It is probable that power structures might be at play in the community's 'protection' systems and structures which might in turn further alienate women and girls from the needed psychosocial support, thereby constraining reintegration programmes (UNICEF 2005, p.203).

Taking a position that feminism focuses on the question of the woman and her place in society, McLaughlin (2003) identifies different branches and thinking of feminism often

influenced by other socio-political theories and ideas. These were indicated as Marxist/socialist feminism, liberal feminism as well as radical feminism. It is suggested that the attribution of what is or is not feminist “rests on claims rather than facts” and there is no universal acceptability of a definition (Ramazanoglu and Holland, 2002, p.146). This study, however, is not about feminism or evaluation of the different forms and dimensions of feminisms, but about using feminist ideas to illuminate, contextualise and advance the research argument. While different feminist scholars provide divergent perspectives on the ultimate aim of feminist social research, Ramazanoglu and Holland (2002, p.147) argue that the main aim for feminist social research is to “give insights into gendered social existence that would otherwise not exist” but not “to score points for political correctness or to attain methodological purity”.

It is thus important to note that a research project cannot be labelled feminist simply because it investigates gender or gendered social lives. According to Ramazanoglu and Holland (2002, p.147) “research projects can be thought of as feminist if they are framed by feminist theory and aim to produce knowledge that will be useful for effective transformation of gendered injustice and insubordination”. And this is the position taken in this study: to what extent can we unravel the gendered injustice and insubordination inherent in the experiences of the girls and formerly abducted child mothers? It is my belief that feminist perspective in this regard will tease out these issues from the points of view of the girls/young women and thus enable a better appreciation of their experiences.

I have also drawn on the feminist theory of intersectionality (Jones, 2009; Crenshaw, 1994) to enable me better appreciate the experiences and situated identities of the child mothers as they negotiate their ways through their captivity and later resettlement, rehabilitation and reintegration processes. While intersectionality was initially applied to black women’s experiences of oppressions within a racialised American society, it has since been used to appreciate and explore women’s experiences in many other different contexts. It has aided the analysis of how gender intersects with many other factors (including socio-cultural ones) to create a situation of rights violations for the women and children (see also Jones, 2009). I find the theory of intersectionality relevant and useful in understanding the complex experiences of the formerly abducted child mothers’ right from abduction through captivity and in the post-bush situations in the return period.

In applying intersectionality theory to the experiences of the African child/woman, I investigate those positions and situations of the girls and child mothers which act and intersect to enhance their oppression or exclusion from normal society's life or violations of their rights. It is important to understand how FACM's experiences of conflict, among other identity factors, intersect with their socio-economic situations, accessibility or constraints to opportunities, and public attitudes. It is noted that the multiplicity of identity owes its origin to the young women's experience of abduction. In the bush they were women/girls; child wives, mothers, fighters and porters, with one person taking on multiple identities (see also Angucia, 2010; McKay 2004; McKay and Mazurana, 2004). In a way therefore the child mothers were torn between their childhood, motherhood and adulthood. Yet their role as mothers demanded a different level of social expectations. So this crisis of identity continued in the return period with the historical circumstances of abduction of the young women acting as a strong obstacle to their marital social integration.

The cultural perceptions of child mothers as adults clouded social support to the girls and in other cases the lack of recognition of the growth and development of the child mothers into young adults made it difficult for them to be effectively supported. This has been exacerbated by interventions which treated the young women as children and not young adults. The individuated experience of the young women and how this can be brought to bear on the reintegration process was thus lost. The deterministic approach to support further created more challenges of identity among the young women, compounding their difficulties. It is suggested that in planning interventions for the young women, focus should be made on these issues and intersection of their abduction experience, perception of identity, gender and cultural positioning. Such an approach can only come out if the intersectionality of the experiences of these young women is taken into consideration.

In analysing the data I have considered African feminist scholarship and interpretation of the African woman's situation. My analysis therefore drew significantly from the writings of Oyewumi (1997, 2000), Mikell (1995), Bakare-Yusuf (2003) among others. To paraphrase Mikell (1995), African feminism recognises the importance of men and disregards militant opposition to patriarchy and hostility towards male. It thus recognises the interdependency among men and women for social harmony and societal progress.

The African feminist perspective however, also recognises the presence of oppression among some familial and patriarchal elements. Mikell notes that African feminist scholars whether literary or otherwise appreciate that not all men “are brutal and repressive” (Mikell, 1995, p.406). Writing further she notes:

My point is that the emergence of African feminism has been in accordance with its own internal clock, evolving in dialogue with the cultural contexts from which it has sprung and only cautiously acknowledging individualism. ....in the search for gender equity, this African feminism has the ability to subject indigenous cultural norms, received legal notions, and new state laws to new scrutiny as it *assesses whether they are in women's interests*. ..the emerging African feminism will generate positive changes in African political structures and contribute to greater gender equality before the law on the African continent (1995,p. 419-420).

In concluding her ideas, Mikell (1995) writes:

Here feminism is defined as approaches to addressing the unequal status of women relative to men; with the goal of mediating gender differences and providing women access to the repertoire of valued roles and statuses within society (1995:420)

Oyewumi (2000) suggests that some feminist anthropology of Africa do not bring out the nuanced issues about gender relations; as western constructions and assumptions about gender relations are often time used as philosophical bases. She argues that ‘woman’ and ‘wife’ might not be articulated as one category. According to her ‘wifehood’ is seen as a transitioning phase to motherhood which in Oyewumi’s words is “the preferred and cherished self-identity of many African women” (2000, p.1097). Oyewumi alludes to the importance of motherhood and how it binds children together, especially coming from the same “mother” and notes that “woman” never existed as a universal category. In taking her ideas about the uniqueness of the African situation, Oyewumi (1997, p.37) says of the Yoruba tribe in Nigeria: “In Yoruba society, in contrast, social relations derive their legitimacy from social facts, not from biology ...” critiquing western systems where “physical bodies are always social bodies” and thus creating a situation where there is no distinction between sex and gender. Oyewumi (1997) looks at feminism as an imposition of western hegemonic tool which assumes that western experience define the human experience. She suggests that the construction of categories including gender be looked at more critically and local realities be considered. Oyewumi (1997, p.44) notes that many African scholars fall into the trap of projecting African experiences as similar or same to the west and then “creating an African version of western things”. Bakare-

Yusuf (2003) also recognises the difference and uniqueness of the African context and notes that patriarchy or male leadership might not in reality equal oppression against women and children.

This study seeks to contextualise the issues under investigation within feminist research perspectives, particularly those aspects which pertain to gendered power relations (see Haralambos and Holborn, 2008; Saul, 2003; Nicholson, 1990). Studies have noted demonstrated gender power imbalances in the political economy and socio-economic and cultural circumstances of most communities affected by armed conflict (Frerks et al., 2005; De-Berry, 2004; McKay and Mazurana, 2004). This is the same community in which formerly abducted girl children find themselves returning to (Bukuluki et al., 2008). I will, however, discuss and analyse the issues emerging from the research within an African feminist theoretical positioning which recognises the difference and uniqueness of the African situation and experiences from other social positioning.

The current study contributes to a greater appreciation of indigenous cultural positions and its unique ways of enhancing children welfare. This study demonstrates that African culture and patriarchy does not necessarily imply oppression to women and children. Evidence of social institutions which enhance women's protection were mainly unreported or ignored due to essentialist approaches and generalisation of the Acholi culture as being patriarchal and therefore intimidating and oppressive towards women and children. However, a nuanced analysis of these cultural aspects and social institutions might show the presence of space for rights fulfilment for both women and children (see also Oyewumi, 2000, Mikell, 1995). My study thus questions the view that patriarchy is inherently oppressive and subjugative of women and children. I am aware, however, that my views as a man, and an indigenous Acholi might be contested as being overly subjective. Current literature on children in conflict recognises the positive role of culture and social institutions in shaping a society which respects the interests of children (e.g. Bisell et al forthcoming; Wessels, 2009; Shepler 2005; Oyewumi 2000, Mikell, 1995). It is possible that it is the abuse of culture and parochial interests of sub groups (in this case the rebels) which generate women and children's oppression, exploitation and subjugation.

### **Formerly Abducted Children: Active Agents or Passive Victims?**

While the issue of structure and agency had been there in social theory (e.g. Blumer 1954), the debate seems to have been reawakened by Giddens writings in 1979 and 1984, especially the seminal piece on the Constitution of Society outlining the theory of structuration. Giddens seems to present the argument that presupposes the primacy of human agency in influencing the structures in place, conceived metaphysically. He however, defines structure as entailing rules and resources but does not unpack these rules and resources. Sewell (1992) unpacks Giddens' rule and resources as human and non-human resources. He defines non-human resources as inanimate and animate objects existing naturally or manufactured to control and lay claims on power. Human resources on the other hand are conceived of as dexterity, physical strength, knowledge, emotional intelligence (commitment) which perpetuates the accessibility and control of power. In Sewell's own view, while all people in society have access to these resources, the latter is unevenly distributed. Perhaps this accessibility ties down to Giddens' observation that these structures (rules and resources) are created and recreated by human actions. Giddens does not, however, bring out clearly the intra and inter-agency constraints to human actions.

Giddens (1984, p.3) writes:

It is the specific socially reflexive knowlegeability of human agents that is most *deeply involved on the recursive ordering of social practices....(on reflexivity) it is not only merely self-consciousness but the monitored character of the on-going flow of social life-human beings are purposive agents capable of explaining their actions*

Although Giddens(1984,p.3) warns that terms such as 'purposive', 'intention' and 'motive' should be handled with care as they "can extricate human actions from the contextuality of time-space". Giddens further writes that:

the rationalisation of actions within the diversity of circumstances of interactions is the principal basis upon which the generalised '*competence*' of actors is *evaluated by others....actors not only monitor continuously the flow of their activities and expect others to do the same for their own; they also routinely monitor aspects, social and physical of the context in which they move (page 3).*

According to Giddens, intentions drive agency but he also seem to suggest that agency is much more complex than ‘interaction’ alone. Giddens (1984, p.9) asserts that “agency refers not to the intention people have in doing those things but to their capability of doing those things in the first place”. This implies power to influence the situation and also suggest that intention alone is not equal to agency as agency implies action, and can also bring about unintended consequences. Giddens (1984, p.14) recognises constraints however, where individual have no choice, and he argues that “to have no choice does not mean that action has been replaced by reaction.....”. He critiques the social theory school which does not recognise this distinction thus equating having no choices to a situation of equivalence to “being driven irresistibly and uncomprehendingly by mechanical pressures” (p.14).

Although Giddens recognizes human agency and its position in societal interactions (Smith, 1998; Turner, 1986) and the influence on social structure, other scholars subscribing mainly to realist social theory schools such as Margaret Archer (1995, 1997, 2000, 2003) tend to critique this view and that of symbolic interactionism and emphasize instead the critical (and independent) role of structure in regulating human behaviour and its constraining influence on agency. Archer criticises the theory of duality of structure and agency, proposing the view of the autonomy of social structure and culture from human agency. Critiquing Archer’s dismissal of interpretive tradition, King (1999, p, 200), argues that “the objective social structure is unsustainable”. Showing his interpretive views therefore, King rejects structure as presented by Archer and other realists arguing that “structure is not autonomous, pre-existent or casual” (King 1999, p. 222). King however, argues that “reduction of society to individuals and to other people, in no way gives individuals’ free reign to do what they will. It doesn’t in any way imply an individualistic libertinism” probably responding to the critique of interpretive tradition suggesting a voluntaristic nature of society (King 1999, p.223). He however, responds more vehemently that:

the interpretive tradition fully recognises the constraint which society places upon the individual but the interpretive tradition does not hypostatise this constraint into certain structural properties but insists that social constraints stems from the relationship between individuals which necessarily limits the kinds of practices which any individual can perform. We are constrained by other people not by structure but that do not make the constraint any less real (King, 1999, p.223).



Contributing to the debates, David Dessler (1989) argues that while human agents have power or influence on their situations and initiate some actions, these powers are exercised within an historical space which regulates such actions (structural influence).

Recognising that actions are a result of both agency and structural regulations, Dessler critiques structural theory that:

...it sets aside considerations of the agential powers underpinning action. It attempts to explain the various models of enablement and constraints operative in given interactive settings, leaving aside considerations of the capacities and *liabilities of the agents who responds to those conditions of actions....of course* any social action is the product of both structural and agential forces and therefore a strictly structural explanations of action (like its agential counterpart) will necessarily be incomplete. Structural theory alone is not capable of providing a complete explanation of action (Dessler 1989: 444).

Dessler therefore advocates a contextual appreciation-understanding the context before any action can be understood. I see Dessler locating himself in an intermediate theoretical position where both agency and structures are seen as playing a key role in the understanding of the dynamics of human interaction in society. Wendt (1987) also recognises the significance of human actions transforming the society they inhabit, recognising the properties of both agents and social structures as crucial in explanation of human agency. Reflecting Giddens position, Wendt writes that “agents and structures can be viewed as co-determined or mutually constituted entities” (Wendt 1987, p.339). Explaining the differences between structuralists and structuration theory, Wendt notes that the latter argues that social structure unlike natural structures does not exist independent of the activities of agents but are instantiated (created and recreated) by agential activities.

Shillings (1999) however critique Giddens conceptualisation of the agency structure debates as not giving adequate considerations for emotions and over-emphasising cognition. Sewell (1992, p.4) takes a critical analysis of the debate and writes that human agency and structures are not opposed to each other but “presuppose each other”. He also argues that structure not only acts as a constraint to human agency but enables it. Sewell though criticises Giddens for not robustly defining structure and leaving it to the reader’s mind. Acknowledging that agency is inherent in all human beings, Sewell (1992) points out however, that agency is not uniform across individuals in society, writing that “agency differs enormously in both kind and extent. What kind of desire people can have, what interventions they can form and what sorts of creative

transformations they can carry out dramatically from one social world to another depend on the nature of the particular structures that inform those social worlds” (Sewell, 1992, p. 20-21). Sewell also points out that there are variances in the stock of agency across societies and within any given society, indicating how occupations of different positions in society determine different accessibility to and exercise of agency. This analysis by Sewell enables the appreciation of the intra-bush world of the child mothers and young girls where their accessibility to power and resources to transform the situation in their favour or negotiate release was not simple due to the lack of control over the rules and structures prevailing in the rebel ranks.

Wessels (2006) found that despite the fact that children are often subjected to great cruelty and extreme difficulties while in rebel captivity, they also demonstrate resilience. He notes that this is often underestimated by other actors and stakeholders. Wessels abhors images of child soldiers as pathological and pathetic individuals. Although he recognises the exploitation children suffer at the hands of the rebels, he believes it is important to highlight the resilience and agency of these “victims”. Wessels’ observations are similar to Boyden and De Berry (2004) about children’s agency both within and in the aftermath of war. They note that:

The overwhelming lesson is that war does not inevitably destroy all that it touches, and that while war causes many to become extremely vulnerable; vulnerability in itself does not preclude ability (Boyden and De berry 2004:xvii) .

In another study, De Berry (2004) examined the effects of the 1987-1992 war in Eastern Uganda and found that sexual violence was used as an act of war, with many young girls and women suffering rape; a situation pointed out by many other studies. De Berry also questioned the international definition of a ‘child’ as a person below the age of 18 years. She argues that in understanding children’s experiences of war, it is imperative to contextualise these experiences and the construction of childhood and to consider the “social, structural and cultural aspects of vulnerability” (2004, p.48).

The current study lends credence to the reintegration literature by proposing an intervention approach building primarily on the agency and strengths of the FACM, while recognising the limitations arising from structural constraints (see Archer, 2003; Dessler, 1989; Sewell, 1992). My study further suggests that the tendencies of the girls

to be unstable in social relationships are a reaction to perceived society's rejections. The fact that the girls move on to seek new relationship is a demonstration of agency which shows the efforts of the young women to positively control the direction of their lives. However the failure of the relationships suggests a failure on the part of the young women's agency (agential powers) to exert control over social structures.

### **Conceptualizing Rehabilitation Resettlement and Reintegration (RRR)**

This study conceptualizes the support to FACM within the RRR framework. The legal and moral basis of the support to children affected by conflict being premised on Article 39 of the CRC which obligates state parties to support psychosocial rehabilitation, resettlement and reintegration of children affected by armed conflict. Within the literature it is generally agreed that socio-economic reintegration of formerly abducted children is paramount to their positive functioning in society. This is because it is generally believed that post-conflict peace and security might not be sustained if the ex-combatants and all people associated with fighting forces are left without any support nor given positive engaging means of livelihoods (see Corbin, 2008; Francis, 2007; Mazurana and Carlson, 2006; Honwana, 2006).

Various approaches to PSS work exist (Loughry and Carola, 2003). This variance arises due to the differences in context, specific organizational strategies and approaches and philosophical orientations of the agencies. The UNIDDRS suggests that DDR is one of many post-conflict development measures and should complement and not be done in isolation of other interventions, with a focus towards making the ex-combatants useful and productive citizens. The debate also centres on the timing of the DDR/RRR support, with the United Nations (2006) suggesting that while reinsertion aims at enabling a smooth return to civilian life accompanied by resettlement packages, reintegration is a long term process which is embedded within the development process of the country encompassing both socio-economic and political engagements and participation, but with external assistance (see also Denov and Machure, 2006; Boas and Bjorkhaug, 2010).

Within the literature, the role of the family and other stakeholders within the community has been noted. RR is not only a State and NGO responsibility but for the local community and the family as well (Corbin 2008; Frerks et al 2005; Angucia, 2010; Singer 2006; Honwana, 2006). The United Nations (2006) suggests an approach to RRR

which is people-centred; flexible, accountable and transparent; well planned and nationally owned. This suggests that the State should be at the forefront of support. While approaches to DDR is generally known to target all people associated with fighting forces such as the children, ex-combatants (United Nations 2006), male and female adult combatants, and their dependants, I shall limit the analysis to children and young women abducted as children.

It is imperative to note that the 1996 Machel study on the impact of armed conflict on children also helped promote the urgency and importance of supporting children associated with fighting forces (Harvey, 2003). While I recognize the DDR framework which effectively commences with the signing of a comprehensive peace agreement (United Nations, 2006; Machel, 2001) DDR does not fully explain the situation in Northern Uganda. This is because while the conventional DDR framework is applied in a context of negotiated peace settlement, the Northern Uganda situation and locational dynamics has implied that children have been returning home in various ways, without the conflict officially ending (see chapter seven). I therefore find the RRR framework quite useful, appropriate and relevant to explaining the experience of the FACM. This framework recognises the unique situations of the FACM and also provides a paradigm within which one can make sense of their experiences.

Rehabilitation and resettlement support to the FACM has thus been carried out in a context of ongoing conflict. In this case the framework for support, follow-up and monitoring has taken a different course from the conventional DDR as the situation has been different. This thesis thus assumes four distinct phases in the engagement with the FACM: life in captivity and return; rehabilitation support at reception and rehabilitation centres (RRC), resettlement in the community after rehabilitation; and a long-term reintegration process. I recognize, however, the interrelationships between these four distinct phases. Within the RRC, the support facilities that were available have been premised on the western models built on psychology/psychiatry and recovery from critical events (see Ochen and Okeny, 2010). However, there was also an adaptive model utilized by some agencies which combines Christian religious approaches with western trauma management.

This conceptual framework assumes that the FACM's situations require interventions in the short term, medium term and long term so as to fully address the enduring impact of the conflict on them and communities (see also Allen and Schomerus, 2006). Best practices in support to children affected by armed conflict suggest that efforts should be geared at restoring social function and structure to the days before the conflict. Lesson of experiences suggests that where intervention in the lives of the children affected by armed conflict is made, there seems to be a quicker return to normalcy and participation in community activities (See McKay et al., 2010., Fearon et al., 2009; Allen and Schomerus, 2006, Boothby et al., 2006). Some scholars however question the efficacy of PSS intervention at community level, arguing that changes at [personal and individual levels appear to be the more defensible option (Humphrey and Weinstein, 2007).

In the short run the interventions aims at ensuring safety, recovery from traumatic shocks, building confidence, family tracing and preparing the FACM for reunion with family and community (Angucia, 2010; Maina, 2010; Allen and Schomerus, 2006). In the medium term interventions encompass activities aimed at equipping the FACM with skills that they can use for support when resettled. Such skills include vocational training, networking and business development (see Ochen and Okeny 2011; McKay et al 2010; Honwana, 2006). Resettlement in some cases is also known to involve establishing primary care and supporting basic services in the community after conflict so that the needs and interests of even the very young children are addressed (Barenbaum et al., 2004). Resettlement is also perceived as involving re-establishing network, trust and a reconnection with social norms and traditions to enhance a sense of belongingness.

Long-term reintegration on the other hand aims at building community capacity to support the reintegration process, enable the FACM and other children affected by armed conflict re-engage with the development process within their communities, and promote community, inter-family and intra-family reconciliations. Conceived as a complex and non-linear process involving immediate (short-term), medium-term and long-term actions, reintegration support has been a subject of much debate within psychosocial programming (see Fearon et al., 2009; Denov and Machure, 2006; Allen and Schomerus, 2006; Maxted, 2003). The significance of reintegration as a long-term process where the FACM are properly documented and supported in the longer term rather than short and medium term only underlies my approach. It is within this framework that the activities

of the Non-governmental agencies and the psychosocial support agencies are analysed in this study (see Denov and Machure, 2006). The issue of community ownership of the interventions, availability of support structures and their prospects for sustainability has also been a consideration for the analysis of the interventions.

This study shows the significance of building RRR interventions around locally occurring structures serving other but relevant functions, for the purpose of sustainability and ownership (see also Ochen et al., 2011; Wessels, 2009; Shepler, 2005). The literature also suggests that reintegration support should consider the socio-cultural realities prevailing within the context (see Bainomugisha, 2011; Francis, 2008; 2007; Boothby 2006; Shepler, 2005). In carrying out this study, I was cognisant of the fact that the young women whose experiences are being researched are interacting in an environment defined by strong cultural ties and dynamics. These cultural belief systems define the perception of the experiences of the child mothers, and determine to some extent their response to RR interventions. In interpreting the findings as they emerge from the study therefore, these socio-cultural dynamics and dispositions form an important analytic window.

Supporting FACM is however not without challenges. Weak states are unable to effectively lead the process for rehabilitating resettling and reintegrating ex-combatants and providing a better environment where they can thrive. In situations where war has not ended it is important to question whether we are actually doing reintegration (see Maina, 2010). Within the reintegration debate there are also issues with regard to tailoring the special and unique interest of the ex-combatants and whether it can be effectively achieved considering issues of resource limitations. Other issues which have not been well answered pertain to the time frame for reintegration: what time frame is being considered in the long-term?

The current study further highlights new insights into how quality of the FACM's personal relationship is crucial for reintegration. In designing reintegration programmes, considerable attention should be aimed at addressing relationship issues. In Northern Uganda past interventions have focused at psychosocial support and socio-economic reintegration without adequate attention to the personal relationships of the FACM (Frerks et al 2005; Maina 2010; Angucia 2010; Ochen and Okeny, 2011). While

relationships had been identified as a critical area in the RRR process, it has not been exhaustively explored as has been done in the current study.

## **Summary and Conclusions**

The foregoing chapter looked at the theoretical framework used in the interpretation of data in this study. I drew from children rights discourse and feminist theoretical perspectives in appreciating and understanding the experiences of the young women coming out of conflict and their rehabilitation, resettlement and reintegration experiences. The African feminist perspective which gives recognition to the interdependent role of women and men in society and suggests that patriarchy is not inherently and necessarily against women informs the theoretical frame. The structuration theory and the emerging debates on the significance of both agency and structure in explaining human relations is also utilised in analysing the experiences of the FACM as well as a consideration for post-conflict RRR framework. The next chapter presents information on the contextual background of Uganda and a discussion of why conflict seems to be quite perennial in the country.

# **CHAPTER THREE**

## **CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND: WARS AND ARMED CONFLICT IN NORTHERN UGANDA**

### **Introduction**

The aim of this chapter is to contextualise and analyse the origin and causes of conflict in Uganda. It is important to understand the nature of politics in Uganda and how this has been shaped by historical, socio-political and economic factors within the country. It is argued that colonialism influenced the nature of the political and socio-economic organisation of Uganda after independence. Much of the social and political upheavals that have become a defining characteristic of Uganda's politics have been shaped by colonial policy which was geared at establishing hegemony over Uganda. Post-independence leaders continued with the same colonial policy approach to position themselves and kinsmen to establish hegemony over the country and entrench their positions in power. As a consequence Uganda is a weak State where parochial interests (ethnic and religious) significantly influence political decisions, the governance systems and access to economic resources. As a result of the weakness of the state, leaders personalise state power and use the institutions of the state to control the country by meting out rewards and punishments as they so wish (neo-patrimonialism). This situation thus leads to significant discontent, producing and reproducing conflicts at different periods in different parts of the country.

### **Background and Context**

Uganda is a former British colony which gained independence in 1962 after more than 60 years of British rule. It is a poly-ethnic country with various tribes although the dominant ethnic groups are comprised of Bantu speakers, Luo speakers, Ateker and



Sudanic speakers. There are 33 million people in Uganda according to recent estimates<sup>4</sup>. Data from the Uganda National Household Survey, 2009/2010<sup>5</sup>, indicate that youth aged 18-30 constitute 21.3 percent of the total population while the size of the population aged below 18 years constitutes about 57 percent. Uganda's poverty rate stands at 31 percent with variance across the regions with the North posting the worst poverty indicators. The current poverty figures for Northern Uganda are still above 60 percent, with other socio-economic and health indicators also worse than the rest of the country (Republic of Uganda, 2010). This situation has been borne out of the inability of the communities (who are predominantly agricultural) to access land for cultivation at the height of the insecurity. While Uganda's average HIV prevalence stands at 6.4 percent, Northern Uganda's prevalence rate has remained consistently above 8 percent (Government of Uganda, 2010<sup>6</sup>; MOH 2006). The high HIV figures in the North are as a result of the militarisation of the North and the penetration of all areas by the armed forces.

Uganda's GDP per capita is estimated at US\$ 300 (Republic of Uganda, 2010). With an annual growth rate averaging about 6 percent since 1986, Uganda was seen as an emerging economy and a success story for the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF) policies. However, recent political unrest and the wide scale riots over increasing prices of basic items have clouded Uganda's claims to socio-economic stability. Politically, Uganda is currently under a multi-party system of government with the National Resistance Movement (NRM) in power since 1986. It has been noted however that while Uganda has made significant socio-economic progress, it still scores poorly in terms of governance indicators as indicated by the narrow political space and competition, the high level of corruption, and weak institutions for enforcing accountability (Republic of Uganda 2010; APRM Commission 2009).

Northern Uganda is currently emerging from the prolonged period of conflict in which it has been engulfed since 1986. Over the period of the conflict, some 20,000 people have been killed, and over two million displaced (US Institute of Peace, 2010), many of whom were relocated to internally displaced persons camps (IDPC). These camps were established in the mid-1990s following calls from the Ugandan government for their

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<sup>4</sup> World Bank World development Indicators 2010 [http://data.worldbank.org/data-catalog/world-development-indicators?cid=GPD\\_WDI](http://data.worldbank.org/data-catalog/world-development-indicators?cid=GPD_WDI)

<sup>5</sup> UBOS, 2010, Uganda National Household Survey, Abridged Report, November 2010.

<sup>6</sup> UNGASS country progress report 2008-2009

formation as means of protecting the general population from the LRA. By 2005 the number of such camps had grown to 250, housing around 1.8 million people. Today, although it is estimated that around three-quarters of the Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) have returned to their homes, some 25 percent of the population of Northern Uganda still languishes in IDPCs (Norwegian Refugee Council, 2010).

## **Uganda's Political History, Political Economy and the Nature of Domestic Politics**

### **Pre-colonial Uganda**

Uganda as explained above is a creation of the colonial powers. Colonialism brought together various ethnic groups, kingdoms and chiefdoms into the Uganda Protectorate in 1894 (Kabwegyere, 1995). It is important to point out that the various ethnic groups and tribes had co-existed for centuries trading and interacting with each other in many ways including intermarriages (Omach 2010b; Kabwegyere 1992). Pre-colonial Uganda comprised of both prominent and powerful kingdoms as well as smaller communities. Bunyoro was the most powerful in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. By the 19<sup>th</sup> century however, Buganda had become more powerful with Bunyoro declining partly due to colonial conquest (Kabwegyere, 1995). Several African leaders resisted the usurpation of their powers during the colonial conquest but what is clear is that there were no attempts to put up a united front against foreign domination.

### **The Advent of Colonialism and its Implications for Post-colonial Governance in Uganda**

With the establishment of the British protectorate over Uganda, the nature of relationships between the various ethnic groups changed. The colonial powers used the politics of 'divide and rule' to control the various ethnic groups. Besides, there were attempts by the colonialists to treat Buganda with favouritism against other ethnic groups within Uganda (Moncrieffe, 2004; Kanyeihamba, 2002; Kabwegyere, 1995). This favourable treatment of one tribe against another sowed the seeds of tribalism and ethnic politics in Uganda.

To assert their effective control over the country, the colonial administrators devised indirect rule systems where two governments would exist side by side: the central

government and the native government. The latter was mainly presided over by chiefs who were tasked with collecting taxes, maintaining law and order and supplying labour to the central/colonial government (see Mamdani, 2004; Kabwegyere, 1995). This system of indirect rule and presence of two governments affected national integration, accentuated the differences among the various ethnic groups and also entrenched the position of chiefs as powerful people who could mete out any form of brutality against their own subjects (Mamdani, 2004). The indirect rule policy later created problems for national integration in the independent Uganda as groups still jostled for special status. Buganda, for example, wanted to maintain her special treatment under the colonial times in the post-independence government.

Colonialism also created the problem of the two Ugandas: the impoverished northern part and the developed south (Bainomugisha, 2011; Kabwegyere, 1995; Omara-Otunnu 1987). While opportunities were given to the southern regions in terms of education and commercial production of cash crops, the northern part of the country was retained as a labour reserve with minimal attention to its social and economic infrastructures. The colonial government also discouraged the production of cotton and other cash crops in the north (Moncrieffe, 2004; Kabwegyere, 1995). So while people in the central and southern regions gained knowledge and accumulated wealth, people in the north had limited opportunities. Further, regarding participation in national politics during the colonial times, there was regional imbalance, with the west, east and central being heavily involved while the North was prohibited from participating in governance although there appear to have been no clear reasons for this (Moncrieffe, 2004; Kabwegyere, 1995). It is unfortunate that later post-colonial governments, including that led by people from the north did not address the marginalisation of the region effectively, a situation which would later constitute one of the key reasons for the commencement of the northern conflict.

Political historians have noted that independence brought together a nation by accident. Many ethnic groups which were hitherto with their own system or organisation, sharing little in terms of culture and social ways of life were all brought together under the new modern nation state (Omach 2010b; Mutua 2001). The lack of shared identity and common interests generated politics of patronage and individualism, tribalism and nepotism. This is because the concerned leaders saw their new found powers as a

privileged position from which they could enrich themselves and their families from poverty and future anticipated challenges (Oloka-Onyango 2001).

According to Moncrieffe (2004) by independence, Uganda had a very good basis for socio-economic development, although this was significantly constrained by the ethnic and parochial politics, with violence being produced and reproduced by the social inequality among the population. This inequality was in turn created by unequal access to productive resources, trade, and other development opportunities. It is sad to note that such trends continued in the post-colonial situation with access to politico-economic opportunities based heavily on ethnicity and membership of a particular party.

Colonialism and its systems created a weak foundation for the establishment of a strong nation state in Uganda. It thus made it possible for the rise of self-seeking leaders who do not prioritise national development but their own ethnicity. Successive governments over the years in Uganda from Obote I to Museveni have had problems of legitimacy as leaders. Even the current NRM government has presided over events which have dented its claims to legitimacy, not least the presidential elections over the years. Uganda's politics has been mainly ethnic based with successive post-independence governments entrusting people from their own home areas (tribe) in the key positions of government, with others playing merely a token role (see Omach 2010b; Omara-Otunnu 1987; Kanyeihamba, 2002).

Politics of exclusion or peripheral representation among other ethnic groups breeds dissatisfaction and discontent. Such perceptions of under representation or lack of access to economic resources and opportunities is a precursor to conflict and armed struggle (Mazrui, 2001). The centralisation of power, exclusive politics and authoritarianism all have their roots in colonialism and its practices (Mamdani, 2004; Jackson, 2002). In his exposition on the struggle for democracy in Uganda, Omara-Otunnu (1992) suggests that politicians in Uganda comes to power riding on heavy rhetoric of good governance and accountable democracy, a thing which seems to get abandoned in due course. Omara-Otunnu suggests that there is always a big gulf between the preached idealism and the reality of practice of participatory governance and broad-based democracies. This view has also been taken up by other scholars with Oloka-Onyango (2001) noting that the so-called liberators in African politics often use the common man to attain power and thereafter abandon him to his own destiny of poverty.

Weak states also rely upon the military to intimidate opponents, the citizens and retain political power. Since independence, Uganda's political issues have been resolved militarily with peace negotiations often not given a fair chance. The retention of military and political power by a few elites presents potential breeding grounds for discontent. Armed conflict might emerge where the excluded target groups rises up to protect their own interests. The grim prospects for any peaceful transition of power in the country come from personal allegiance of the army to the person of the sitting president (see Omach 2010b, Kanyeihamba, 2002; Kabwegyere, 1995). These were challenges with Obote I which were crystallised under the government of Idi Amin, continued with Obote II and was entrenched under the NRM government. Evidence suggests that promotions in both the civil service and army are still significantly skewed towards the region where President Museveni comes from, a form of favouritism which also owes its origin in the colonial approach to governance (see Observer, 24 August 2009<sup>7</sup>).

Weak states breed despotic leaders who wield absolute powers and manipulate the state institutions in such processes. Personal rule then sets in with the leader using state resources to reward his cronies. Political commentators have noted that Milton Obote, Idi Amin, Godfrey Binaisa, Yusuf Lule and Yoweri Museveni have all surrounded themselves with their own people, during their time in power (Kanyeihamba, 2002; Omara-Otunnu, 1987). Successive Uganda governments have played politics of nepotism, favouritism and patronage, although the degrees have varied over the years. Having considered the view that Africa's dilemma is partly due to its extractive nature of politics, Francis (2008) suggests that neo-patrimonialism does not in itself fully explain the crisis (and tragedy) of the African State. He acknowledges the complexity and homogeneity of the different African countries' context which cannot in all fairness be "explained" by the phenomenon of personalised rule. There are other external socio-economic factors which all have a bearing on the domestic politics.

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<sup>7</sup> Army rank saga ruffles NRM government, Observer newspaper, 24<sup>th</sup> August 2009.

### **Post-independence Political Crisis**

Uganda attained her independence in 1962 with Milton Obote as executive Prime Minister, and Sir Frederick Edward Mutesa II (also Kabaka of Buganda) as ceremonial president. At independence the Uganda People's Congress Party (UPC) and its Kabaka Yekka party alliance received instruments of power, with the Democratic Party in opposition. The coming together of UPC and Kabaka Yekka (KY) was a political marriage to keep DP from state power. The Kabaka Yekka party did not have a national outlook as its main interests were to promote and protect the privileged position of Buganda in the post-colonial government. The 1962 (independence) constitution retained the special status of Buganda in the new government of Uganda (Kanyehimba, 2002). This also generated resentment from other ethnic groups who saw Buganda as being given privileges. This was a continuation of the native government/central government dichotomy which constrained the achievement of an integrated nation state. Politics of intrigue and domination did not start at independence but became more pronounced with different centres of power based on parties, religion and tribal alliances jostling for the control of state power (see Kanyehimba, 2002). The parochial outlook among the KY members was to lead to Prime Minister Obote terminating the agreement between UPC and KY in 1964.

Such were the tensions between 1964 to 1966 that attempts at controlling political power in Uganda pitted Obote's camp and President Mutesa's camp against each other. There were also attempts by both camps to control the army. Moreover, with the British colonial troops leaving in 1964, there was a need to fill the vacuum especially among the Officers with the Ugandan personnel. This was taken up as an opportunity by the various leaders to promote only their people or those they had faith in. According to Omara-Otunnu (1987) this was the beginning of factional political interest and the manipulation of members of the armed forces in Uganda's politics.

Within a short period of time the new government faced a crisis and struggle for control of political power with Buganda clashing with the central Government under Prime Minister Obote. There were also reports of some Baganda officers and politicians stockpiling weapons to engage with the national army (Kanyehimba, 2002). Prime Minister Obote acted swiftly and ordered an assault on the Lubiri, the Kabaka's palace<sup>8</sup>.

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<sup>8</sup> The Kabaka was then both the King of Buganda, a kingdom and the Head of State of Uganda

The Kabaka fled and Obote abolished the 1962 constitution and banned all activities of traditional leaders, paving way for the promulgation of the 1967 constitution which confirmed Uganda as a republic with one executive president who was also the head of government (Kanyehamba, 2002). Commentators have noted that since 1966 at the suspension of the independence constitution, Uganda has suffered from politics of violent conflict. The resultant overthrow of President Obote by Amin in 1971 was almost inevitable as the ethnic tensions within the army and country as well as the politics of intrigue had reached its climax (Kanyehamba, 2002).

Idi Amin took over power by overthrowing the government of Milton Obote in a bloodless coup in January 1971. While militarism started just after independence with attempts to control and dominate political power by the various factions (especially from 1964) they became more entrenched and widespread during Idi Amin's regime in the 1970s. When Amin took over power in the first ever coup by the military in Uganda in 1971, he became so obsessed with eliminating opposition towards him that very many high ranking government officials (mainly perceived pro-Obote people) were brutally killed. This included even his own ministers and high ranking religious leaders and academicians (see Omach, 2010b; Moncrieffe, 2004; Kanyehamba, 2002; Kabwegyere, 1995). The brutality meted out by Amin's regime further entrenched the politics of violence and fomented ground for armed insurrection which has continued to dominate Uganda's politics. According to Omach (2010a, p.292) the initiation of guerrilla warfare (against Amin) "increased the militarisation of conflicts with the army being used to resolve political differences".

After the overthrow of Idi Amin, there was proliferation of arms with rising divisions and differences even among anti-Amin forces with competing centres of power within the country. In a period of 18 months between 1979 and 1981 Uganda had four defacto heads of government. It was therefore of no surprise that Yusuf Lule's and Godfrey Binaiza's governments did last more than a year, with the former barely making three months in office (Kanyehamba, 2002). With time, recruitment into the military by members of the military commission, in the post-Amin period further highlighted ethnic rivalry and the race to control both the military and the political space in Uganda (Omach 2010b). Yoweri Museveni, as defence Minister and also vice chairman of the military commission, influenced the disproportionate recruitment of Banyankole and Bakiga. On

the other hand Oyite-Ojok was also accused of recruiting northerners, although the level of recruitment of northerners was comparable to other ethnic groups. However, it is also important to note that the domination by people from the North in the Uganda armed forces of the early 1980s was due to their participation in the wars of resistance against the government of Idi Amin, the high numbers of Acholi officers enlisted into the forces before Amin's takeover and the higher presence of Acholi exiles in Tanzania. Yet again in post-Amin's Uganda ethnicity was proving a significant challenge in nation building.

A succession of events and outright intrigue and counter intrigue then occurred with different committees, the military commission and the national consultative council wielding power until the elections of 1980 were held and Milton Obote regained the presidency after almost ten years out of office (see Omach 2010b; Kanyeihamba, 2002). This election was rejected by Yoweri Museveni who then waged a five years guerrilla war against Obote's government, thereby creating situations of insecurity in much of central Uganda. Obote was overthrown in 1985 partly because he had failed to resolve the simmering problems in the military between the Acholi and Langi officers and his government replaced by the Tito Okello Military Junta (Omara-Otunnu, 1987).

### **The NRM years 1986- to the Present**

Yoweri Museveni came to power in January 1986 after the National Resistance Movement (NRM) refusal to honour a peace agreement signed in Nairobi with the General Tito Okello Military Junta which had overthrown Obote in 1985. The Okello regime was not prepared to govern and had no agenda to retain political power; its only interest was to bring peace to the whole country by uniting all the fighting forces into an all-inclusive government (Omara-Otunnu, 1987). Their effort over four months of attempts to negotiate peace with the NRM failed and yet again military might prevailed over diplomacy in Uganda's politics.

Riding a wave of positive public euphoria in the southern and central part of Uganda, Museveni promised not only a change of guard but a fundamental change (see Omach, 2010b; Kanyeihamba, 2002; Museveni, 1997). On assumption of power, Museveni promised to build a broad-based government in a non-party movement government inclusive of all Ugandans (Museveni, 1997). This endeared the NRM government to donors which pumped money into Ugandan economy. With restoration of peace in many



parts of the country except the North and East, the NRM government wrote a new constitution and reconstituted parliament. However, recent development within the NRM government and its relationships with neighbours, internal opposition and the management of dissent suggests that Uganda remains a weak state (Moncrieffe, 2004; Omach, 2010a).

Since 1996, election campaigns have utilised fear-mongering and stocking of ethnic hatred as Ugandans were told voting any other person other than Yoweri Museveni is asking for the bad old days to come back. People from the North were portrayed as killers, an issue which has not promoted national integration at all. Several elections have been characterised by violence and intimidation. Moncrieffe (2004) argues that such intimidation of the electorate could actually breed armed rebellion against government. Elections are rarely perceived as free and fair with incumbency giving the sitting president significant advantage over his opponents (Commonwealth Secretariat, 2011; Bainomugisha, 2011).

While the NRM government claims to be against tribalism and nepotistic tendencies in politics, evidence suggests otherwise. Omara-Otunnu (1987) notes that as Museveni used ethnic politics to gain power he had to develop the means of placating the interest of the ethnic groups which brought him to power. The Banyankole, Baganda and other Southern ethnic groups have thus benefited disproportionately from the dispensation of patronage under the Museveni leadership, with people from the Northern and other parts of the country only getting token representations in the government. According to Kanyeihamba (2002) there is a perception among the general community in Uganda that the NRM government is “riddled with blatant ethnicism, nepotism, and personal patronage.....” (Kanyeihamba, 2002, p.278). The way Uganda’s politics has been played over the years has clouded the objectives of national development. There is agreement among most political commentators that the politics of self-perpetuation, exclusion and discrimination underlies Uganda’s story (see Oloka-Onyango 2001; Mutua, 2001; Kanyeihamba, 2002). This tendency to personalise power has also been identified in several African countries. Francis (2008) suggests that the politics of neo-patrimonialism has dictated many African countries’ affairs in their post-independence governance. Therefore, despite the abundance of natural resources and other minerals, Africa posts very poor socio-economic indicators

So like all other leaders before him, president Yoweri Museveni has been reluctant to step down from power declaring one time that “freedom fighters do not simply hand over power...and that transition from movement system of government to any other will be gradual and will only occur after a calm discussion” (Kanyehamba, 2002, p. 277). That statement was interpreted by the opposition to mean that Museveni will never hand over power to anyone else should he lose an election. This narrows the legitimate means of taking power and only draws the country to further conflict as a means of changing government

### **Nature of Wars and Armed Conflict in Northern Uganda**

At the overthrow of the Tito Okello’s government in 1986, Government soldiers from the Acholi ethnic group who formed a considerable part of the army, retreated to their traditional home districts with some of their weapons but did not offer any active resistance to the new government of Yoweri Kaguta Museveni. Several months later arbitrary arrests and harassing of ex-servicemen and other young men within the community provoked the ire of the former soldiers. They mobilized their hidden weapons and staged ambushes against the NRA soldiers, and this marked the commencement of the war (Dolan, 2005; Refugee Law Project, 2004).

Over the years, various armed groups have operated in Northern Uganda with the major ones being the Uganda Patriotic Democratic Army 1986-1988, Alice Auma Lakwena group (1986-1988), and the LRA (1988- present). Of all the fighting forces in, the LRA have been the most brutal and long lasting although there have been fluctuations over the years in the intensity of the conflict. While scholars of the Northern Uganda conflict have advanced various reasons for the origins of the conflict, what is clear is that the conflict started in 1986 and has not formally ended; although active military engagements between the UPDF and the LRA has been transferred to the borders of Central African Republic and the Congo, with Northern Uganda virtually peaceful. There is however one agreement among scholars that the Northern conflict is complex and is situated within the geo-political forces within the region and the nature of domestic politics within Uganda (Omach 2010a; Dolan 2006).

Political commentators have noted that the nature of the domestic politics in Uganda (weak state) and the overall approach to governance is at the core of the Northern Uganda insurgency (Omach 2010a; Omara-Otunnu, 1992) although the brutality of the NRA has generally been regarded as the spark that set off the Northern conflict. Even Museveni in his book *sowing the mustard seed* (1997) acknowledges that there was mismanagement of the NRM approach to Northern Uganda. According to Omach (2010a): “the armed conflict in Northern Uganda is rooted in Uganda’s domestic politics and the problem of state making and nation building, including the lack of national integration and failure to build consensus on the role of the constituent groups in national politics” (Omach, 2010a, p. 187). This observation implies that there is a failure on the part of the ruling elite to effectively and sustainably involve various constituent groups in government, thereby creating both overt and covert revolts.

Other commentators have noted that the failure at state building is the result of desires to centralise and monopolise state power (Omach, 2010b; Oloka-Onyango, 2001). If the State was strong, inclusive and accountable, perhaps the conflict in Northern Uganda would not have occurred. Alternatively even if the war had erupted, a conciliatory and supportive government policy/programme might have nipped the conflict in the bud. It is suggested however that when states are weak, they often lack “domestic, political and social consensus. The idea and institution of the state are contested and governments face challenges to legitimacy and viability” Omach (2010a, p.289). Such struggles are at the root of armed conflict and the incessant insurgencies over the years.

In examining some of the factors for the northern insurgencies, Dolan (2006) argues that there is a tendency for every successive post-independence government to be dominated by a particular ethnic group, a fact that the government led by people from the North was dominated by the latter and the same for the current NRM government being led by people from the south-west. The presumed domination of the earlier post-colonial government by President Obote’s people, the Acholi and Langi created resentment among some people from the southern part of the country, an anger which was particularly directed at the Acholi. This could have fuelled the drive for revenge among the NRA soldiers and perhaps a plan to marginalise people from the North.

The marginalisation of the North by the NRM administration has also been advanced as an explanation of the conflict (Bainomugisha, 2011; Maina, 2010; Refugee Law Project, 2004). This however also relates to the weakness of the state and its inability to pursue uniform national development. Bainomugisha argues that economic marginalisation is at the root of the conflict in Northern Uganda. Indeed commentators have noted that such economic, political and social marginalisation has created two countries in one (the creation of two Ugandas: the prospering South and the stagnating North). With many of the successive post-colonial governments, neo-patrimonial politics proved significant obstacles in redressing the colonial imbalances within the country, especially the situation in the North (Omach 2010a, 2010b; Omara-Otunnu, 1987, 1992). Even Uganda's longest post-independence government, the NRM, has failed either by omission or design "to prioritise the development of Northern Uganda as a conflict management tool" (Bainomugisha, 2011, p. 173).

### **The Trajectory and Dynamics of the Northern War**

Since its commencement in 1986, the northern insurgency has gone through several phases, each characterized by different dynamics and power brokers. The first phase of the war was led principally by former UNLA soldiers, and all those that participated joined voluntarily. This group became known as Uganda Peoples Democratic Army (UPDA). However, by 1987 another rebel group led by Alice Auma "Lakwena" had emerged alongside the first group. Whereas the former fought using conventional warfare strategy, Lakwena's group claimed to be using mystical powers to fight its battles and even clashed with the UPDA. In June 1988, the UPDA signed a peace agreement (Pece Peace Accord) with the government of Uganda and abandoned rebellion. The group's commanders and fighters who wanted to join the army were absorbed into the NRA. The Alice Lakwena Group was eventually defeated by the government army in eastern Uganda when they tried to attack the capital city. Out of the Lakwena group emerged Joseph Kony who formed his own group and later named it "Lord's Resistance Army", claiming to be fighting for the restoration of the Ten Commandments (see Omach 2010b). When the UPDA signed the peace agreement with the NRM government in 1988, Kony's group did not take part and remained in the bush.

The LRA requested peace talks in late 1993 and these were initiated in 1994, mediated by Mrs Betty Bigombe, the then Minister for Northern Uganda. The talks however

collapsed after only a few weeks when president Museveni gave an ultimatum for the rebels to surrender unconditionally or face the might of the NRA (Dolan, 2006). Such a turn-around by President Museveni was interpreted by many people as evidence of unwillingness on the part of government to fully pursue dialogue. The period also saw the derivation of Khartoum support which enabled the LRA to extend its capacity to cause problems in a wider area, including Lango sub-region, part of west Nile and Teso.

From 1994, the level of abduction of children also significantly increased although the first cases of abduction were reported in 1988 (Corbin, 2008). Children would thus be abducted and taken to Sudan to be trained as fighters and brought back to Uganda to fight. It should be noted that unlike the UPDA which recruited primarily from adults and mature young men, the LRA relied on abduction of very young children girls and boys to perpetuate its war. The recourse to child abduction could also be explained by the unwillingness of adults to join the LRA as people had lost interests in conflict and were in favour of peace settlements with government. The LRA then saw children as malleable and they were recruited extensively through abduction. For the girls their abduction was not only to fight wars but also do other works within rebel establishments including bearing children for the rebels' new race (see Human Rights Watch 2006; McKay and Mazurana 2004).

The involvement of the Sudanese government in providing support to the rebels from 1994 fundamentally changed the course of the war (Omach 2010a: Dolan, 2005). After 1994, the brutality of the LRA became more prominent. The widespread displacement of people to the IDP camps began in 1996 when government forced all people living within the rural areas of Acholi sub-region to vacate and go to camps for protection. This continued up to the year 2006 when mass movements away from the camps started, with the decline in LRA operation and the initiation of the Juba Peace Process

By 2002 there was also an improved relationship between the government of Uganda and Sudan, which occasioned an agreement for the UPDF to trace the LRA rebels within Sudanese territories in an operation codenamed Iron Fist. This operation opened a new phase in the northern conflict and increased the internationalisation of the conflict and the generation of greater public interest in the war. It was also in the aftermath of Operation Iron Fist that Jan Egeland, the then humanitarian coordinator of the United

Nations, referred to the Northern conflict as the worst and most forgotten humanitarian crisis in the world.

The trend of abduction also greatly reduced between 2004 and 2006. The improved relationship between the government of Uganda and the government of the Sudan curtailed the support to the LRA and reduced the areas for their operations. This period also saw an intensification of the ICC investigations and indictment of the senior commanders of the LRA. Other developments in Uganda such as the discovery of oil within the Lake Albert region and the impending CHOGM 2007 could have also made government to reconsider its image, all leading to a more conciliatory stance (Dolan, 2006).

### **The LRA-Government of Uganda Peace Settlements: Implications for FACM Rehabilitation, Resettlement and Reintegration**

The Government of Uganda and the leadership of the LRA engaged in peaceful negotiation to end the northern conflict between 2006 and 2008 in the Southern Sudanese capital of Juba. It is generally agreed by commentators that development within the region and in Uganda itself facilitated the commencements of the Juba peace talk (Omach 2010a; Dolan, 2006). Such developments included the desire by both the SPLA in Southern Sudan and the Khartoum government (northern Sudan) to implement the comprehensive peace agreement signed between the SPLA and the Khartoum government in 2005. The LRA were perceived as spoilers of the peace process. It was thus imperative that a solution be found for the LRA. Talk commenced in Juba on the 14<sup>th</sup> of July 2006, mediated by Dr Riek Machar, the Vice President of Southern Sudan. This continued up to the year 2008 when the final documents were supposed to be signed by Joseph Kony and government representatives.

The talks were witnessed by many international observers and several agenda items were signed. The final agreement however remains to be signed as Kony failed to show up to endorse it at the time the peace negotiations were concluded. According to Omach, suspicions and mistrust beset the whole peace negotiation influenced in part by the NRM government's handling of other agreements.

Although the Juba peace process collapsed, several of the agenda items were signed and agreed upon between the representatives of the Kony rebels and the Uganda government negotiators. Some of the core items signed relates to accountability and reconciliation as well as to demobilisation, disarmament and reintegration of children and other fighters within the ranks of the LRA. The cessation of hostility agreement notes that during implementation of DDR, special consideration will be given to unique needs of girls, boys and child mothers. The Juba peace agreement on DDR also commits to ensuring that women and girls are protected and treated with dignity and equality in the DDR processes. The agreement also commits government to adapt the DDR programmes to the PRDP, reflect national, local and global lesson learnt on supporting the rehabilitation, resettlement and reintegration of ex-combatants so that good practices are considered.

The Juba agreement on cessation of hostility and DDR also specifies that rehabilitation and reintegration would be carried out within the framework of the UNIDDRS (United Nations integrated disarmament demobilisation and reintegration strategy), with participation of UN agencies in monitoring the process. The UNIDDRS focuses at building sustainable peace following the signing of a negotiated peace agreement, with the latter providing the legal foundation for the DDR processes. UNIDDRS also suggests that when planning reintegration there is need to factor in the different roles of the fighters, non-combatants, those that returned with disability, other illness and also their dependents. This should all be done within the local and national context with an understanding of the causes of the conflict to ensure that the issues are effectively addressed<sup>99</sup>.

The DDR agreement calls upon government to implement the return and reintegration programme for the returnees within the ambits of national and international standards. The DDR agreement also commits to ensuring that reintegration support to the children returning from the LRA would be within the relevant community-based interventions. The agreement also commits the parties, especially government, to enhancing the educational opportunities for the returnees with special attention to the unique situation of the girls and the child mothers, those with mental illness, physical injuries and other conditions. Provisions were to be made to ensure that the ex-combatants and non-

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<sup>99</sup> See [www.unddr.org](http://www.unddr.org)

combatants are provided with adequate support to transition to civilian life, including vocational training and formal education.

Within the agenda on accountability and reconciliation, the parties commit to promote local customary approaches in addressing aspects of the conflict. The focus was to be on those approaches which promote reconciliation among the parties and those affected by conflict within the region. It recognises “mato oput”, “kayo cuk” and “tonu ci koka” among the Acholi Langi and Mahdi respectively, which all aim at reconciling parties formerly in conflict with each other after a full accountability has been made. The agenda item also commits to addressing accountability and justice within national systems and customs and recognises the roles and competence of the Ugandan Human Rights Commission and that of the Amnesty commission in implementing part of the agreement. However, some of the activities proposed under this agenda item are not practical, like requiring the perpetrator to make reparation to the victim. It is doubtful whether this can be done within the context of the local situations due to resource limitations and other factors.

The agreement on accountability and reconciliation also makes provisions for protecting the privacy and security of victims. Like the DDR agreement, the agreement on accountability and reconciliation promotes the recognition of the special circumstances and needs of women which, in my opinion include child mothers. It is difficult to tell however whether all these provisions would have been realised had the peace talk prevailed.

Reflection on the Juba agreements suggests that these are very comprehensive frameworks which take into consideration the social, physical and emotional needs of the children and young people. Besides, many historical issues which could have given rise to the conflict have been identified and deliberated on. Opportunities for social regeneration are also available should government commit itself to implementing the terms of the agreement. If implemented, it would offer greater potential for psychosocial and socio-economic rehabilitation as well as integration of the ex-combatants and redevelopment of the region. The agreements, however, only paid limited attention/commitment to building community relationships with the returnees, with the main focus being on how the ex-combatants and other non-combatant members would be



resettled. Community oriented factors were not explicitly identified and elaborated on much as wider historical issues and marginalisation of the region were identified. As I show in chapter seven, relationships and other micro-related factors at the community level are at the core of reintegration success.

## **Summary and Conclusions**

In this chapter, I have presented and discussed the political history, political economy and nature of domestic politics in Uganda. I show that Uganda is a weak state characterised by unstable government, weak democracy and institutionalism. It is dominated by a neo patrimonial based political approach where allegiance has over the years been to the person of the president who wields significant amount of power and privileges. These leaders have tended to prioritise and favour their kinsmen and regions against others. Such practices breed resentments and a perception of lack of participation in the affairs of state leading to conflicts. The perceived and real marginalisation, especially of people from Northern Uganda, created what has been referred to as two Ugandas: one where there is prosperity (the south) and the other where there is lack and underdevelopment (the north). This colonial creation has not been effectively addressed by the various post-independence governments. The chapter also analysed the Juba peace agreements and their implication for the rehabilitation, resettlement and reintegration of children, ex-combatants and other people associated with the LRA. While the final agreement has not been signed, there are important lessons to draw from the Juba peace process on post-war settlements.

# **CHAPTER FOUR**

## **CONTEXTUALIZING CHILDREN'S AND YOUNG WOMEN'S EXPERIENCES OF CONFLICT AND REINTEGRATION**

### **Introduction**

This chapter attempts a critical review of the literature on children in armed conflict situation. It begins with a discussion of contemporary conflict in society and explores the relationship between conflict and development. Having set the broader societal context, I then move on to explore the impact of armed conflict on children. I next discuss issues of support (rehabilitation and reintegration) for children during conflict and analyse the programmes and interventions in place. Chapter four also discusses the significance of social capital in the reintegration process and the mechanisms developed to support children affected by conflict. The chapter ends by making an intrusion into the issues of post-conflict reconstruction and development and analysis of the international and national child protection standards and instruments (framework) for children in situations of armed conflict. I provide a summary of the legal and policy context for ensuring the rights of children affected by armed conflict and also discuss some of the limitations in the implementation of international instruments and demonstrate that the key factor in the effectiveness lies not in ratification per se, but in the political will of state parties.

### **Contemporary Conflict and Society**

In spite of the existence of international watchdogs such as the United Nations and increased global advocacy for respect for human rights and promotion of good governance, armed conflict continues to be a defining characteristic of the geo-political situation in many countries (Keen, 2008; Kaldor, 2006). In the 1960s, 70s and 80s, many conflicts in developing countries were directed at gaining independence. However, self-governance brought with it a growing call for recognition among different groups leading to intra-state power struggles and an increase in internal conflicts especially over the control of state resources (Draman, 2003; Harris, 1999; Wessels, 1998).

Recent contemporary conflicts in Africa have included the protracted civil war in Sudan, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Uganda, Chad, Ivory Coast and the Ethiopia - Eritrean war. Other conflicts have occurred in the Democratic Republic of Congo, the more than 20 years of anarchy in Somalia and the recent civil conflicts in Angola, Mozambique and Burundi (Ozerdem and Podder, 2008; Achvarina et al., 2008; Draman, 2003). In Asia, there is the conflict in Palestine, Nepal, Afghanistan and Iraq. While civil conflict has been more prominent in developing countries (especially Africa and Asia); the Western world has also not been spared as evidenced by the conflict in Northern Ireland and the Balkans (see Francis, 2008; Bull, 2006; Nations, 2003).

Keen (2008) attempts an exposition of the complexities surrounding contemporary conflict and argues that whereas a significant section of the literature on conflict has presented civil conflict as a “contest” between one or more parties (e.g. Dunne et al, 2006); civil conflicts should best be understood as a “system”. His contention is that civil conflicts are at times more complicated than presented. It has also been suggested that contemporary conflicts have had more devastating effects on un-armed civilians than ever before, causing socio-economic, physical and psychosocial pains (Keen, 2008; UNFA, 2002; Lachman et al, 2002; Wessels, 1998). Given the extremely high socio-economic and human costs of war; some commentators have wondered why wars persist for so long (Keen, 2008). It has been suggested that at times civil conflict can be perpetuated by stronger parties for parochial and financial gains, although these factors may not be fully understood by the wider international community (Keen, 2008)<sup>10</sup>.

There are however, differences of opinion on the emergence and sustenance of contemporary conflicts. Factors ranging from ethnic preservation, control of state resources, self-aggrandizement, political expediency, greed and support for dissidence among conflicting countries have all been put forward (Keen, 2008; Kaldor, 2006; Jackson, 2002; Harris, 1999). Some commentators have attempted to link conflict, especially in Africa to poverty (Draman, 2003; Jackson, 2002; Luckham et al., 2001).

Harris (1999), exploring the causes and consequences of war and intervention options in a post-conflict situation, notes that the root causes of most wars in the world cannot be attributed to one set of factors. He argues that the emergence of conflict is in most cases

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<sup>10</sup> Keen (2008) also argues that conflicts can be fomented by “local and international actors” acting singularly or in cohorts with other groups.

situated within a specific context, which therefore requires context-specific resolutions. Harris also points out the necessity to address structural imbalances in economic situations and inequality as important for durable peace.

While Harris (1999) does not claim to have unravelled all the causes of conflict in Africa, he discusses some of the major common causes of conflict in contemporary global societies with specific emphasis on Africa and the developing world. The colonial legacy is identified as one of the main root causes of conflict in developing countries. It is argued that the negative politics espoused by the colonial powers which utilised violence to impose authority and the politics of divide and rule is one of the main precursors of conflict. It is posited that such divisive politics have continued in the post-independence African societies and have defined the nature of subsequent administrations. The resultant injustices have often been opposed by sections of the population and in turn, this has led to the outbreak of civil wars (see also chapter three).

Closely related to the colonial legacy and yet more deeply rooted in historical factors is the issue of ethnic and religious differences. This problem is particularly evident in Africa where a multiplicity of tribes and divergent cultures has presented an impediment to national integration. While tribal and ethnic differences might not be a problem per se, the politics of favouritism, nepotism and tribalism have defined many post-colonial governments in developing countries. This is where the ruling ethnic group often ensures that only people of that group access state resources; resulting in diminished access to jobs, economic and political opportunities for other ethnic groups (Kaldor, 2006). This parochial use of political power and privilege breeds ethnic tensions which foments civil strife and conflicts.

The problem of unequal development within the same country, which often has roots in the colonial legacy and ethnic politics, is another key factor for the cause of armed conflict in Africa (Harris 1999). Kaldor (2006) and Keen (2008) also confirm this assertion. It is thus arguable that the high levels of dissatisfaction on the part of the citizenry and infringements of rights is a key factor in the emergence of armed conflict. These kinds of situations are sometimes exploited by members of political elite groups from the aggrieved regions to step up anti-establishment rhetoric which fuels the development of civil war.

The literature also suggests that some leaders within developing countries seem to wilfully promote inequality in development in order to perpetuate their stay in power. It appears that some leaders deliberately keep people impoverished, especially in regions in which political challenge might arise, as a strategy to lessen dissent and control potential opponents. This is compounded by what Osamba (2001, p38) calls ‘politics of the belly’ where those in power support and enrich those it considers its allies and starves the rest of socio-economic development opportunities. As previously mentioned, poverty has been identified as a cause of armed conflict in the developing world and high levels of unemployment, especially among the youth, makes them potential targets for recruitment for war (Brainard and Cholet 2007).

While some of the root causes of conflict are potentially internal, one major external factor which has been advanced as a critical precursor to conflicts in developing countries is entrenched foreign interests, exacerbated by globalisation and the tendency of multi-national companies to exploit the poorer and less powerful actors within a relationship (Keen, 2008; Harris 1999). It is argued that while the demise of cold war-era politics changed the dynamics and dimensions of foreign interests, these have not disappeared. If anything, the entrenchment of foreign interests has been reborn in new ways with African and developing country governments playing second fiddle to global institutions, multinational corporations and powerful private individuals.

### **Children and Armed Conflict**

The past few decades has seen an increasing utilisation of children in armed conflict (Coalition to stop the use of Child Soldiers, 2008; Achvarina et.al., 2008; Francis, 2007; Mawson, 2004). Like other key writers on contemporary conflict, Mawson notes the increasing scale of violence against children, observing that:

*“Up to 75 percent of deaths in many contemporary wars are of civilians compared to 90 percent of war deaths being of soldiers at the beginning of the twentieth century. A proportion of these deaths is the result of genocide, murder and human rights abuses by combatants-some of whom are children” (2004, p.130-131).*

The recruitment and abduction of children (including girls) into armed forces has become a defining characteristic of most contemporary intra-state conflicts (Achvarina et al 2008; Singer, 2006; Brett and Specht, 2004). Rosen (2005) takes a critical look at the

child soldier phenomenon and argues that this is much more complex than is understood. He also suggests that children are used by third parties in the global search for power and superiority among state parties and geo-political institutions. In this case, children are taken as pawns in a political chess game masterminded by selfish individuals and institutions in a war whose objectives they might not even understand. In his own words: “the child soldier crisis is part of the contested domain of international politics in which childhood serves as a proxy for other political interest” (Rosen, 2005,p.2).

Wessels (2006) however, raises a new dimension to understanding the phenomenon of child soldiers and points out that whereas the conventional conceptualization of the problem is that children are forcefully recruited into rebel ranks, this is not the whole story. Evidence suggests that in some cases, children wilfully join fighting forces but this comes about when they (the children) are sceptical about their future and the opportunities they can access suggesting that they “*do not see any positive place for themselves in society.....As a result they may see violence as an acceptable way to replace the existing social order with one offering social justice and positive economic and political opportunities*” (Wessels, 2006, p.3).

Within the last two decades there has been increased research into the effects of armed conflict on girls and women (Mazurana et al 2008; Annan et al 2007; Frerks et al 2005; McKay and Mazurana 2004; UNFA 2002). In almost all civil conflicts in developing countries, women and girls have suffered either directly or indirectly. They have been targeted by fighting forces to be used as cooks, domestic servants, sex slaves, porters and in some cases as fighters (McKay 2004; McKay and Mazurana 2004).

Commenting on the scale of exploitation of women and girl children in Teso, Eastern Uganda, De Berry (2004) writes that girls were at risk of being sexually exploited by both the rebels and the government forces. De Berry identifies a number of factors that increase vulnerability for girls, including militarization, displacement, soldiers dictating movements within the camps<sup>11</sup> and commodification of sex (De Berry 2004,p.52). She also suggests that many girls within situations of war forgo their own sexual protection in the face of survival. De Berry identifies exposure to HIV/AIDS and social ostracism as some of the risk factors associated with sexual abuse of girls. Her study also identifies

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<sup>11</sup> At the height of the insurgency in Teso, the camps were under a virtual curfew with regulations of movements of people controlled by the army.

some of the supportive factors for girls coping with sexual abuse and exploitation during war, including “affective ties” between the young person and the family, and availability and accessibility of business opportunities for girls and women. She concludes that in Teso the girls were both victims of adversity and “active resilient survivors” (De Berry 2004, p.58), noting that the agency of the girl was visible in their taking advantage of business and other opportunities within the camps to ensure own and dependants’ survival. In this case the girls were not just apathetic victims but mustered efforts to direct to some degree the course of their lives under the circumstances.

Other writers have also questioned the presentation of women and girls only as victims in situations of conflict. It has been suggested that girls have played an active part in many conflicts, not only as victims of aggression but fighters and perpetrators of violence (Haeri and Puechguirbal, 2010; Francis, 2007). Francis, however, suggests that while the participation of children and young people in conflict has been both voluntary and involuntary, in most cases the young people do not have a choice at all and joining fighting groups is perceived as giving the best option for survival in a difficult context.

It is, however, the view of some scholars that much remains to be learnt from children and young peoples’ experiences of conflict and its aftermath (Boyden and De Berry, 2004). Boyden and De Berry laments the significant dearth of empirical information on long term outcomes of conflict on children. They note that research needs to pay more attention to how political conflicts affect adolescents’ economic and social roles as well as the effects on gender relations within childhood and intergenerational relations (between children and their parents or grandparents).

### **Interventions for Children Affected by Armed Conflict**

The UN CRC article 39 counsels state parties to ensure that children subjected to extreme brutalities (e.g. torture, rape, other cruel treatment) in armed conflict situations are supported to recover from such critical events (Loughry and Carola, 2003). It is noted that many agencies have increasingly implemented interventions aimed at addressing psychological and social issues using a variety of methods and approaches. (Angucia, 2010; Allen and Schomerus, 2006; Loughry and Carola, 2003). Loughry and Carola (2003,p.2) regard psychosocial intervention as activities that “seek to positively influence human development by addressing the negative impacts of social factors on

people's thoughts and behaviour". They observe that such recovery can only be possible in an environment where children's health, self-respect and dignity are fostered. This observation emphasises the significance of context for effective rehabilitation, resettlement and integration interventions.

According to Loughry and Carola (2003) therefore, psychosocial work with children in conflict situations is a new development, thus various types of intervention exist and there are no uniform models adopted across agencies. It should be noted however, that WHO, UNICEF and UNHCR have guidelines and models which can be applied. The authors also note that most of the literature focuses on interventions within an emergency context. It can be argued that the body of knowledge on reintegration work with children over time is limited and opportunities for experiential learning are wide open. It is important to point out that whatever support is provided, if the broader socio-economic and politico-cultural contextual issues are not addressed, the efficacy of reintegration interventions remains unclear.

The literature seems to present a mixed situation in regard to issues affecting the RRR of female ex-combatants. Current scholarship has however recognised the distinction between reintegration and reinsertion. Reinsertion is one of the emerging concepts in the literature on reintegration (Corbin, 2008; Ozerdem and Podder, 2008). It refers to the process of resettling returnee child soldiers back into their community, usually after being 'rehabilitated' at a reception centre (see Angucia, 2010). Reintegration on the other hand refers to all the processes of ensuring that the children are supported to lead as normal a life as possible once they have been reinserted into their communities (Angucia, 2010). The literature on social reintegration (e.g. Corbin, 2008; Green and Rynn, 2008; Ozerdem and Podder, 2008; McKay, 2004; Marslen, 1997) generally perceives reintegration of former child soldiers as a situation where the former fighters/abductees are supported to marshal personal and community resources to live as normal a life as possible, notwithstanding their experiences.

In terms of supporting reintegration, two perspectives seem to emerge from the literature: the community-focused model and the individual FAC-focused model. It is noteworthy that many NGOs supporting the rehabilitation, resettlement and reintegration (RRR) efforts have tended to use a combination of both approaches with different degrees of



variance<sup>12</sup>. The argument presented is that support to both male and female former combatants should not only take into consideration the needs of the target group but also those of their families and the communities they are returning to (host communities). The premise of the argument is that the RRR interventions should not be de-linked from “broader community recovery programmes” (Mazurana et al., 2008; Annan et al., 2007; 2006; United Nations, 2006). Despite calls for a broader approach, individual-focused interventions are what most agencies have implemented over the years for formerly abducted children and young people (see Ochen and Okeny, 2011; Betancourt et al., 2008; Allen and Schomerus, 2006). This involves the agency reaching out to one individual child/young person and addressing his or her needs and to some extent those of the immediate family. Key activities include basic education, vocational training, psychosocial support, family tracing and reunion. Proponents of the broader community approach critique the current approach as being too narrow and creating avenues for stigmatisation of those receiving its targeted support.

It has also been suggested that in responding to challenges of resettlement and reintegration, there is need to emphasise efforts that can bring communities together to address them, such as mediation, conflict resolution, income generating activities, education and local infrastructural rehabilitation programmes (Frerks et al., 2005). While these are potentially very good initiatives, their proponents do not spell out the intervention options in situations of protracted conflict, where the sustainability of the interventions are in turn affected by a multiplicity of factors<sup>13</sup>.

In supporting resettlement and reintegration of young women, Annan et al. (2006) recommend economic and educational support targeting all youth and children affected by conflict. In justifying a general targeting of reintegration interventions, Annan et al. (2006) refers to the fact that a large proportion of children and young people went directly home and did not pass through formal reception systems. It is noted that approximately 50 percent of the formerly abducted young women in Northern Uganda

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<sup>12</sup> While the focus here is on reintegration the pre-reintegration support programme falls under two main categories as identified by Mawson (2004): Mawson points out two intervention models for children affected by war: keeping children out of war; and supporting former child soldiers. The latter encompasses all kinds of support while the children are being prepared for reintegration up to reintegration process itself.

<sup>13</sup> Efforts at restoring social and economic infrastructures can be constrained by changing patterns of armed conflict. Facilities may be put up in situations of a lull in fighting; but when fighting intensifies again people might abandon these facilities and relocate to safer places/areas.

fall under this category and thus missed out on formal reception centre support. The premise of the argument is that if resettlement and reintegration interventions target the broader community other than only those who were abducted, chances for community ownership and participation is enhanced. This approach suggests improving family resource capacity and that of the community to support the children and also to address social stigma. This view has been supported by other studies such as Mazurana et al. (2008); Corbin (2008); and Frerks et al. (2005).

There are different RRR challenges for rural and urban areas. For example, reintegration in rural areas is sometimes a challenge due to the limitation of land while for urban areas; there are difficulties in obtaining employment in both the formal and urban informal sectors for the returnees (Frerks et al., 2005). Other constraining factors for employment of former child soldiers appear to be their low level of education and skills as indicated by case studies from Namibia, Uganda, Ethiopia and Mozambique (Frerks et al., 2005; Mazurana et al., 2008; Annan et al, 2007; Annan et al, 2006). These are often the result of early conscription of young people into the armed forces before they have been exposed to adequate basic education, thus limiting their later livelihood opportunities. Whereas Annan et al (2006) suggest a generally high level of support within the communities (in Northern Uganda) for formerly abducted children in Cwero IDP camp in Gulu district, it was noted that families were more supportive compared to general community members (Corbin, 2008).

Within the literature there has been criticism that DDR programmes tend to disfavour girls compared to the men/boys as in most cases the girls do not have “guns to exchange” as in Sierra Leone (Adanan, 2010; Maina, 2010; McKay and Mazurana, 2004; Chitalia and Odeh, 2004). This challenge was also noted by the representatives of governments that gathered in Paris, France to review support to children affected by armed conflict<sup>14</sup>. The Paris Commitment recognised the devastating effects of armed conflict on children and noted that “girls continue to be largely invisible in programming and diplomatic initiatives regarding the unlawful recruitment and use of children by armed forces or groups.”(Paris Commitment, 2007, p.2). The Commitment also stresses the primary responsibilities of state parties in protecting children from recruitment or use by armed forces and further emphasises the role of the State in supporting the reintegration of

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<sup>14</sup> The Paris Commitment to Protect Children from Unlawful Recruitment or Use by Armed Forces or Armed Groups, February 2007

children used by armed forces in addition to reporting and monitoring progress on the violation of children's rights.

Okello and Hovil (2007) decry the limited involvement of the formerly abducted child mothers in debates about their interests and needs at all levels of policy formulation and interventions in Northern Uganda. They also point out the dearth of policies and institutional frameworks for addressing issues related to the post-bush relationship between the formerly abducted child mothers and their "bush husbands", especially those related to claims over the children born in captivity and where they belong. Commentators have been grappling with the question of how these issues should be resolved. Should they be handled culturally, legally or with new policies or bye-laws and ordinances? There is also the whole issue of whether the government should be involved in this issue.

Swaine and Feeny (2004) also point out one important factor in the coping of young people. They note that the disruption of family and community support networks significantly undermine a girls' ability to make sense of events and experiences they undergo. In other words it compromises their coping abilities. In a study in Gulu district, Corbin (2008) found that girls had not been exposed to more difficult experiences than their male counterparts. She added that boys argued that girls often married off and in their view, had an easier life. These findings, however, seems to differ significantly from other studies (such as McKay, 2004; McKay and Mazurana 2004; Frerks et al 2005). Even Corbin (2008, p.330) acknowledges that "the invisibility of female experiences is a barrier to addressing their physical, economic and social needs, thereby compounding their challenges of reintegration". This situation apparently arises from the inability or unwillingness of the FAC to talk about their experiences.

Another situational factor which has ramifications for resettlement and reintegration is the poverty that formerly abducted children/youth return to. In Northern Uganda, the high level of poverty has often affected reintegration programmes as the returnees are left with few options in terms of livelihood, and have to depend on humanitarian agencies (Abola et al., 2009; Corbin 2008; McKay, 2004).

In terms of factors aiding the resettlement and reintegration process, the primacy of the role of the family over social groups and other affiliations such as religion, have been identified by studies (Corbin, 2008). In some communities, traditional cleansing ceremonies are seen as important in aiding the process of “cultural reconnection to the larger community” (Corbin, 2008, p.325). This has also been identified in other studies (Frerks et al., 2005; McKay and Mazurana, 2004). Having noted that the family is seen as playing a key mediation role in the process of traditional cleansing; Corbin (2008) wonders what the implications of the role of the family would be for those returnees who find no trace of their families on return from the bush raising the question as to whether the extended family and the clan system steps in to perform this role. In many African communities (including Acholi in Northern Uganda) however, cultural functions are normally performed by the wider extended family or clan (see Angucia, 2010; Shanahan, 2008; Frerks et al., 2005; Mazurana et al., 2008).

While Frerks et al. (2005) allude to cultural and social institutions using traditional practices as a method for rehabilitation and reintegration; they observe that boys appeared to have utilised this method more than female returnees. It has also been suggested that other than the psychological benefits, there is at present no documented study on the effectiveness of traditional practices in enhancing reintegration in the community<sup>15</sup> (Allen and Schomerus, 2006). However, the main challenge for resettlement and reintegration arises from the fact that many abducted children had been turned into instruments of subjugation and violence against their own communities. Other scholars have also raised concerns about how the rehabilitation and reintegration process is managed when the philosophies underpinning definitions and conceptualisations of childhood differ from local socio-cultural context (see Francis, 2007; Shepler, 2005).

This study contributes further to the reintegration programming by recognising that many young people in the community are not being effectively reached in spite of several years of programme interventions. Other studies (e.g. Abola et al, 2009; Okello and Hovil,

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<sup>15</sup> It should be noted that traditional cultural practice (using traditional conflict resolution and cleansing rituals) as a way of redressing the wrongs committed by the rebels against the community has recently been advocated by a number of stakeholders, especially during the process of the Juba Peace Talks between the government of Uganda and the LRA rebels. While the Acholi community has cultural provisions for handling heinous crimes including killing, the society had never before dealt with the current level of intra and inter communal violence, many a time involving children against own families at the behest of rebel commanders.

2007; Allen and Schomerus, 2006) have also recognised these challenges. The current study recommends a change in approach to consider broad community interests when resettling the FACM, putting efforts at community poverty reduction and expanding opportunities for the FACM, through specific targeting.

## **Post-conflict Reconstruction and Development**

Different views have emerged about post-conflict reconstruction and development. Harris (1999, p.8) observes that “Rehabilitation and reconstruction should aim for a more than pre-war economic political and social life”. In developing an effective post-conflict service, there is need for consultation with all who are affected including the victims and stakeholders otherwise the “construction of peace” can be elusive. Moreover it is also pointed out that programming should focus on both short-term and long-term outcomes, but with more emphasis on long-term outcomes which address psychosocial, socio-economic and political development needs. What emerges from this argument is that while medium-term plans might be important in addressing some of the consequences and effects of the war on the population and preparing the community for post-conflict phase, this might itself not be sufficient for a process of reconstructive development. Harris (1999) proposes a 20 year long-term horizontal outcome plan and argues that if realistic outcomes are to be achieved over a twenty-year period, preparation is crucial (Harris, 1999).

Citing ILO (1995), Harris (1999) picks out the main challenges faced by “demobilised combatants” as alienation from civilian life, inadequate information on reintegration options and programmes, inadequate counselling, problems of land availability and allocation, as well as problems of finding stable livelihood and employment including self-employment. It is also noted that for the ex-combatants who had been recruited as children the capacity and means to comfortably “return to peacetime society is limited” (Harris, 1999, p.132). Skills and business training is seen as aiding economic reintegration. Harris further points out the need and importance of preparing the community for the reintegration process. However, the study also identifies the limitations of such a process.

It is observed that while the centrality of the role played by the community in reintegration (including initial resettlement) is not in doubt, the local community

involvement in the programming and planning processes of these interventions is very limited (Brethfield, 2010). This limitation emerges from the fact that most DDR programmes are centrally developed. It is thus presumptive to surmise that the community will fully appreciate reintegration interventions if their involvement in planning has not been adequate. Harris (1999, citing the 1995 ILO study) emphasises the need to increase the capacity of the community to cope with reintegration through well-conceived socio-economic interventions. It is also pointed out that the immediate family and community members might need support and training to provide basic counselling to the returnees.

### **Social Capital in Development Programming**

According to Coleman (1990, p.302), “social capital is defined by its function. It is not a single entity, but a variety of different entities having common characteristics: they all consist of some aspects of a social structure and they facilitate certain actions of individuals who are within the structure”. Coleman (1988) observes that social capital can be depleted if not renewed and that when people work together on an increasing basis, the greater the social capital.

Within the last few years, the argument for social capital as an alternative resource for leveraging development interventions has gained increasing prominence. Even the World Bank has been re-examining its over-emphasis on economic growth and increasing its focus on the role of social resources in the development process (Woolcock and Narayan, 2000). By the year 2000/2001<sup>16</sup>, the Bank’s policy was shifting more towards the promotion of social and economic institutions for development and a visualisation of social capital as the missing link in the development process. The concept of social capital has increasingly been accepted both within the mainstream development paradigm and alternative development approaches as playing a critical role in bringing about development (Putnam, 2000; 1995a; 1995b; Fukuyama, 1995).

The contention is that if meaningful development is to occur and social progress attained, then social capital should be considered as a critical resource and tapped. Many scholars have for long advanced the arguments that social capital plays a paramount role in socio-economic development and pursuits of positive and meaningful social change (Jackman

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<sup>16</sup> As seen in its World Development Report 2000/2001; subtitled *Attacking poverty*.

and Ross, 1998; Hartman and Guss, 1996; Coleman, 1988). Social capital is visualised as playing an important role in building the capital base on which socio-economic development will thrive (Fukuyama, 1999, 1995; Dasgupta, 1997; Cox, 1995; Coleman, 1988). Differential perspectives have, however, also emerged with some equating the concept of social capital with increasing inequality among sub-groups and also providing breeding grounds for many social vices (Haralambous and Holborn, 2008).

On the other hand, the contention among other social scientists is that social capital is necessary in its own right to promote positive social interaction, civic engagement and development from the point of view of the citizens (see ONS 2001; Putnam, 1995a). The sense of belonging and togetherness which is promoted by positive social capital is regarded as a unifying factor in the face of socio-economic difficulties and emergencies.

There is evidence that social capital among rural communities in Acholiland was very strong and effective before the war as exemplified by firm kinship ties, attachment and ease of mobilisation for community work, and a high tendency for the community to be responsible for the general welfare of community members (see Frerks et al., 2009). It is worth noting that the protracted war in Northern Uganda has seemingly had far reaching repercussions on the communities, accentuated by disruption of social lives, economic means of livelihood and displacement to camps. As such, some development commentators have observed that there is an apparent decline in social capital exemplified by an increasing trend towards nuclear families in both urban and rural settings; rampant abuse and neglect of children, weak and unstable marriages and family relations, and increasing juvenile delinquency (Frerks et al., 2009). It is also possible that new forms of social capital could have emerged during the conflict, which could form an important resource in the resettlement and reintegration process. In Lebanon a study by Karame (2009) suggested that the network and close contact formed by ex-combatants during the period of conflict was a key resource in their social reintegration.

### **International and National Child Protection Standards and Instruments (framework) for the Protection of Children in situations of armed conflict**

In realisation of the devastating effects of armed conflict on children, a number of international treaties, conventions and commitments have been made over the years to

enhance child protection. These can be broadly categorised as: the international humanitarian laws/conventions; international human rights laws/conventions; and case laws and national domestic legislations.

### **International Humanitarian Laws/Conventions**

According to Harvey (2003, p.9) “International humanitarian law is the body of law that seeks to regulate the methods and means of warfare and the treatment of people in times of war, who are no longer (e.g. prisoners of war, or injured soldiers) participating in the hostilities”. I discuss below some of the core international humanitarian laws relating to children in armed conflict situation.

#### **a) The Declaration of the League of Nations**

This was one of the very first conventions regulating the conduct of man in warfare. Coming in the aftermath of World War I and recognizing the devastating nature of war, one of the key declarations of the League of Nations aims at providing protection to people including non-combatants, those taken prisoners in conflict and regulating how these should be treated (Bainomugisha, 2011; Gadda 2008). This declaration aimed to show that despite participation in war, there were acceptable ways of treating people with dignity in such situations. The 1924 Declaration of Rights of Children was also significant in that it laid a solid foundation for later deliberations on rights and treatment of children in both conflict and non-conflict situations (Gadda, 2008).

#### **b) The Geneva Conventions of 1949**

Developed and promulgated in the aftermath of the bloody and devastating World War II, the Geneva Conventions have been some of the most cited standards on protection of civilians, combatants and those denouncing war or taken as prisoners of war (POWs). Several Conventions (up to four) were developed to ensure the safety, dignity and humane treatment of people caught up in conflict situations. Convention I: for the amelioration of the condition for the wounded and the sick in armed forces in the field; Convention II: for the amelioration of the condition of wounded, sick and shipwrecked members of the armed forces at sea; Convention III: relative to the treatment of prisoners of war; and Convention IV: relative to the protection of civilian persons in time of war (all promulgated on the 12<sup>th</sup> August 1949). Geneva Convention IV was also



acknowledged by commentators as “the first treaty to provide protection for civilians during armed conflict” (Harvey 2003, p.10).

According to Bainomugisha (2011, p.65), Convention IV specifically addresses the welfare of children in the hands of the opposing forces although it does not regulate “the conduct of parties to a conflict in order to protect civilians”. Other provisions of the 1949 Geneva Convention are for the conflicting parties to ensure children are protected more specifically and making available access to food, water and other such necessities as clothes and medicines. Some commentators have, however, noted that the Geneva Convention IV of 1949 did not provide protection to all children below 18 as by that time there was no general agreement on the age definition of childhood (see Bainomugisha, 2011). Another limitation of the Geneva Conventions is the emphasis on inter-state conflict, a situation influenced by the fact that most conflicts at the time, including World War II were mainly inter-state affairs. Despite these limitations, however, most countries (up to 190) are party to the Geneva Conventions, which provided some of the benchmarks for the development of future instruments to protect children. This has, in the words of some commentators, also resulted in the Conventions being considered as a customary international law, which is applicable in every international conflict, obligating even the few countries that have not signed to abide by their provisions.

#### **c) United Nations Declaration on the Protection of Women and Children in Emergency and Armed Conflict**

This declaration was signed on the 14<sup>th</sup> of December 1974 (Harvey, 2003). It is a non-legally binding international instrument but nevertheless has a key role to play in promoting awareness of the challenges and difficulties that non-combatants, especially women and children go through in conflict situations, and requires these issues to be considered and addressed.

#### **d) The 1977 additional protocols to the Geneva Convention (Protocol I and Protocol II)**

These two additional protocols were developed to address challenges and limitations in the earlier Conventions, with the International Committee of the Red Cross playing a key role in their development; the protocols were aimed at helping international actors to appreciate the changing dynamics of wars and armed conflict. According to Hamilton et

al. (2001) cited in Bainomugisha (2011), the development of the additional protocols was also heavily influenced by the Vietnam War, the usage of new and more deadly weapons and their impacts on people. The two protocols make special provisions for the protection of children and women in conflict situations with article 77 of Protocol I stating that:

Children shall be the object of special respect and shall be protected against any form of indirect assault. The parties to the conflict shall provide them with the care and aid they require whether because of their age or for any other reason (Hamilton et al., 2001, P.15, cited in Bainomugisha, 2011)

Protocol I also set the age of 15 as the minimum age at which children can be recruited into the armed forces. It also counsels all parties to ensure that children below the age of 15 are not included in direct hostilities. Protocol II recognizes the need to protect children from recruitment by both state and other armed groups; the Protocol also provides protection to people caught up in domestic conflicts. A major issue of contention regarding this protocol however, was the issue of the recruitment age (15) into direct armed confrontations (Harvey, 2003). This age was regarded by several advocacy groups as too young for children to be responsibly involved in conflict and hostilities and yet this was retained within Protocol II of the Geneva Convention.

### **International Human Rights Laws**

The international human rights laws obligate states parties to protect general human rights (Bainomugisha, 2011; Harvey, 2003). These rights are also reflected in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Examples of the international human rights instruments include the Convention on the Rights of the Child, CEDAW, ICCPR, ICESR, among others and these also provide the basis of international human rights laws. Harvey (2003, p.10) provides the following definition of such laws:

International human rights law primarily seeks to regulate the way state treats people although human rights law is not specifically designed to protect persons during times of armed conflict, many of its provisions remains applicable.

#### **a) The Convention on the Rights of the Child**

The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) has so far been the most comprehensive instrument for the protection of children generally, and in conflict situations as well. The CRC has four general principles which are non-discrimination

(article 2); best interests of the child reflected in article 3; right to life survival and development (article 6) and the right for children to have their views heard and given due weight in all decisions affecting them (Article 12). Furthermore, article 38 subsections 1, 2, 3 and 4 specifically address the issues of protection of children in armed conflict. The Convention prohibits the recruitment of children below 15 years into the armed forces and encourages states parties to recruit older persons, and to ensure that adequate care and support is provided to children affected by armed conflict (Harvey, 2003). All countries except the United States of America (USA) and Somalia have ratified the CRC.

Article 39 of the CRC obligates states parties to support the psycho-social and physical reintegration of children affected by war. A key weakness of the CRC has also been the retention of the age of 15 as the minimum age of recruitment into armed forces. The limitations of the CRC led to the subsequent development of the Optional Protocol on the CRC on the involvement of children in armed conflict. While the Optional Protocol retains 18 as the age of adulthood, it still allows for recruitment of children aged 16 as volunteers, but recommends that such children do not participate in actual conflict. The key challenge however, is that it is difficult to determine whether even among states parties the so-called volunteer children would not be involved in direct hostilities.

#### **b) The Optional Protocol to the CRC on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict**

Enacted in 2000, this Protocol prohibits recruitment of children below 18 although it leaves the room for training of 16 year olds as volunteers. Due to its failure to settle on one age for involvement of children in conflict or with the armed forces, the Optional Protocol has been critiqued for complicating child protection in conflict situation (see Harvey, 2003). The language of some of the phrases of the Optional Protocol have also been contested as in the clause which urges states parties to use all feasible means to prevent recruitment into armed conflict. The question arises as to how one determines what is feasible or not feasible in specific cases. This loophole has been utilised by some states to weaken the efficacy of the instrument.

**c) International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention 182 on the Worst Form of Child Labour, 1999**

The participation of children in armed conflict falls under the worst forms of child labour. It is an accepted situation that many children that participate in armed conflict die, get maimed or are seriously affected by the conflict. Armed conflict thus affects a child's physical, psychosocial and emotional health as well as social relationships. It is important to note that the ILO Convention categorises the involvement of children in armed conflict among the worst forms of child labour and criminalizes it. While children can perform certain tasks within their wider socio-economic and physical environment, such tasks should ideally not include involvement in armed conflict.

**d) The Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC)**

One of the key contributions of the Rome Statute has been the criminalization of the use of children in armed conflict (Francis, 2007; Harvey, 2003). The Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, like the Optional Protocol on the CRC on involvement of children in armed conflict, binds all fighting forces, including governments to respect the rights of children and protect them from early enlisting into armed forces. Precedence has been set where actors, including rebel groups and their sponsors who committed crimes against children or humanity have been arraigned before the International Criminal Court at The Hague, Netherlands. This has happened to sponsors of fighting forces in Sierra Leone and Liberia as well as the Democratic Republic of the Congo (Francis, 2007). It is, however, unfortunate that the Rome Statute of the ICC has limitations over indicting sitting heads of state, besides only covering crimes committed in the post-2002 period (Adanan, 2010). In this case therefore, many African leaders have not been prosecuted yet there is strong evidence that they have used children in their "revolutions". Questions have been asked why the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda has never tried senior Rwanda Patriotic Front officials also implicated in war crimes. Coincidentally, only those that were members of the old Habyarimana regimes have been prosecuted over the years. Unless the UN and the international community pursue global social justice and accountability in a consistent and equitable way, manipulations and crimes against children may continue. However, where leaders realise that they will be held accountable, whether in or out of government, they might carefully consider their actions.

While the Rome Statute provides an important international framework for bringing justice for children, it has seemingly been antithetical to other locally accepted solutions of the conflict. For example, the accountability and reconciliation agenda item signed between the government of Uganda and the leadership of the LRA during the Juba peace process (2006-2008) recognizes the traditional conflict resolution mechanisms among the most affected communities in Northern Uganda<sup>17</sup>. Such agreements are asymmetrical to the provisions of the ICC which requires that the commanders stand trial in a formal justice system either at the ICC or within the country. Yet other studies suggest that the desire of the population that bore the brunt of the war is for a local solution which promotes accountability and restorative justice as opposed to retributive justice (see RLP, 2005). Indeed, some commentators have attributed the collapse of the Juba peace process to the looming trial of the rebel commanders at the ICC (see Bainomugisha, 2011; RLP, 2005). This brings us to ask to what extent local and traditional mechanisms of accountability and conflict resolution can be brought to bear on the international human rights law and such global initiatives?

#### **e) Other Frameworks for Child Protection in Conflict Situation**

Other protective frameworks for children in conflict situations include the Paris Principles 2007, the UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on women's participation in peace building enacted after a recalling of earlier resolutions aimed at protecting women (1265, 1261, 1296, 1314) and, the Beijing Declaration for Women.

Premised on children rights discourse and informed by lessons learnt in implementing interventions for children affected by armed conflict, the Paris Principles advocates: accountability and transparency of actors, ensuring that actions of humanitarian actors is based on Children Rights and Humanitarian Principles; context specific programming, taking into consideration diversity in local realities; capacity strengthening which comprise supporting regional, national, local and community efforts to prevent recruitment of children into armed conflict and advocate the release, rehabilitation and reintegration of children involved with fighting forces. Other key Principles include: making available funding for the protection and reintegration of children affected by armed conflict; coordination, collaboration and cooperation among all the key actors; and

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<sup>17</sup>Agreement on accountability and reconciliation between the government of Uganda and the Lord's resistance army/rebels. Source [www.beyondjuba.org](http://www.beyondjuba.org)

ensuring confidentiality of the information obtained from children and protecting them from unfair and harmful media coverage.

Resolution 1325 urges the involvement of women at all levels of governance internationally, nationally and locally to address peace and development issues. Resolution 1325 is important in the RRR planning considering the unique and special needs of women and girls during such processes (Nduwimana, 2008). It also calls on actors to ensure that interventions adopted categorically enhance and protect the rights of women and girls and ensure their dignity. Resolution 1325 denounces gender-based violence and calls upon fighting groups (state and non-state) to ensure that women are protected from rape and other forms of sexual and gender-based violence. It also calls upon states parties to prosecute those responsible for crimes against women. It is important to note that the application of this resolution in many developing countries affected by conflict remains problematic especially on aspects of prosecution of those implicated in perpetration of acts of violence against women. In many cases where such violent acts were committed by persons in power, they tend to be shielded by the prevailing systems and powerful individuals.

Nduwimana (2008) notes that although some achievements with regard to SCR 1325 have been made in peace keeping, enhancing protection from gender-based violence and participation of women in political process, significant challenges remain. The major challenges include the inability of reformed legislation in countries to effectively give women rights of inheritance; discrimination still abounds in many countries, and the democratic participation of women, especially at the grassroots and national level, is also still weak in many countries.

To enhance child protection in conflict situations, the European Union adopted “Guidelines on Children and Armed Conflict” in 2003 and in January 2006, it further adopted the implementation strategy of these guidelines. Recognising the challenges in the application of the CRC, the EU Guidelines reaffirm the commitment of the European Union in addressing the impact of armed conflict on children including influencing countries to consider and implement international human rights laws and key conventions and treaties affecting the welfare of children. In Asia, there is the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) Declaration on the Commitment to

Protect Children Exposed to Armed Conflict. American States also adopted Resolution 1904 aimed at protecting children during situations of armed conflict.

Other significant protocols, conventions and standards which enhance the global protection and development of children include the following: the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966); Education for All Declaration (2000) and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (1990). More treaties and standards include the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman and Degrading Treatment or Punishment (1984); and Optional Protocol to the CRC on the Sale of Children, and Child Prostitution and Child Pornography (2000). Yet others include: Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (2002); Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (1999) and the United Nations Millennium Declaration (2000). It is noteworthy that Uganda has signed and ratified all these conventions and standards (Uganda APRM Commission, 2009).

### **Regional Mechanisms for Protecting Children (Africa)**

Regional initiatives include the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC), and the revised Arab Charter on Human Rights which outlaws recruitment of children into armed forces. The latter applies to African countries of Arab composition and therefore operates concurrently with the ACRWC. The adoption of the Cape Town Principles and best practices on the prevention of recruitment into the armed forces, demobilisation and social reintegration of child soldiers in Africa (1997) is also taken here as a regional development, although the Cape Town meeting involved other international actors as well.

#### **a) The African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC)**

The African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC) is one of the most recognizable frameworks for protection of children in Africa. Enacted just a year after the promulgation of the CRC, it enabled a process towards domestication of the CRC in several African countries. Many of its provisions rhyme with those of the CRC and Article 22 on children in armed conflict, Article 15 prohibit child labour (especially the worst forms and Article 16 provides for prosecution of people implicated in child abuse). The ACRWC urges states parties to recognize the international humanitarian laws on

child protection but sets 18 as the minimum age of recruitment into armed forces and discourages the recruitment of children into armed forces. However, just like the CRC, the ACRWC has also not prevented the recruitment of Africa's children into civil war. Indeed just like Francis (2007) suggests it makes a fundamental flaw of going with the age-based dichotomy of who is a child. Other socio-economic variables and factors have also made it difficult for children to be protected from recruitment. Moreover, the perception of what constitute rights of children might actually vary across African communities within and across countries (Francis, 2007).

#### **b) Cape Town Principles, 1997**

The Cape Town Principles and best practices on the prevention of recruitment of children into armed forces and demobilization and social reintegration were adopted in April 1997. It provides guidelines on protection, demobilization and reintegration of child soldiers and other children affected by armed conflict, reaffirms the age of 18 as the minimum age for participation in armed conflict/recruitment into the forces. Some commentators have critiqued the Cape Town Principles as out of touch with the African construction of childhood, having also been developed by elitist participants from all over the globe. It thus falls short of being described as a regional framework for Africa (see Bainomugisha 2011). Although the Cape Town Principles are not legally binding they nevertheless raised international awareness on Africa's conflict affected children.

#### **c) Maputo Declaration, 1999**

This builds on the Cape Town Principles. The Maputo Declaration considers the involvement of children under 18 in conflict as totally unacceptable and counsels African states to promote a protective environment for children and prosecutes those using children in conflict situations. The Maputo Declaration also advises on rehabilitation and reintegration of children and those no longer part of the armed forces. It further encourages states yet to ratify the CRC and ACRWC to do so<sup>18</sup>.

#### **d) Lome Peace Accord**

This Accord was signed to bring an end to the 9 year protracted conflict in Sierra Leone. This was a significant agreement because it was the very first agreement on African conflict where special attention was drawn to the conflict role of children and their

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<sup>18</sup>Text of the declaration accessible at [http://www.childsrights.org/html/site\\_en/law\\_download.php?id=363](http://www.childsrights.org/html/site_en/law_download.php?id=363)



special needs as child soldiers in the DDR processes (Bainomugisha 2011). It is important to point here that the Juba peace process was based on agreements such as the Lome Accord and recognized the special need of children and made provisions for their involvement in the DDR process.

### **Case laws and National Domestic Legislation and Mechanisms for Protection of Children in Uganda**

#### **The Constitution, Amnesty Act and Children Act, CAP 59**

The Constitution of the Republic of Uganda 1995, (amended 2005); The Children Act (Cap 59) enacted in the year 2000 and Amnesty Act 2000 (amended 2006) are some of the foremost laws which regulate the observance of children's rights in Uganda. Article 34 of the Constitution of the Republic of Uganda commits the state to protecting children from abuse, exploitation and respecting the best interests of children. The Children Act (Cap 59 of 2000) and a series of other policies were enacted and passed to domesticate international conventions (including the CRC) to provide a wider protective framework for Ugandan children. However, while these laws have been put in place, one of the key observations of commentators is that implementation of the legislation and policies has not been very effective (Ugandan APRM Commission, 2009).

According to Bainomugisha (2011) the Amnesty Act application and implementation especially through the Amnesty Commission has been beset by challenges such as limited staffing and limited, funding which affected the number of people it could reach. Although other government pronouncements and legislation such as the Amnesty Act (2000) have aided the process of return for formerly abducted children and ex-combatants, apparently the Act has not supported reintegration efforts beyond reinsertion. Recent studies (Mazurana et al., 2008; Annan et al., 2007) also indicate a limited knowledge on the part of the beneficiaries (especially the female former child soldiers) about their eligibility for the reinsertion packages from the Amnesty Commission. Another dimension of the Amnesty Act which has courted controversy is that communities have often viewed the package as a reward for rebellion since it only targets those that have been with the rebels (Annan et al. al, 2007).

The Amnesty Act was also recognised as a mechanism by which rebel combatants could be reintegrated within the society at the Juba peace talks from 2006-2008. It is important

that government sets aside politicking and engages equally with returning and surrendering rebel fighters if genuine peace is to be achieved and sustained in northern Uganda. Short of this an environment of tension and uncertainty among returning rebel soldiers and officers could yet foment more conflict.

The UPDF Act (2003) also limits the age of recruitment into the armed forces to 18 but due to lack of a rigorous birth registration processes, falsifications are rampant and in some cases the army claims it has not been able to verify the actual age of the recruits.

Uganda also enacted the International Criminal Court Act 2006 which came into force in April 2010, establishing the war crimes division of the Ugandan High Court. In a recent landmark ruling, the Constitutional Court ruled that the War Crimes Division of the High Court was trying one of the former captured rebel commanders (Thomas Kwoyello) illegally, as he was entitled to the amnesty which he had been denied by government. However despite the ruling, the government insisted that Kwoyello was a dangerous person who should not be released to the public and he remains incarcerated in prison in spite of a court order to release him (see BBC news, 2011; JRP, 2011). Such is the duality and double standards in the application of legislation that the good practice objectives outlines within DDR programmes are compromised.

### **Limitations of the Protective Framework for Children in Conflict Situations**

The presence of all these conventions and institutions has, however, not prevented the mass recruitment, abduction, sexual exploitation and violation of the rights of children in both Northern Uganda (see chapter one and six) and elsewhere (United Nations, 2008; Achvarina et al., 2008; Coalition to Stop the Use of Child soldiers, 2008; Keen, 2008; Honwana, 2006; Singer 2006; Brett and Specht, 2004). In some cases, states parties promote the “national interest” above that of children and women. This could possibly explain why some countries have been hesitant in signing the CRC and other international conventions on the rights of children. The inclusion in the Optional Protocol for child military volunteers at 16 years was made to address strategic interests of countries such as the United States of America and Britain. This in a way compromises the best interest principle and has arguably limits the efficacy of the Optional Protocol to the CRC on the involvement of children in armed conflict (see Bainomugisha, 2011; Singer, 2006, Harvey, 2003).

In many other countries there has been very slow progress or none at all in domesticating international conventions and laws to enhance protection for children affected by conflict (Francis, 2007). Indeed, as suggested by Francis, impunity is widespread in many parts of the developing world, where genuine democracy is hard to come by. In some situations even where culprits have been implicated and substantial evidence exists, they have gone unpunished. Francis (2007) argues that application of international criminal laws and prosecution of culprits is a selective issue often driven by strategic interests of dominant world powers, and not so much to uphold the global commitment to human rights and good governance (see also Keen, 2008; Paquin and Saideman, 2008; Mamdani, 2002). In such situations, it can be said that justice for children and vulnerable communities are sacrificed to the altar of expediency.

Francis (2007) suggests that westernisation of the concept of childhood differs significantly from the social construction of childhood in African societies and presents significant challenges to the application and domestication of the international laws and conventions. This may account for the view of commentators that Uganda is good at developing policies and legislation but weak in their implementation (Uganda APRM Commission, 2009). Honwana (2006), reviewing the situation of child soldiers in Africa, argues that the actions of the international, local agencies and individual child rights activists have not been effective in enforcing international laws and ensuring that violators of children rights do not act with impunity. She writes:

International humanitarian law has been unable to secure the protection of human rights in times of war. The central challenge is how to make international humanitarian law understood, recognised and enforced in places where children are recruited into armed conflicts on a daily basis (Honwana, 2006, p.39).

Much therefore remains to be done to ensure the protection of children from recruitment into armed forces. More critically, the global civil society and the international community have much more to do to achieve child protection and to ensure that children enjoy a normal childhood apart from enacting laws and signing treaties and conventions. While the treaties are needed, the political will behind such treaties and the unequivocal commitment to their realisation and implementation is even more important. Recent monitoring reports such as the United Nations Report on the compliance of states parties

to the prevention of child recruitment (2008) suggest that many countries are not doing enough to attain standards for the protection of children including prevention of their recruitment into fighting forces.

In some cases, the recruitment of children into armed forces has been abetted by the state either by omission or commission (Wessels, 1998; 2006). In Uganda's case, whereas the country has signed and ratified the UNCRC and its Optional Protocol on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict, and is also a signatory to the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, it is one of the many countries in which children have been recruited and used in the armed forces (Achvarina et al., 2008; United Nations, 2008; Human rights Watch, 2006). While debating Uganda's progress report on Article 8 of the Optional Protocol on the Involvement of Children in Armed Forces, the CRC Monitoring Committee was concerned that despite strong legislation for prevention of recruitment of children (such as the Uganda People's Defence Forces Act 2005), Uganda has still not done enough to protect children from recruitment as child soldiers<sup>19</sup>.

### **Some Gaps in the Literature**

Recent studies have indicated that while substantial data exist about the process of rehabilitating children affected by armed conflict and re-insertion in the community, little has been documented at a deeper level about the post-reunion/post-reinsertion experiences and adaptation to life within communities (Corbin, 2008; McKay 2004; Boyden and De Berry, 2004). In Northern Uganda, the communities are still in a state of transition from war to peace, having only recently returned to their original homes (Huber, 2010; Abola et.al. 2009). Furthermore, it should be noted that whereas most of the studies have explored psychosocial and socio-economic interventions for children affected by armed conflict including resettlement/reintegration within the community, little is written about post-reunion "relationships" between the FACM and their families or wider communities.

The current study provides information on the agency of the child mothers in resisting rebel sexual advances in the bush; even at the expense of their life. A significant contribution has been the revelation that the development of motherly love happened

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<sup>19</sup>Another limitation pointed out was that coordination of the implementation of the optional protocol was not sufficient.

gradually and not instantaneously. In this case the circumstances surrounding the conception could have dampened the excitement of motherhood (see also Allen, 2005, 2006; Angucia, 2010). In contributing to the literature on children in armed conflict, the study foregrounds the unique coping strategies the FACM adopted during captivity to ensure that they return alive, together with their children. This shows significant demonstration of agency amidst a very difficult context. Relay of the girls as wives among different rebels, constituted violations of both their bodies and dignity, something which could have sown the seeds of later difficulties in sustaining long-term relationships among some of the returning young women.

### **Aims of the Study**

This study was conducted with the following aims:

- To examine FACM's bush experiences and explore the ramifications for rehabilitation, resettlement and reintegration (RRR) as they negotiate the transition from life in the bush to life in their communities
- Investigate the social and interpersonal factors that impact the process of rehabilitation, resettlement and reintegration (RRR) of FACM.
- Document and analyse the community resources and structures supporting the RRR of the FACM.
- Explore stakeholder perceptions and views on the effectiveness of the RRR programming for FACM in Northern Uganda.

# CHAPTER FIVE

## METHODOLOGY

### **Introduction**

Chapter five presents the research design and the main methodological approaches of the study. The data collection, data analysis, challenges encountered and how these challenges were addressed are also discussed. In concluding this chapter I make a personal reflection on the research journey and the ethical procedures undertaken during the research process.

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- Explore stakeholder perceptions and views on the effectiveness of the RRR programming for FACM in Northern Uganda.

### **Epistemological and Ontological Assumptions of the study**

In studying the experiences of formerly abducted child mothers affected by war in Northern Uganda, a number of issues come to mind regarding knowledge generation and development. I espouse the idea that there are multiple knowledge points and realities in understanding the experiences of the FACM and how they themselves make sense of their situation (Haralambos and Holborn, 2008; Guba and Lincoln, 2008; Harding 1997).

What comes to mind therefore, is that the construction of knowledge in how the FACM responded to events in their surrounding, how they negotiate their rehabilitation, resettlement and reintegration in the post-reunion period depends on a number of factors, including the context in which the FACM live. Such subjective experiences of the girls and child mothers should be accepted and understood as making meaningful contribution to the scholarship on women's experiences of conflict. The socio-ecological, political, cultural, economic, religious and psychosocial factors thus significantly imbue the process of resettlement and reintegration of the child mothers and are also important in contextualising these experiences.

Ontologically therefore, this study takes the perspective of relativism with the view of "subjective/inter-subjective social knowledge and the active construction and co-creation of such knowledge by human agents" (Guba and Lincoln 2008, p 269). A transactional epistemology is assumed with the participants playing a key role in creation of new knowledge, with this knowledge being embedded within the socio-cultural and politico-economic situation.

The diversity of the experiences of the FACM has been reported in various studies (Mazurana and Karlson 2006; Honwana 2006; Frerks et al., 2005; McKay 2004). Differences have also been reported in terms of how the FACM in different countries respond to socio-economic and cultural dynamics/circumstances in the resettlement and reintegration process. Scholarship has also shown that different contextual factors necessitate different strategies in terms of the interventions that are planned to support either the process of rehabilitation or reinsertion as well as reintegration initiatives. It is therefore evident that the construction of knowledge in terms of how the FACM negotiate the reintegration process will be dependent on a number of factors, scenarios and developments.

Determination of the outcomes of RRR interventions are a difficult issue to assert with absolute certainty and at times with measurable indicators. The unpredictability of the outcomes of such socio-economic development interventions in the lives of the FACM suggests that any attempt to explain the complex web of issues surrounding the post-abduction experiences of FACM and support initiatives should involve a framework which allows for participation of those directly affected by such crises. It also implies

that the subjects of study should not be perceived as passive objects in the research process, but as active participants who are aware of their situations and can verbalise their perceptions and description of that situation and their overall experience. However, the theorisation from the experiences of the FACM (research participants) has been made by me as the researcher, taking into account my personal and professional values and biases which have influenced the position that I take in this study.

I have endeavoured to ensure that as far as possible, the voices and lived experiences of the research participants define the content and tone of the study. I am also aware that another researcher with different value points and analytical framework might arrive at different understandings of the data. The knowledge generated is therefore contextual, temporal, socially constructed and may not have universal application although the general issues that emerged could inform socio-economic programme developments, legislation and policy more widely. In consideration of the above issues therefore, I came to an epistemological position that a humanistic paradigm allowing for the interpretation of subjective experiences and perspectives based on the theoretical framework outlined in chapter two would be more appropriate for researching the life stories of the FACM.

The methodology for the study was qualitative thus enabling the social construction of knowledge and experience as informed by the many social, cultural, political and economic factors that determined how young women respond to conflict/post-conflict transition. I take the position that the same event can be experienced differently by different people depending on the level of individual coping resources and other psychological and emotional factors.

Qualitative research approaches provided flexible data collection methods and tools which allowed for the exploration of the experiences of the FACM while still in rebel captivity (retrospectively) and in the post-reunion period, a context which is complex and unpredictable. According to Denzin and Lincoln (2003), qualitative research provides an opportunity for a rich description of the social world. Research literature also indicates that qualitative tools provide a good strategy for understanding social processes as some of the events within the social sphere cannot be quantified. The qualitative methodology also allowed me to immerse myself in my field of study and locate myself as a male



researcher with prior professional experience of the topic and with my own values (Denzin and Lincoln 2003).

The methodology enabled me to reflect on the research process to ensure that personal values and biases were minimised in the interpretation of the data as far as was possible (Denzin and Lincoln, 2003). I argue that there are multiple realities and these realities are socio-culturally defined which in a way therefore, defines and influences how people live and interact with one another (Denzin and Lincoln 2003). The theoretical approach underpinning this study is that the information which was generated by the narratives are social constructions of the FACM based on their own subjective perceptions; experiences and interpretations of the world around them. However, the presentation and analysis of the data have been influenced by my own worldview and conceptual and theoretical perspectives.

Following from the foregoing therefore, an interpretive epistemology underlies my study as I believe the research process and subjects influence me and my thinking as much as I interact with them. In this case therefore, much as the findings discussed in this thesis represent the experiences of the young women, the interpretation and analysis of their experiences is my own. In utilising feminist perspectives and children's rights as my theoretical framework I sought to ensure that as a male researcher I did not inadvertently slip into a patriarchal biased analysis of children and young women's experiences of conflict.

## **Research Design**

This study was qualitative in nature due to the complexity of the issues investigated and in order to explore these issues to a much greater depth than a quantitative approach would make possible. Boyden and De Berry (2004) justify the application of anthropological approaches which allow ethnographic investigation of the experiences focusing on personal narratives and interactions of the young people and thereby allowing for estimation and understanding of the meanings of all these experiences over time. While this was not a conventional ethnographic study, some perspectives were borrowed from ethnography in the exploration of the lived experiences of the young women.

The strength of the research has thus not been on the number of participants but the depth of data generated and the significance of the emerging issues in the light of the research questions. The theoretical position taken in this study was based on interpretivism and phenomenology as the study focused on exploring the lived experiences of the participants and their interpretation of their social world (Smith, 2008; Schwandt, 2003). I explored the young girls' experience of captivity and their journey back home as well as events happening in their lives post-bush, the sense the young women made of these experiences and how this influenced other choices they made. Much as initially I wanted to focus my study only on the rehabilitation, resettlement and reintegration challenges being experienced by the FACM, the richness of their bush experience and how it seemingly affect the reintegration outcomes made me extend the boundary of the study to include the intra-bush experiences of the FACM.

The study combined snapshot design (analysis of state and process at the time of data collection) and retrospective study design. The latter applied mainly to the FACM to recall their experiences in the pre-abduction period, while in the bush and up to their resettlement in the community. The snapshot design captured the perspectives of the community regarding the child mothers (Flick, 2006). While I talked to young women who at the time of the study were aged 20-27 years (no longer children) a greater part of the discussion was on their experiences as children, through to the process of having conceived and returned with children from the bush. The snapshot design on the other hand enables me to explore the current situation and the perspectives of people who were knowledgeable on issues pertaining to the study focus.

In the actual interview situation, it was possible to combine aspects of both designs in eliciting information on the earlier experiences of the FACM and the state of affairs at the time of the interviews. I refer to these interviews as episodic interviews. Using a narrative method as the main means of gathering information was particularly appropriate in understanding the world of the formerly abducted child mothers.

### **The Data Collection Process**

Fieldwork was carried out in Northern Uganda, specifically Gulu and Amuru Districts, which were at the core of the conflict. A triangulated approach was used involving in-depth interviews with formerly abducted child mothers, focus groups, key informant

interviews and a review of pertinent documents. Data collection was aided by a semi-structured interview guide to ensure that the main issues were addressed without stifling the free flow of thought of the interviewees. How the FACM make sense of their experiences and their world was elicited through analysing their narratives (Murray, 2008). Where possible interviews were recorded and detailed memos were kept about the proceedings (Flick, 2009; Corbin and Straus, 2008). The detailed memos added width to the analysis and enhanced the process of reflection and reflexivity while the digital recordings ensured that all interviews and discussions were captured verbatim to enhance accuracy and reliability of data.

### **Identification and Selection of Participants**

Criteria were developed to guide the selection of the research participants. The criteria were the length of stay in rebel captivity; having children while in rebel captivity or shortly on return (but having conceived in the bush); and the duration of life in the community (post-reunion life). The study involved mothers who had at least one child and had been resettled within the community for a period of more than three years. The time frame of three years was thought to be reasonable for interactions between the community and the FACM. Similarly, three years is time long enough for implementation of medium-term reintegration interventions in the community. In analysing the impact of interventions on the lives of the FACM however, I have considered a period longer than this. Only young women who lived within Gulu and Amuru districts were included. At a practical level, I identified research participants using community-based resource persons working with agencies supporting rehabilitation, resettlement and integration of the children affected by armed conflict.

### **The Sampling Procedure**

Twenty one (21) FACM (aged 20-27 years) were interviewed. Of these, fifteen were supported by psychosocial agencies in resettlement and six were young women who went directly to the community on escaping the rebel clutches. This latter group of young women were thus not actively supported by psychosocial agencies at the initial return period. Key informant interviews were held with seventeen staff of NGOs working in the areas including the Focal Person for Child Protection in the Gulu District administration and other community leaders. Seven focus groups were held with community members to elicit their views on the rehabilitation, resettlement and reintegration process.

While this is not a grounded theory study, a grounded theory method of sampling was used in reaching a saturation point decision<sup>20</sup>. While I sampled purposively in identifying and selecting the research participants, I borrowed from grounded theory in determining the point at which I thought saturation point was reached. While initially, a semi-structured narrative guide was developed to elicit information and provide a framework for narratives by the FACM; this was only developed as a guide. During the interview with the FACM, a number of issues which kept on emerging were followed up progressively. These were issues pertaining to both the abduction lives, post-abduction situations and experiences of the FACM. Critical events and experiences and what their meanings were for the young women were explored with the subsequent participants and key informants. These were narrowed down until no new issues emerged and the interviews were wound up.

### **The Narrative Interview**

I have relied substantively on the narrative interviews in talking to the formerly abducted young mothers. This involved giving the young mothers enough time to talk about their experiences with the rebels. The narrative started from the abduction point, continued throughout their lives in the bush (captivity) right through to return and reintegration including, experiences in the RRC and the community. However, I was aware of the limitations of the narrative interview especially its inability to depict contextual factors (Flick 2006). I thus adapted the tool to go beyond narratives to also explore perceptions about the community and issues affecting the environment. Hence the episodic interview (Flick 2006) and narrative method were flexible with probing and guided discussion also being used to obtain information.

In interrogating the experiences of the young women in the bush, I was mindful and cognisant of the gendered power relations coming into play (Reinharz, 1992). I was also aware and mindful of my own personal prejudices and how these might inadvertently creep into my interpretation of what the young women were narrating. To reduce the influence that I, as male researcher had on the research process, I empathised but at the same time maintained my self-awareness so as not to get emotionally involved with the research participants. I therefore limited probing and interview questions only to those

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<sup>20</sup> I recognise however, that this is not the only method and approach to reaching saturation in qualitative research.

relevant situations and points. Reflecting the diversity and uniqueness of the experience of the young women, some of the interviews lasted a short time (45 minutes) and others took about two and half hours.

However, some of the interviews were prolonged simply because the child mothers became emotionally distressed during the interview (in the process of recounting their experiences) and had to be given time to recollect themselves. The levels of emotion shown by the women in recounting their experiences enabled me to understand how deeply ingrained and traumatising the experiences were for them. Some of the young women were recounting experiences that had happened as long as five years earlier however in the unfolding of events and the visibility of the emotion displayed, it seemed as if they had happened only a few days earlier.

What also captivated me during the data collection process was the flow of the individual stories of these young women. The participants were able to recount the key events in their bush experiences, right from abduction, quite methodically. The smoothness with which the story was told was very inspiring. I was captivated by the young women's ability to remember the key events that happened in their lives in the bush coherently. This perhaps indicates the level of confidence of the FACM and significance of the unfolding events in their post-reunion lives. It could also explain how ingrained and deleterious these events were in the lives of the young women. Narratives began with an introduction which explained the abduction experience followed by the main body of the story which included the experience in the bush with its wide array of critical and deeply disturbing events, the factors triggering escape or release, return and the events that happened after return. The young women also talked about the support processes in the RRC (for those that passed through them) and experiences within their communities.

In most of the interviews it was when the young women had finished narrating their abduction experiences that the discussion shifted to describing the current state and prevailing circumstances in the areas where the young women are domiciled: at this point the interview took an episodic form and a rich array of information was collected. The combination of the narrative and episodic interviews was thus appropriate to the study.

### **In-depth Interviews with Key informants**

In deepening the understanding of the information from the primary participants in the study (FACM), several key informant interviews (seventeen) were held. Key informants were purposively selected based on their line of responsibility in respect to the FACM and included local leaders, NGO staff and relevant district departmental staff working for children affected by armed conflict or in charge of their welfare. Interviews were held with the Manager of Community Services in Gulu District, the Focal Point Person for Child Protection for Gulu District, the Gender Officer for Gulu District, the Community Development Officer for Alero sub-county in Amuru District, Project Officer for Concerned Parents Association (CPA) in Gulu and Amuru districts, the Reception Centre Administrator, GUSCO and two other field officers from the same organisation. Further interviews were held with the Regional Advocacy Manager for Marie Stopes - Uganda, Northern region office, the Programme Manager and Project Officer - Ker Kal Kwaro Acholi and the Psychosocial Support Advisor World Vision Uganda, Gulu and Amuru. Other key informants interviewed included staff of Trans-cultural Psychosocial Organisation (TPO) Uganda and the Director of Programme for ACORD Uganda, district planners and cultural leaders. Key informant interviews helped in exploring the resources in place to support reintegration and also in validating and contextualising the experiences of the young women. Key informants were also helpful in providing first hand information on the applicability of the policies at the local levels and the resources in place to support the reintegration process.

### **Focus Group Discussions and their Significance to the Research Process**

Any study exploring the lived experiences of children and young women might need to also explore the perceptions of the community that interacts with them about how they visualise their relationships with the target participants. Being aware of the complexities involved in understanding the experiences of formerly abducted girl children, it was deemed relevant to utilise a focus group to elicit community views and perceptions about the reintegration experiences of the formerly abducted child mothers. This method was appropriate because it provided opportunities for the experiences of the young women to be contextualised and where possible for certain positions to be elaborated on or validated.

Focus groups were conducted with local community leaders, religious leaders, members of the Child Protection Committees (CPCs), and most importantly members of the community, including parents. The youth also played a critical part in the focus group discussions because they are the most immediate peers of the formerly abducted child mothers. It was thus imperative to listen to their perspectives regarding their relationships with the FACM and how they perceive the reintegration initiatives and support networks and systems in place.

In selecting and recruiting members of the focus groups my consideration was drawn to the role played in the lives of the FACM. Focus group participants were therefore people who had a direct relationship or interaction with the FACM; people they interact with on a day to day basis such as their peers and workmates in the markets. As such the parents and or official guardians of the young women were also considered as participants in the focus groups.

Local leaders also formed another important category for the focus groups. It should be pointed out that local leaders interact with the FACM especially in cases where the children of the child mothers get into any conflict with other community children; they always arbitrate. This is especially the case when it involves usage of abusive language against the children born in captivity (CBCs) or against the child mothers themselves. If the family cannot resolve an issue using intra and/or inter-family approaches, the services of local leaders has always been sought. For example, in the focus group discussion held at Alero sub county headquarters in Amuru district, the community development officer, two parish chiefs, and representatives of local community based organisations and other international organisations were also party to the discussion. In Lalogi sub-county the focus group comprised of the chairman LCIII of the sub county<sup>21</sup>, a representative of Save the Children in Uganda, and the community-based child protection committee (CPC) members. The CPC is a structure initiated by UNICEF and the key stakeholders in child protection within Acholi and Lango sub-region with the all important brief of monitoring child abuse and reporting to the local government through the sub-county. Their selection to participate in the focus groups was also based on their probable interactions with the research participants.

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<sup>21</sup> This is the most senior political leader in the sub-county.

In conducting the focus group discussions, the researcher began by introducing the issues for description to the participants. Ground rules were set and efforts made to ensure that participation of each and every group member was attained. Theoretically, the focus group method is an appropriate data collection tool in feminist leaning research and researching children and young people's life experiences since it has potential to bring out the gendered power imbalances as it provides opportunities for research participants to express their opinions and perspectives without any fear of recrimination (see Harding 1997). The views expressed belong to the group, not to individuals who make up the group. Focus groups are also appropriate in a context where mobilising participants will not be difficult, laborious or a time consuming activity. These were factors which suited the study.

### **Documentary Review**

Review and analysis of secondary data formed a very important part of the current study. Information about intervention activities and resources in place for reintegration exist in written texts and reports of actors that are involved in psychosocial programming activities in northern Uganda. A number of annual reviews of programmes, midterm review reports of interventions and end of project evaluations of PSS agencies, policies and laws were reviewed to capture the interventions in place for children affected by armed conflict. The critical issue in arriving at an understanding of interventions was the comparison of the information as documented and perceptions of key informants and the community including the child mothers about the efficacy of the interventions and the legislation in place. This also provided a better understanding of the context and how it has changed over the years.

### **Challenges Encountered During the Research Process**

The data collection process did not go without challenges. Identification, selection and conducting the interviews were not easy sailing at all. The movement of displaced persons back to their original homes did not make the process any easier as some of the child mothers had gone back to the villages for agricultural or agro-forestry economic activities (main sources of livelihood for the majority of the population) or had simply relocated and were difficult to trace.



At the community camp levels (rural area) many of the child mothers had also left the trading centres where the camps were located and returned to their original homes. Tracing them was especially difficult due to the fact that homesteads were very far apart. Local leaders and child protection committee members helped to locate the young women. Within the municipality a snowball sampling approach was eventually used to identify and select the child mothers. This strategy worked well in locating research participants and reached a level where I could interview many more primary participants if this had been necessary.

Identification, locating and interviewing FACM who had not passed through reception centres was particularly challenging. I had to rely on local community-based organisations in Lalogi (War Affected Children Association-WACA) and the child protection committee in Patiko sub-county to identify and select young women for interviews. However, despite all these challenges I was able to interview all the planned number of child mothers as well as carry out key informant interviews and focus groups. The challenges initially appeared daunting but utilisation of local structures and adopting a strategy which responded to the emergent challenges proved effective.

## **Reflection and Reflexivity**

### **Reflections on the Data Collection Process**

During the process of data collection I was mindful of my own limitations as a researcher. I was also aware of the challenges presented by my persona as male researching young mothers' experiences. I also took into consideration my own biases and perspectives during the interviews and focus group discussions. These reflections enabled me to focus on the story of the primary participants as I listened to them recounting their experiences, much of which was quite harrowing, especially their bush experiences.

Being a male I was also aware that the young women could inadvertently project or displace their disappointments on me who could be seen as an accomplice in their bush experiences. I was aware of the possibility that these frustrations could be projected on anyone representing authority. However, what made the interview process productive was also the fact that I was able to introduce myself as a child protection activist;

someone who has worked with young people in their situations before, including supporting the process of developing programmes and projects aimed at supporting young women like them. I thus, let the participants know of my role as a social worker with one of the organisations that had been supporting reintegration efforts, GUSCO.

For the child mothers who went through World Vision Uganda Children of War Rehabilitation Centre I also informed them of my field work training for a period of six months with World Vision and the fact that I knew and could remember the names of the World Vision staff that interacted with them made things better and put the young women at ease in the interview process. Sharing this information about myself made it easier for the child mothers to open up and build a relationship of trust and confidence in me.

It is my view that the fact that the child mothers felt at ease to recount their experiences and even let flow the emotions without any attempt to conceal their deepest feelings demonstrated their trust and belief in me as a person who valued them and as far as possible empathised with them and understood what they had gone through. Perhaps this also deconstructs the assumptions and arguments among feminist scholars that women with apparent deep seated resentments about betrayal by men are not able to totally open up to a male researcher who would be cast in the light of an oppressor (Reinharz, 1992). I feel that my objectives were attained and that the FACM did not withhold any critical information from me by virtue of my being a man. It is possible that the defining point in inter-gender openness in a research situation is predicated on a relationship of trust, confidence and freedom that the researched feel in the presence of the researcher. It is thus my own view that perhaps gender differences alone cannot therefore explain the outcome of a research process on topics such as gender-based violence and in which both men and women are involved. However, this is my own view and it has not been empirically tested in divergent locations among different researchers and research participants.

Another approach used to put the participants at ease was the fact that I gave them enough room to tell their story in their own ways. No pressure was exerted on them at all. In situations where the child mothers became emotionally disturbed, enough time was

also given to them to reorganise themselves, where necessary and put themselves in the right frame of mind for the continuation of the interview.

I also informed the child mothers that it was my intention that their experiences and perspectives would be used in improving/developing effective interventions for both themselves and their children born in captivity. At every point in time when I told the child mothers this, their faces brightened up and I saw that they gained more interest in the discussion and were willing to be more open and discuss with me their experiences without any reservation. It is my view that when we recognise strength, worth and value in people and make them feel important and appreciated, this in a way increases people's confidence and self-esteem which eventually enhance people's agency whenever they confront difficult circumstances. It is my belief that sometimes the research act and process provides an opportunity, in this case for FACM to tell their stories and this in itself can be an empowerment process. It is plausible that this can result in more positive outcomes for the researched when the confidence gained is sustained.

My interviews with the child mothers were not extractive but tried to give back to the young people by recognising, celebrating and emphasising their agency and resilience in spite of all that they had gone through. While I would not consider my approach as counselling it was a supportive interview process which aimed to recognise and enhance the strengths of the research participants.

As a child rights activist, there are certain things that I find unacceptable and repugnant. It was important therefore, to maintain a neutral non-judgemental attitude while listening to the stories of the young women. This is because much as I do not tolerate and condone violations of the rights of children by any party, I could understand the situations and events which led to the FACM committing heinous acts while with the LRA. As they were children themselves at the time, they simply had no choice and this demonstrates the lengths children had to go through to ensure their own survival amidst some of the greatest odds anyone could be faced with. Faced with all the harrowing stories, I had to compose myself physically and maintain controlled emotional involvement as enshrined within social work practice. My keeping composure was also important for me to fully appreciate the events in the lives of the child mothers.

### **Postscript: Reflections on Post-data Collection Period**

When I first set out to study the experiences of formerly abducted child mothers using narrative techniques I had one fear among many. I was not sure whether the young women would open up to a male researcher, considering the challenges they had gone through and also noting that these were very personal experiences. I was also concerned about how the young women would feel about the dissemination of their information through the thesis, book chapter, journal articles and other publications. Considering the uniqueness of the situation, the experiences of the young women and the fact that I was a male researcher involving himself with FACM many ethical questions were raised such as what psychological risks would I be subjecting the participants to in the process of the study, would my seeking out the FACM in any way enhance their reintegration challenges and stigmatisation and how would the resettled FACM feel being searched out for the purpose of this study. These were the questions which ran through my mind as I searched out the FACM for the study.

I developed a contingency plan including making arrangements with counselling centres to support young women who might be re-traumatised in the telling of their stories. However, in reflecting on the process and on the depth and range of information captured from the FACM and the similarity of the stories and experiences that were narrated, it makes me come to one conclusion. The young women told their stories with honesty, sincerity, frankness and in my own observation therefore truthfulness. This situation was achieved despite the ever present reality that the narration of the experiences would leave these young women exposed and vulnerable to the listener.

It is important to reflect on the reasons behind the truthfulness of the young women. What would really motivate these women to be so open about their experiences? How come they narrated intimate details without holding back and fear of whether their stories could be misused or misconstrued as I pondered over this one thing came to mind: I remembered the statement of one of the FACM who said:

sir, I would like the world to listen to my story and if it can help other children, help protect more girl children from abduction, help to generate more support for the effective reintegration of the child mothers so that we and our children could have better lives and heal the scars of war and once again believe in the humanity of mankind then I would tell it over and over again.

This was a deep and quite touching expression which made me reflect on my own limitations in helping in the realisation of the dreams of these young women. I recognise that there are hundreds of such young women scattered all over Northern Uganda. How best can they be reached with effective support? How come earlier interventions have seemingly left many FACM in need and why do they still complain of stigmatisation? I realised that much need to be done and as a student researcher was aware that I could not do much to change the circumstances of the young women, other than by telling their stories.

As much as my study makes a contribution to understanding the situations of the FACM and other war-affected children, I realise that it cannot do much to redress their situations directly. Listening to the young women also made me reflect on the social work concept of professional helplessness where one is aware of developmental challenges and problems but cannot do much about them at that material point in time, or can only do little but not enough to transform the situation. However, through all my interactions with the FACM, and other research participants, I maintained self-awareness and while I empathised with them I was aware of my limitations. I therefore listened to them and provided information and encouragement where it was needed but did not promise them what I knew I or other agencies could not provide at the time.

## **Data Analysis**

Following from the epistemological and ontological stance of the study, relevant analysis methods and approaches were adopted. The method of analysis chosen was also tied to the theoretical framework of the study. Data were analysed using content and thematic analysis, based on the template analysis (TA) approach (King 2004). Major themes coming out of the stories, transcripts and experiences were identified and analysed to determine what meanings they had for the participants, and how they shape the participants' interactions and functioning within the community (Reissman, 2003). The position adopted in this study is that the information generated by the narratives are social constructions of the FACM based on their own perceptions; experiences and interpretations of the world around them (Murray, 2008; Robson, 2002).

### **Analysis of Field data (Key informant Interviews, Narrative Interviews and Focus Groups)**

All interviews and focus group discussions were tape-recorded and later transcribed verbatim. These were then analysed thematically using Template Analysis. TA is a useful method in analysing textual data emerging from fieldwork (Cassells et al., 2009; King, 2004). Template analysis involves reducing large amount of data into a framework of a few pages to simplify the process of analysis of substantial amounts of raw data (King, 2004). It is an adaptation of thematic analysis in qualitative research and has been successfully applied in the field of qualitative research with human subjects.

Since King's (2004) seminal paper, several studies have utilised the method to interpret textual data of social phenomena and the meanings research participants derives from them (see Troung and Simmons, 2010; Andersen et al., 2007; Dries and Pepermans, 2008; Wainright and Waring, 2007; Cassells et al., 2009). This demonstrates the applicability, efficacy and ease of usage of template analysis in a variety of fields. In their application of template analysis to strategic marketing, Troung and Simmons, (2010, p.246) writes:

the template approach allows codes and categories to be presented hierarchically to aid the analytical process in categorising and unitizing data ...while bearing some resemblance to grounded theory, template analysis is less prescriptive and more flexible in its approach to analysis, allowing the researcher to amend its use to the needs of the research project...the template analysis introduces structure and consistency into the categorising and unitizing of qualitative in-depth interview transcripts.

This view is also shared by Wainright and Waring (2007) who contend that the beauty of template analysis in comparison with grounded theory is its flexibility and ease of adaptation without necessarily applying puristic inductive procedures and also the prospect of developing broad conceptual themes which can be clustered into broader categories.

I therefore found TA quite helpful and appropriate in my research as I had substantial textual data from multiple sources. The similarity in the themes explored and the interview/discussion guide made it easier to construct an initial template based on the

research tools. This was modified by the first few interviews and later again finalised by reading through all the textual data collected and applying them to the initial templates (framework for data analysis). While I could have utilised grounded theory approach or conventional narrative analysis, I needed the flexibility exhibited by TA considering that there was a mixture of data from various groups within the research area (see Troung and Simmons, 2010).

TA was also particularly applicable to the broader philosophical approach of the study which borrowed extensively from phenomenology to explore the lived experiences of the research participants (see also Wainright and Waring, 2007). I found it useful and appropriate to utilise TA method because it presents a theoretical middle ground between realist ontology and constructivism. Its philosophical stance also allows for the fact that there are multiple realities, and therefore accepts a multiplicity of perspectives in the interpretation of social realities (King, 2004). It also recognises that the interpretations of these multiple realities will be contingent on the social context and the disposition or assumptions of the researcher.

The main strategy in TA is to determine the main themes for the study and derive the subsequent smaller level themes in a nested but orderly hierarchical way (King, 2004). In my case, an initial template was developed by utilising information from the main research questions and the interview guides which had been developed prior to the commencement of fieldwork to determine initial codes (King, 2004). Manual analysis was relied upon in ordering the information on an acceptable template. This involved pulling out a large manila paper (3/4 of a square meter) and an initial template was drawn in pencil and all emerging themes and sub-themes added to it as the data collection process evolved. This was later enriched by considering the themes emerging from the data. Further adjustment to the template was made during the data transcription process when more codes were applied to the initial template and modification made to the original template (Cassells et al, 2009; Dries and Pepermans, 2008).

The process of developing the template was quite laborious and it included reading through the texts over and over again to pick out all the key thematic issues. These were listed on a piece of paper and categorised based on their level of significance and relationships to the research questions and aims. This was applied to the narrative

interviews, the key informant interviews and the focus groups transcripts. Transcripts of texts from interviews with various participants were considered in turns to develop emerging themes. Focus group data were also brought in later to further enrich the templates and make reflections on upcoming issues. In constructing the templates I was however, also mindful of new emerging themes which were not considered critical at the commencement of the study. This process was repeated for all textual data until no new and significant codes or themes were emerging.

While I used TA I was aware that this is only a tool to help in organising data and does not bring out the issues in the study or derive understanding about experiences. Data interpretation was thus guided by my research aims, the research questions, theoretical frameworks and my own epistemological stance and assumptions.

### **Analysis of Secondary Data**

Secondary data were analysed using content analysis following some identified criteria and parameters. These criteria followed from the main objectives of the study and the research questions. For the interventions, the focus was on analysing their targeting, reach, strategies, quality of interventions indicators and important assumptions. Other criteria included the potential and strategies for lesson learning, durability of the interventions and perspectives of the target groups and key informants on planned activities.

### **Ethical Procedures**

Ethical approval for the study was obtained from the University of Huddersfield's School Research Ethics Panel and the research was carried out with full regard to ethical considerations. Consent of the respondents was sought after explaining that the study might require them to give information they may not be comfortable with. Before commencement of fieldwork, preparations were made to ensure that the data collection process went well. I developed the data collection tools and had them reviewed by my supervisory team and prepared the necessary protocols like introduction letters to the local authorities who had to give permission for the study to proceed. Overall permission for the study was obtained from the Uganda National Council for Science and Technology, the body charged with regulating research in Uganda. At the commencement of fieldwork, the researcher paid a courtesy call on the Chief



Administrative Officers for the target area and obtained clearance and permission to commence the study. This was important to ensure that the objectives of the research were not misconstrued considering the fact that the location of the research is politically viable.

During the interview/discussion, participants were given freedom to skip questions or issues they were not comfortable with. Confidentiality and privacy of participants were assured by conducting interviews in private locations or at a safe distance away from other people.

Taking into consideration the fact that the study involved participants reliving their experiences with the rebels, arrangements were made with one of the counselling centres to provide follow-up psychosocial support where necessary. In the event that participants might be hesitant about participation, arrangements were made to replace them with other people who did not feel threatened in any way by the study. This, however, did not happen as all identified and selected participants agreed to participate in the study and share their experiences.

Efforts were made to protect the identity of the study participants. In no circumstances were the research participants identified with their real names and in the presentation of findings the participants have been identified by the use of pseudonyms (see appendix 1 and 2). The recruitment procedures and interview arrangements did not present any known risk to the participants' anonymity. This is because most of the potential research participants were known by the local authorities, PSS Agencies and Community Resource Persons. I therefore used the same contacts to locate the participants, especially the young women for the narrative interviews. The purpose of meeting the research participants was thus only known to a few people who also worked with the latter as a wider network of support. Furthermore, since the researcher speaks the local language (Luo), he interviewed the research participants directly without the use of translators<sup>22</sup>. This helped to protect the identity of the participants further.

Interviews were carried out in secure environment where only the interviewer and the participant(s) were privy to the discussion except in focus group discussions. Information

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<sup>22</sup> Data collected in the local dialect Luo was later translated into English, but the original expressions (including repetitions) of the participants maintained as much as possible.

from participants has been made accessible only to the researcher and his supervisors. It is important to indicate here that tapes and field notes have been kept in very secure locations and after data were transcribed, a password was used to protect the information on the computer. Permission was sought from the participants to use direct quotations in the presentation of findings. This was duly agreed to by the participants who assented to their voice being used in the report by signing the consent form or making a consent statement. The key informants and members of the focus groups also gave their consent to use the information and quote them directly.

## **Summary and Conclusions**

In chapter five I have presented and justified the methodology utilised in the investigation of the experiences of the formerly abducted child mothers. I have also described the data collection process, the methods and tools used data analysis and ethical procedures undertaken. The following chapters discuss the findings of the study and begin in chapter six with a discussion of the experiences of the girls and child mothers while with the rebels in the bush.

## **PART II: PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS**

### **Introduction**

In this part, I present the findings from the primary data collection exercise. The findings are presented in four chapters beginning with chapter six which looks at the intra-bush experiences of the girls while with the rebels in captivity. Chapter seven makes an assessment of the relational and other factors affecting the reintegration process. Chapter eight presents the findings from the assessment of the community structures for reintegration. Finally, in Chapter nine, I present and discuss stakeholders' perceptions of the implementation of programmes for FACM in the two districts of Northern Uganda. While in this part I make some efforts to question the key findings, a more critical analysis and discussion in light of the literature and theoretical framework are presented in Part III.

## CHAPTER SIX

### THE INTRA-BUSH EXPERIENCE OF ABDUCTED GIRLS AND CHILD MOTHERS

#### Introduction

In this chapter, I delve into the hidden and intricate world of the child mothers while they were with the rebels. In bringing out the girls' bush experiences, I have relied extensively on their personal narratives, although these are complemented by key informant interviews and secondary data sources. Understanding the intra-bush experiences of the child mothers is important in appreciating the post-reunion reintegration challenges and options. Notably, the subjection of the girls to physically gruelling activities; exposure to battles, injuries and killings; physical and psychological torture and humiliation, coerced sex at the age of 12 or younger and forced motherhood, demonstrates not only a violation of their rights and bodies but also propels them into adult roles and responsibilities for which they are neither mentally nor physically equipped. On a positive note, I present the motivation for escape and the circumstances that made it possible for the FACM to return home.

#### Circumstances Predisposing Abduction

Most of the girls in the study had been abducted either from home or on their way to school, either at night or during broad daylight as depicted in the following testimonies:

I was abducted on my way to Guru-guru. I was riding a bicycle from Lacor because my aunt was in Lacor hospital. We also used to get food from Guru-guru. Although insecurity was at its peak, people would still travel for lack of an alternative. It was at around 6pm when the rebels abducted me. They removed the bicycle from me and cut it into pieces while I was watching, so we walked and went and stayed at Got-atoo for three weeks (Harriet Abalo).

When the rebels came, we were just from school... We were six; and out of the six, I think they just liked me, we *hadn't reached home*. *They told me to show them the path going to the main road*. [After moving with them a few meters] I said this is the path going to the main road....yet many of them had already gone ahead. Raska Lukwiya said I should go with them, I was very frightened; I started trembling, he said why are you trembling? Just show us the way then you will

come back. I started walking, thinking that after showing them the way they would release me and I would come back home. As we walked, we passed homes, they started looting and catching chicken. They caught a very big cock and gave it to me to carry and I realised I was already taken by the rebels (Anena Jackie)

The vulnerability of the girls to abduction was partly explained by the rebels' strategy of abducting young children who would be more amenable to implementing rebel objectives and activities. It was the view of the key informants, especially local government and NGO staff that the decision to abduct young girls barely able to understand sexual matters was apparently predicated on the presumption that they would be free from HIV/AIDS.

Most of the FACM expressed a sense of betrayal: an inaction which resulted in their abduction. It is understandable that children felt betrayed because they expected to be protected by their families, communities and government, but this did not happen. According to the Paramount Chief of the Acholi:

The girls and boys who were abducted by the rebels did not go on their own accord but as a result of failure in their protection. As members of society; we did not prevent their abductions. All stakeholders in child protection failed these children. The local leadership structures, the local government, the central government, the police, the military, the community, the family in which these children were domiciled; the religious leaders and the cultural institutions did not effectively provide protection.

As indicated in the quotation, it is possible that such abduction were not preventable on the part of the majority of the population as the rule of law had severely broken down: minimal support from government and refusal by the rebel to spare children from the conflict.

### **Critical Events in the Bush**

In the context of this study, a critical event is conceived as an event which affects the psychological, emotional and social well-being of an individual. A critical event can thus precipitate the development of a crisis in the life of a person. It is therefore, important to point out that most of the events in the lives of the child mothers starting from abduction can be termed as critical events, including Maggie's testimony:

After abducting me together with my brothers, the first terrible thing I witnessed was that all my brothers were killed there and then. Out of the 26, who were abducted that day, I was the only one who was left alive. They tied me with a rope and we started walking and crossed one of the streams called Ayugi going towards Kilak hill. Upon reaching Kilak Hills we did not take long before we encountered government troops. They started firing at people....people scattered and ran in different directions. As for me I was still tied up with the rope (Ladira Maggie)

As indicated by Maggie, critical events represented significant turning points in the lives of the girls over which they had little control, except in their response to mitigate further risks.

The first critical event the girls were unable to prevent was abduction:

I was abducted from Kalil. Although we had already left to take refuge in town, we went back to pick some food. That was when we were abducted. We were staying with one of our aunts. We were ten who were staying with her and out of the ten, three were her sons and we were all abducted at night. We spent that night with the rebels and the next day we continued walking, and on that day three people among my family members were killed..... On the fifth day two other relatives were killed because some of them were weak. For example, one of my *aunt's sons had cough so he could not carry luggage* and could not manage walking long distance. So, this one was also killed from one of the homesteads by having a roof of a granary thrown over him and setting it ablaze (Apiyo Brenda).

Sexual exploitation constituted another critical event in their lives. The girls were assigned to men who demanded sex almost immediately, without consideration for their physical or biological development. This was a traumatising experience for all the girls interviewed, as many of them were virgins. One FACM narrated:

When we reached Sudan they started distributing us to men, but for me I did not know that the kind of distribution was to give you to a man as a wife... And then I was finally given to that person that I stayed with. But he was not a good person he was fierce and he was already old and had grey hair. According to their rules, you were not supposed to start having sex with a girl until she is 13 or 15 years old but with this man he started right away, the very minute I was given to him so I never had any easy life and besides he was punishing me in different ways. I stayed there for two years. I had a lot of injuries because he was always battering me (Aloyo Maria).

Findings further indicated that the girls tried all that was possible to resist sexual exploitation without success, as depicted in the following testimonies:

One day Otti [senior rebel commander] called me to go and sleep with him. I refused, he then called Amony and she also refused to go. He called Anek, and asked if there was water, and she said yes. He told her to bring it to him. That water was poured on our bodies until we were completely wet. He ordered us to stand throughout the night, which we did. That night we stood inside the house, wet. He called Lamwaka and started having sex with her in front of us. The following day, again water was poured on us, my legs were swollen because of standing for a long time. On the third day, he again called the girl and had sex *with her, we asked for forgiveness and he refused and said: 'I am going to sleep with this girl in front of you so that you become envious'* (Jackie Anena).

... He waited when all the ladies had gone to the well but he told me not to go to the well and so I did not go. Then he told me to go to his house. I went and stayed in his house and then he asked me to go with him to bed but I refused. He then *picked a 'wire lock'*[long metallic object for locking a bicycle] and started *threatening me with it...he hit me with the wire lock and I started crying... and he picked a gun and started cocking it; he asked me: 'Have you ever seen a person who has been killed?' I said: 'no', then he said: 'In the evening am calling you back here, let me wait and see if you are going to refuse then you may have to choose between death and life'. He then asked: 'What do you choose between death and life?' And I told him that I choose life* (Adero Flo)

As seen in the testimonies above, the resistance put up by the girls against sexual exploitation was not a one-off struggle. For some of the girls it happened over several days and weeks. They only submitted when they were threatened with death. This shows how far girls go to protect their dignity, a clear demonstration of agency and resilience.

The forced sexual relationship and repeated rape of the girls ultimately resulted in pregnancy for most of them. Conception and motherhood were thus other critical events in the lives of the young girls<sup>23</sup>. Discussion with the FACM indicated that most were not prepared to embrace motherhood in the bush. In their own words: it was the most unlikely place in which to bear and raise a child. Most were first-time mothers who were neither biologically nor mentally ready for this role. Some of the FACM revealed sentiments suggesting that initially they wanted to kill the children or hoped that they would miscarry, as indicated by Alobo:

At that age I was not ready for a child, because from home I would see those who *are old enough giving birth. Here I was a child having a child also. I didn't like it*

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23 Reports and records at the Psychosocial support agencies such as GUSCO and World Vision suggest that the majority of the girls who stayed in the bush for more than three years all either came back with children or were pregnant, having conceived in the bush.

at all; it gave me a lot of worries and I thought I may not manage to take care of him. Even when I was pregnant I thought of aborting. But once the child came, I *didn't have any bad feelings towards him although even in the process of delivery I was thinking of killing it but I didn't have energy. If I was to deliver alone I would have killed it because I was not prepared for it.*

This implies that adjustment to motherhood in the bush was not an overnight issue for the girls. Interviews with FACM who delivered in the bush also indicated that many girls tried to kill the children and some only came to show love to their children much later on. It was only after a few weeks, and for some of the child mothers, months, that they developed love for their children. In the subsequent pregnancies and deliveries, the child mothers had come to accept their situation as part of their destiny. Unlike in the normal Acholi society where advice on motherhood, including some traditional rituals, is given to expectant mothers to prepare them for birth, this was not the case in the bush. Explaining the difficulties of first time motherhood one of the FACM mentioned: “you see what your friend is doing and that is exactly what you would also do”.

The agency of the child mothers came out clearly in the way in which they coped with their motherhood and parental responsibilities under very difficult circumstances in the bush to ensure that their children stayed alive and were fed. One of the child mothers (Ladira Maggie) recounted:

I realised that my own childhood was already lost. The only way through which I could redeem this lost childhood is by ensuring that my children survive the turbulence in the bush and return with me home alive, perhaps they would be the ones who would also take care of me in the future.

Ladira Maggie eventually returned home on her own volition, motivated by consideration for the safety of her three children who had survived many battles in the bush.

It is therefore, important to point out that while the choices were limited in the bush; any available option for survival was weighed before any action was taken.



### **Child Mothers as Child Soldiers (Fighters) in the Bush**

Narrative interviews with the child mothers suggests that on abduction, they were all made to undergo military training as their primary duty was soldiers, all other roles were secondary. Considering that many were abducted at age 9-11 the training took place in the days after abduction when they were still young and un-attached to men as wives and child mothers. Many of the young girls (later FACM) experienced battles of different magnitudes, even before undergoing any training, for example one of the child mothers (Aci Lorna) noted:

We walked and crossed the stream [Unyama] and [immediately] entered an ambush. People started running [away in fear and panic], for me I was still tied up with the rope, they started pulling me even among thorns now... they were just pulling on them but we managed to get away. In that encounter other people got a chance of escaping, some were killed and others were captured by the army [government]... but for me I could not escape because I was still tied up.

In the bush therefore, there were about three circumstances predisposing the child mothers to battles: when the women are chosen to accompany a standby fighting brigade to Uganda (quite frequent); indirect ambushes by SPLA, local militia and other fighting forces within Sudan; and attacks by the Ugandan government forces on the LRA bases in Sudan, especially during operation "*iron fist*".

Narrative interviews suggested that many child mothers (including expectant ones) and girls were made to accompany their husbands for operation to Uganda from Sudan, with or without their children. In such situations they were made to perform all roles of fighters including direct confrontations and responding with fire during ambushes. They were also selected in smaller fighting groups to carry out raids and counter raids on UPDF positions within the bushes of Uganda or to loot foodstuffs. Some of the child mothers were high ranking rebel soldiers, like in the case of (Ladira Maggie) who was a lieutenant in the rebel establishment. She was commander of a unit which comprised both male and female soldiers and was also a wife to one of the top commanders with whom she had an abusive relationship which forced her to later escape and abandon the LRA. Ladira had several missions to Uganda in the same standby as her husband and travelled with her children on many occasions. She revealed that when commanding battles her children would be carried by other junior soldiers. In her case, her 'favourable

treatment' was because of her rank and also due to the fact that her husband was one of the top rebel commanders.

Within Southern Sudan the rebels mainly fought with the SPLA rebels at the behest of Khartoum government and also to protect their own territorial bases. Child mothers were also forced to engage local communities within Sudan to look for food, especially in the operation iron fist aftermath when their gardens and food stores were destroyed by the UPDF assault. In such situations most of the rebel forces were preoccupied with fighting the UPDF and the child mothers had to look for food for their households on their own. The food had to be taken by force after exchange of fire, and in many cases shedding of blood. As depicted by one of the child mothers (Anena Jackie) "if you did not fight you do not get the food and no one would give it to you". The Child mothers thus had to choose between fighting for the food and starving in the bush. Anena Jackie added:

In 2002, we went up the mountain but did not take long. The UPDF soldiers were everywhere and there was no food. One day, I was very hungry, my child was one year old but he was still breastfeeding and he was good. They would send girls to go and look for food; sometimes you *eat only one piece of potato. We were around 100 people in Kony's home.* One day we decided to go and look for food. I decided to come with them, *leaving my child behind. ... And we all had guns because we were trained on how to use them. You must fight with Lutugu Mordir [a tribe in Southern Sudan] to get food because they also had guns (Anena Jackie).*

According to the child mothers, while their engagement in direct confrontation was fairly limited when based in the Sudan in the days before operation iron fist, this changed afterwards. In the aftermath of operation iron fist everyone (girls, boys, and child mothers) was given a gun and told to defend themselves. Many of the child mothers had to take up arms and join their husbands in fighting for survival.

It is clear that whether in Sudan or in the bushes of Northern Uganda, the child mothers faced significant risks and challenges as soldiers within the bush. Testimonies of the child mothers indicated that many of their compatriots died in battles, some lost their children and many were severely maimed in battles. In some cases, children were shot dead with their mothers as they engaged other fighting forces, while others died on the back of their mothers who escaped alive.<sup>24</sup> During battles therefore, the child mothers

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<sup>24</sup> Interviews with formerly abducted child mothers.

were faced with a complex situation: they had to ensure protection of their children, born, unborn and also fight for their own survival. One child mother remarked:

*As a child mother fighter you had many challenges. You had to hold your child or in some cases children, carry your guns and munitions as well as other children's paraphernalia and take cover at the same time. This was no easy feat...actually in some cases you are forced to either throw the gun or run (if we have to retreat) or throw down the child...which was a more difficult option! We always tried to ensure that we have the children at all times. As a mother you feel so bad for your children being caught up in this very difficult environment (Oroma Nancy).*

In other situations some of the girls/child mothers were made to kill other abductees or those rebels deemed to have violated orders or shown cowardice at the front line (battle). All this was made to harden them as fighters and make them ruthless. In the narration of their experience with the rebels, participation in killing innocent children exerted a strong impact on the girls. Their recall of these events was accompanied by regret and deep emotional pain. In other situations the participants wept openly when they remembered such incidents and realized the full weight of what happened in the bush.

The exposure of the FACM to battles and other combat environment in the bush significantly predisposed them to critical events. Such critical events which can induce trauma and traumatic events include killing, witnessing macabre incidents and the trauma of battle itself. It is therefore conceivable that girls and child mothers who get such significant exposure would have more difficulties and challenges reintegrating within the community compared to those that did not. Consultation with agency staff in the rehabilitation centres also indicated that child mothers who got exposed to significant amount of trauma through their direct or indirect participation in battle and as fighters often show more signs of trauma including depression, withdrawal and isolations. Comparatively, it was revealed that those with less exposure to battles did not present with much trauma symptoms.

### **Other Critical Events**

Other critical events included being subjected to gruelling tasks and activities such as having to walk long distances and carry heavy loads that sometimes caused bodily injuries. Illustrating this situation, FACM made the following observations:

One day from Uganda, we were attacked and there was serious fighting; the UPDF caught us unawares. I was given a mattress (beddings) to

carry. At one point, they bombed one of the bee hives and the bees came out and stung me everywhere. I ran and found myself in an area where I could not run away. I just lay down there crying for help. That was in a place called Palaro; one man called Okot came and rescued me. I could not carry the mattress because the UPDF were chasing us. When we caught up with the others, they said I should be killed, because I left the mattress and wanted to escape. It was Okot who saved me from the ire of the rebels (Anena Jackie).

When we reached Sudan we stayed but there were a lot of restrictions and on my side it was difficult since I was even still young at the time and I could not easily walk, so what happened was I thought I might not even reach Sudan. So one day my legs were swollen and I could not walk and the commander that I was walking with started telling us that those with swollen legs should be killed. One person however, came and said that we should not be killed since the security behind us seems to be fine we should first be allowed to rest. So we rested and I felt some improvement. The luggage I had was removed and I remained with nothing, then we continued walking until we reached Sudan (Akeru Damalie Flo).

The inhuman treatment and superhuman expectations to which the rebels exposed the children greatly endangered their lives. As noted in some of the testimonies above, some girls were killed when they failed to cope with these physically strenuous activities. It is clear that exposure to physically gruelling activities had a bearing on the child mothers' survivability in the bush and also impacted their adjustment to normal life in the post-bush period depending on the levels of physical disability experienced.

## **Subjugation and Exploitation of the Girls during Captivity**

### **General Humiliation as a Result of Deviation**

Findings further indicate that the political economy and socio-political requirements of life in the rebel camp were that of obedience and "blind and forced loyalty". No one was expected to question any authority. Perceived disobedience was heavily punished. This could involve severe corporal punishment or psychological torture. Humiliations and macabre socialisation (like killing) were used as tools to deprive the children of their sense of dignity, confidence and humanity as well as the hope of returning to normal society: how do you live with what you have done out of the bush? An FACM depicted it this way:

I thought life there was not good enough so I started thinking of escaping. But it was very difficult for me to escape because some of our colleagues who tried to

escape were killed. Those who were caught escaping were brought and given to us to kill. They would give you a machete or a very big log with which to hit the person until she dies. So I was sincerely afraid to escape because I knew if I did, I would be killed like other people (Anena Mary).

Another added:

Kony said we had a plan to escape at night and a boy whom they alleged we had a plan with was taken and shot dead. I was only lucky that I had a baby. During that time I only kept quiet, because if you may talk to anybody, they will just kill you. In fact I was too fearful to talk about anything. I started staying amongst the sick people in a place called Jabulamone around Juba town, it is also 6 miles to reach Juba town (Eunice Acora).

Interviews with the child mothers revealed that some girls were executed when they had miscarriages in the bush because the miscarriages were perceived as self-induced. Despite all these, the child mothers did not consider themselves useless but kept on believing in their capacity and ability to one day obtain their freedom.

### **The Role of Bush Wives**

As pointed out earlier, on abduction the girls were allocated to a man who was expected to become a husband to them. Therefore, in addition to their roles as fighters, girls were expected to perform wifely roles which included bearing of children, cooking food, washing and generally attending to the needs of the man and their children. A situation therefore, arose of child-wives taking care of their children and husbands in a context which was itself vulnerable to attack. It is imperative to point out that most of the child mothers were propelled to an adult role without adequate preparation. It is also worth pointing out that for the girls, in addition to their motherly and wifely roles, they had to ensure their own protection from attack by other forces.

### **Relay of Wives**

The subjugation and violation of the rights of the girls and child mothers was also exhibited in how they were treated after the death or defection of their so-called husbands. In such situations, the child mothers were redistributed to whomever the rebel commander chose. One of the child mothers whose husband had been killed by the rebels for apparent dissent said:

One day, a Tata lorry came and they put us on the vehicle and drove back to Nisitu. That is when they wanted to kill him [her then allocated husband]. We just heard from the people that Otti Lagony was killed....We stayed in his home but one day the nine of us [wives of the previous husband] were sent to different homes. *I was taken to Kony's place, from there he made me his wife and in 2000 I gave birth (Anena Jackie).*

As indicated in this quotation, the 'relay' of the girls as wives among rebel commanders and officers did not take into account the feelings of the girls or those of their children. The latter were expected to naturally develop affection for their new "fathers". The relay of wives was therefore another humiliating experience for the girls and this had an overall effect on their dignity. The girls were used as objects for the satisfaction of the interests of the dominant male powers who were in physical and psychological control of their lives, sexually and physically. It is possible that the practice of relaying wives, especially where relationships with subsequent rebel husbands were more abusive, led to a higher degree of distrust for men in general and could have sown a seed of negativity about long-term relationships. These issues are explored in more depth in Chapter Nine.

### **Oppression by Senior Wives**

The arrangements for allocating wives in the bush implied that the rebels, especially the commanders, had a harem of wives<sup>25</sup>. When new batches of girl-abductees were brought these would be apportioned to the various rebel officers as future wives. The name given to these girls was 'ting ting'<sup>26</sup>. These were initially placed under a senior wife. Some of the senior wives took advantage of their privileged positions to physically and socially abuse the new arrivals in their homesteads:

*From Jabulen, I was taken to Lagony's home. In his home there were seven girls and I was the eighth. I got one of his wives called Agnes who was very rude and arrogant. If she wanted to take her bath, you had to first scrub/ brush her leg, clean it with a towel before taking her bathing water in the bath shelter. After bathing she would leave the basin and the knickers for you to go and wash (Aci Lorna).*

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<sup>25</sup> Narrative interviews with FACM

<sup>26</sup> This concept in the rebel speak implies a young girl who is yet to be taken over as a wife by the rebels. Interviews indicated that when girls are abducted at a tender age, they are made to stay until they start experiencing puberty, and then are taken over as real wives, with the man demanding sex from them.

Contrary to the generally held view that punishment came predominantly from male, the girls were subjected to oppression at the hands of the powerful and influential figure of the senior wife. Interviews with reception centre and other NGO staff, however, indicated that many of such women also returned home through similar routes as other FACM (chapter seven).

## **Escape from Captivity: defining factors**

### **Motivation for Escape and Circumstances Predisposing Escape/Return**

The desire of most girls was to escape and rejoin the normal (free) society. According to the girls this was always strong but that opportunity to escape was often rare. Some girls who tried to escape were captured and killed, and this acted as deterrent to many others.

Those who eventually mustered the courage to escape were reportedly motivated by successful escape stories of peers and stories of a better life outside the bush. The decision to escape was also fuelled by heightened levels of suffering in the bush and by love for children born in the bush and for desire to ensure these were seen by the family back home<sup>27</sup>. The child mothers began to imagine a different future for their children and they realised that this could only be assured by rejoining normal society<sup>28</sup>. Yet for some desire to have full custody of their children was another motivation as revealed by one FACM who had a disagreement with the father of the children:

There was only one reason that made me escape... [she wanted to keep her children]...because if it was life I thought that the life we had in captivity was what life was all about. I escaped because if I had not done it, Bogi [her bush husband whom she disagreed with] was going to take Yoba [her child] away and by now the children would be in Juba. So, I decided that it would be better to escape than lose my children; that was why I convinced my friends and we escaped (Ladira Maggie).

Other girls exploited their familiarity with the rebels and the knowledge of locality to initiate their escape. According to one FACM:

In 2004 I was shifted together with my then husband to a place called jubalomone, which was a sick bay for the rebels, around Juba town, it is only 6

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<sup>27</sup> Interview with child mothers

<sup>28</sup> It is possible that many FACM while in the bush could have not anticipated the challenges of single motherhood for children fathered by rebels in the normal society.

miles to reach Juba town. We started digging there but got to know that if we escaped and report to the Sudanese government forces we would be well received. In May 2004 we escaped and to one barracks called motala (after mutually planning the escape with my husband). From the barracks those soldiers [Sudanese armed forces] took us to one place near river Nile. We stayed there for two days as prisoners again we were taken to another barracks and again taken to jail in another barracks. We were locked up in jail for two weeks in the hand of Sudanese army. So one day Bigombe Atuku and Richard who was in charge of the children who escaped from captivity came to world vision in Sudan. So they went to the barracks, they took us and brought us to the world vision centre (Aci Lorna)

The situational factors that favoured return appeared to be constructed by both the will and power of the girls and the opportunities that came by, although as shown in the preceding quotation, it was not always without challenge of another nature other than that experienced in the bush. According to some key informants, other FACM returned during the protracted peace negotiations between the government and the rebels (2005-2007). During this time many child mothers were released by the rebels as a gesture of goodwill for the peace process.

### **Risk Management during the Return Process (journey back home from the bush)**

The process of return, especially for those who escaped on their own, was fraught with significant risks. Stories were told of girls who escaped and were re-kidnapped by the rebels and bludgeoned to death. This therefore, indicates that the decision to escape was taken only after careful thought and considerations of the circumstances, as well as knowledge of the ultimate consequence of their actions in case the plan aborts.

The child mothers therefore, exhibited considerable care and agency in managing their escape to ensure they did not fall prey to recapture. In managing risks, many escaped at night, rehearsing a well known route but keeping clear of the positions of the rebels and other fighting forces. It also worked to the advantage of the child mothers during their escape that they had their children with them, thus providing some reassurance to people coming into contact with them that they meant no harm.



## **Summary and Conclusions**

This chapter has endeavoured to show the journey the child mothers undertook involuntarily starting with their abduction, bush experience and a discussion of the return process. The circumstances predisposing the children to abduction were discussed as well as the reported failure of child protection systems and stakeholders to protect children. The chapter also presented the critical events the children were unable to resist while in the bush, including sexual exploitation, forced motherhood, and other difficult experiences. I show in the chapter that many children tried to muster courage and strength to resist sexual abuse although they had to eventually give in due to the rebel establishment's situational power over them.

Other critical events to which the girls were exposed during their time in the bush included killing, witnessing death, exposure to deadly battles, walking long distances and carrying heavy luggage. I have also demonstrated that the girls were subjugated and exploited, including being passed between different men as concubines. They were expected to perform roles of wife, mother and fighter at the same time and subjected to oppression by powerful "senior" wives. The chapter also discussed the circumstances predisposing escape and eventual return of the child mothers and how the risks associated with such a process were managed and mitigated.

In chapter seven, I explore the post-bush relationships between the FACM who have returned home and the significant people in their lives. Chapter seven therefore explores in greater detail the nature of the relationship between the FACM and their children; the interactions of the FACM and their parents and extended family members as well as their in-laws. The nature of the relationships and interactions between the FACM and their peers and the wider community is also presented as well as the peer-to-peer support among the FACM themselves. Other factors affecting their RR are also explored.

# **CHAPTER SEVEN**

## **RELATIONAL AND OTHER FACTORS AFFECTING RESETTLEMENT AND REINTEGRATION**

### **Introduction**

In this chapter, I explore the thematic issue of relationship and how it influences the reintegration of the FACM. The FACM are involved in a web of relationships, which entail their family members (including their children, parents, in-laws and extended family) and their peers. Other relationships exist between the FACM and general community members, suitors, and local government personnel. In chapter seven a description of the nature of the relationships, including the factors that explain positive or negative relationship between the FACM and those with whom they interact, is also presented. I also show that the nature of the existing relationship with all these different people is dependent on other social and contextual factors.

Apart from relationships, the other major issues addressed in this chapter are: the nature of the return process<sup>29</sup> and the route of return from rebel captivity; the factors that determined the nature of return and its effects on reintegration. Others include: significance of group support for FACM reintegration; role of child mother agency in reintegration; and the influences of gender in the reintegration process as well as its role in the acceptability of children of the young women. Data for chapter seven came from narrative interviews with the FACM, focus group with the general community, child protection committee members, and key informants.

### **Post-bush Relationship between Child Mothers and their Children**

Overall the post-bush relationship between the FACM and their children who were born in captivity has been very positive although, as indicated in chapter six, the child mothers initially had difficulties in accepting their motherhood roles. Moreover, for many of them, it has also been indicated that one of the greatest motivations for escape was the

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<sup>29</sup> Process of leaving rebel captivity, either by escaping, being released or rescued by UPDF and coming back home.

well-being of their children. The issue of FACM fighting to defend the rights and interests of their children when taunted by other children about their circumstances, for example, calling them demeaning names, also illustrates the strong bond that exists between the FACM and their children.

Narrative interviews revealed that that many FACM have chosen to remain with their children instead of abandoning them as suitors and other people pressurized them to do.

I see no one among us who has a husband and is living happily. You may get a marriage partner but after, may be, producing a child with him; he will just ...leave you (Ladira Maggie).

When I was admitted with my child in the hospital, this man said that I have rebel children...so even if the children were to die there it wasn't *his concern*, and he would not come to the hospital to visit us. At home, he was often drunk and would not buy essential items such as paraffin, soap, etc. He used to insult me a lot. So one time I lost my temper and I almost killed him. I locked him in the house and set the house on fire and I left and went to fetch water. I think fortunately people saved his life, and I left him thereafter (Abalo Harriet)

Despite the seemingly positive relationships and love for their children, however, some of the FACM admitted having difficulties managing their relationships with them. There are reported cases where the FACM were indirectly blaming their own children for their failure to sustain a relationship or live a better life, with some resorting to excessive physical punishment of the child:

I used to look at my children as if they are the ones who brought me problems... it is because of them that I am suffering. Well I would beat them and even quarrel with them. The girl child was very stubborn so I would always beat her and while beating her, I would remember the condition I am in (sic)....*I would not only beat her for her mistakes but for all the problems I was going through...* However, when I started getting quotations from the Bible, I realised that what I went through was not the making of the child. I then started looking at the children like they are not the ones bringing me problems (Adero Flo).

The bad thoughts I had about the children was first of all instigated by my step-mother...she would say that my children do not have a father that these are *children who have been brought from the bush*,... *they* [the relatives] are always irritating me. They say that they do not have time to take care of such children and at times they call them Kitgum children [presumably areas where she could have conceived the children]. So the young child was the one who was very weak and sickly and when he is admitted in the hospital, no one comes to see me. So I stay with the child and those who have pity are the ones who assist me (Abalo Harriet).

In practice therefore, some of the FACM were indirectly putting blame on their children for their personal dilemmas arising from their bush experiences. Could this be because of the limited self-confidence in some of these young women? Or is it due to the absence of effective social support framework? It is possible that where FACM felt accepted and supported by the community they have not gone ahead to vent their anger on their children. However, perceived social rejection could generate regrets among the FACM which manifests itself in poor relationships, including with own children. Interviews with NGO staff and other key informants also reinforced the above views.

It is also possible that the dysfunctional relationship some of the FACM have with their children could be due to limited parental guidance, preparation for motherhood and parenting. Since the girls were abducted when they were still young, it is also a possibility that they did not have opportunities to learn their own cultural traditions and ways of bringing up children. The extracts from the interviews also suggest that the children are the tangible evidence of the abduction and forced motherhood experienced by the FACM and their link with their abusers. This constrains the development of positive mother-child relationships. Could it therefore be possible that some of the FACM latently feel no love towards the children in spite of what is verbalised?

### **Interactions and Relationships between FACM and their Families (Immediate and Extended)**

Narrative Interviews conducted with FACM indicated that initially parents and extended family members were excited about the FACM returning home. However, this excitement was short-lived. There were also cases of parents not adjusting to or receiving their children wholeheartedly, such as Ladira Maggie who returned with several children. When her father came to visit her at the Reception and Rehabilitation Centre (RRC)<sup>30</sup> she was very excited at the prospects of meeting with him for the first time in so many years but the father was less so. He advised her to join the army and leave her children at the Gulu Support the Children Organisation (GUSCO) RRC. Ladira Maggie described her encounter with her father as follows:

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<sup>30</sup> I discuss a more elaborate role of the RRC in the resettlement and reintegration process of the FACM in chapter eight (8) although some mentions of support to the FACM has also been made in chapter seven(7)

When I came back my mother had passed away but my father was still alive... he even came to visit me at the Centre (Reception). But he was not very excited because of what people were saying that if your child comes back from captivity just know that he/she is possessed by demons...because there was no proper sensitization in the community. He asked me where I was going with my children. If possible I should leave those children in GUSCO or give them to the government and I join the army because there is no place for me [at home]. So, *this really broke my heart [sic] but my sister refused my father's idea. I decided to tell GUSCO about it and they started counselling me and encouraging me.*

The girl indicated that while she was happy to be reunited with her father, she was very disappointed with his perspective about her future, All of a sudden she felt very bitter, that the people she most wanted to accept her and love her the way she was were not able to do that. The inability of the closest people to the FACM to offer social support was thus another issue with which some of them had to contend. However, even in the midst of all these difficulties the resolve of the young women came out strongly. So, instead of giving up on life, they would look around for other support opportunities. Ladira Maggie quoted above found solace in one of her uncles who was positive about her situation and return:

My Uncle was good and he was the one who said I should go and stay in Bardege [a suburb of Gulu Town] with him because such a problem did not only happen to me therefore, I should not worry about the past. The only good thing is that God saved my life and I returned safely so I was not worried about anything; he provided a lot of advice.

Ladira Maggie's experience is not an isolated case, many families of formerly abducted children actually claimed that the bond that existed between them and their children had been significantly weakened. They were thus happy for their children to return, but also experienced a dilemma, as explained by one parent in Bungatira sub-county, Gulu district: "*although we were happy for our children's return, we were not sure what to do with them. A lot of time had passed and some of us did not even know our own children anymore*". This statement can be understood in the context of the abduction dynamics: most children were very young when they were abducted, but returned not only as older people, but also as mothers.

In the Acholi cultural set up girls with children are treated as adults, since normally it is the latter who are expected to have children. Focus groups with elders indicated that the concept of child mothers was therefore even foreign to the local cultural conceptualization. But what is clear is that there was a big gap between the FACM and

their parents/immediate family. The separation occasioned by abduction and the resultant bush experiences implied that the person (child) who returned was totally different from the one who was abducted several years earlier, as a very young child.

Other fears from the parents and immediate community members have come from the support that families were expected to contribute towards the welfare of the FACM and their children. Most families, at the height of the insurgency, were also dependent on government aid; so, how would they effectively help? Some of the FACM returned to find vulnerable and elderly parents. In many cases the parents and many members of the immediate family had died and the FACM had to depend on their parents' extended families. Findings suggest that the decline of the extended family cohesiveness, mainly due to war, also made it difficult for FACM to find support. Interviews with key informants and community focus groups revealed that while the pre-war traditional family set-up would have adopted CBC in the family; this was a complex and ambiguous issue at the height of the displacement to the IDPCs. The above trend raises the importance of effective family preparations in the reunion process.

There was general agreement from seven focus groups held with both community members and the Child Protection Committee members that FACM who returned and did not find their biological parents alive faced more difficulties being accepted into the extended family than those whose parents were still alive. The issue of who supports these young women was raised as a serious matter given that some of them were reportedly rejected when they returned to their original homes from the IDP camps. This does not however, negate the fact that immediate families, including parents, also had difficulties relating to the FACM as elaborated in the foregoing discussion. Explaining this challenge, local commentators noted:

So you find that some of these children came back and did not find their parents alive and they decide to go and stay with a relative, for example, an aunt. However, they may not feel very comfortable there and they think of looking for another place to stay and maybe find a partner. This also has its problems, for example, that man will be interested in the woman and does not like the child she came back with from captivity so that child may not have a proper place to stay in since this girl will not be having any place to take the child to (Child Protection Committee (CPC) members Patiko Sub county, Gulu District).

I had one of my uncles who was a drunkard and when he was drunk, he would *come home and say that 'you people who came from the bush, you are useless you brought children who are possessed by demons'* (Lamaro Patricia, FACM).

*There are problems.... up to now if you move and go to the centre you are going to find some houses that have remained in the [IDP] camp.....you will find that some of them are for former abductees because they feel that they cannot go anywhere. Their homes are there, maybe their brothers' but they think that if they go back they would be looked at as 'different'. So what they do is to remain in the camp and start small businesses such as restaurants (focus group with Local leaders and Child Protection Committee, Alero sub-county, Amuru District).*

You are allowed to build a small hut in the compound but you are only allowed to cultivate behind the hut. When you ask for a garden, they will tell you that the land has already been allocated to someone else. For those child mothers whose parents, especially mothers, are still alive, they are a bit okay because their mothers always stand firm behind them (Norah Alana, Alero sub county Amuru district).

This last statement also reflects the significance of the figure of the mother in the home, as an advocate for her children. This suggests that perhaps the fathers might care but not be consistently involved in supporting them<sup>31</sup>. In some of the cases, the resentment from some immediate family members came out in subtle ways and yet was heavily felt by the child mothers. According to one of the young women interviewed, depicting her relationship with her guardian, an aunt, said:

*Sometimes my aunt quarrels a lot. And when she quarrels I only look at her...I cannot do anything. [I think] people were advising her wrongly because she did not produce many children, she only gave birth to only one child. She sometimes says that my children make her latrine to fill up; that they make her compound dirty yet she does not have any child. Sometimes I cry when she is quarrelling but sometimes I do not. I just take a walk and go to my friends and once I forget it, I go back home when she has already entered her house. Even there is a saying which goes: "you brother's child is not yours". Sometimes, don't talk to me for the reasons I don't know (Acii Lorna, FACM).*

It was clear that stigmatisation of FACM and their children featured prominently in the experiences of some of the young women with this being particularly evident in how the land needs of the young women were dealt with. According to an NGO worker, many FACM who in a majority of cases have not re-married, have nowhere else to go except their parent's home. However, in some cases they have been chased away from such land. In other cases, parents have left the FACM behind in the IDP camps:

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<sup>31</sup> Due to the war, the mortality rate among men was also very high. In many families therefore the defacto heads of the families are female and not male.

And most of the girls even as I speak now are still living on their own. They are more comfortable living on their own than living with their family members. We had cases of girls who were reunited with their family members however; their parents left them behind in the IDP Camps where they were reunited. They [parents] say that they are still going to start opening the land [initial preparation of the land for cultivation] as an excuse to go away and not come back. They leave this child mother with her own children with nothing in the house to eat (Omara Amos).

One of the programme officers of the cultural institution (Agweng Ida) working to support reintegration initiatives of the FACM confirmed that there are big challenges. According to her, there was a situation where instead of the family ties and networks coming to support the FACM, this very system had turned against them with young women being ejected from the land on which they grew up. In one of the Focus Group Discussions in Patiko sub-county, this was also mentioned. In some cases, the child mothers have been ordered to take their children to their biological fathers. But in this case, where are the fathers? Many are still in the bush and others have already died. More reflections on the issue of land and reintegration are discussed in Chapter Nine

### **Influence of In-Laws**

Interviews and focus groups further indicated that while some FACM experience problems within their families, many were well received at home. The biggest challenge the FACM appeared to have in the home was in the relationship with their sisters-in law. According to the FACM, their brothers' wives have often abused and belittled them, labelling them as killers, and thereby expressing insensitivity to their situations and experiences. Putting this scenario in a socio-cultural perspective, the behaviour of the sisters-in-law can be explained as follows: the young women would normally be married off and girls who have children would be expected to stay in their husbands' homes, not their brothers' or parents' homes. There is thus in my view a resentment, which is manifested through suspicion, contempt and arguments. This situation could also be fuelled by resource competition as the women in the homes (wives of the brothers) look at the FACM and their children as encroaching on the family resources, especially those of their own children who are the rightful heirs in the home.



It is, however, important to note that some FACM state that their sisters-in-law have been very supportive and have acted as a bastion of support in coping with life in the community. It is therefore, possible that the maltreatment by some of the sisters-in-law is related to individual behaviour and circumstances and not reflective of wider community or family acceptance of the FACM. However even brothers-in-law have been cited as directly and indirectly rejecting some of the FACM whenever they married into another home:

Then concerning the relationship between the child mothers and their husbands especially the new husbands; many are not successful in their marriages, this is because of the relatives of their husbands. Most of them [relatives of the suitor/husband] interfere with their relationships with their husbands because *they keep on labelling them that this is “dwog cen paco”*[derogatory term for someone from rebel captivity] or something like that. I remember one case from Patiko where World Vision had constructed a house for one child mother and then at the end of the day the brothers to the husband chased her away that she is kind of destroying their home or something of that kin. So they ended up also taking up the house of that woman (Muno Lillian).

On a positive note, many families have endeavoured to re-build the lost relationship between themselves and the FACM. This has been especially supported by family networks, clan interventions and other factors within the community. The study suggests that effectiveness of the preparation of the family to support the FACM is paramount to a sustained and functional relationship.

## **Relationships between Child Mothers, their Peers and other Community Members**

### **Relationship with Potential Suitors**

The FACM were finding difficulty integrating, especially on issues pertaining to love relationships. As expressed by one of the child mothers, “these people are only interested in our bodies and what we have to offer yet they cannot accept and look after us and our *children*”. When one relationship fails, the young women try another one because they are young and desirous of a meaningful relationship with a man, and the social acceptance this brings. Findings show that due to their tendency to date several partners successively, communities have now labelled the FACM as “*men hoppers*”. Further interrogation of this issue indicated that there are two dimensions. First, negative public

opinion against the FACM as depicted by one of the FACM, sometimes coming from people close to their suitors:

.....It was from his mother, she said that she does not want formerly abducted women... that women who were formerly abducted, first of all they are wicked, and secondly they like butchering [sic] people with machetes. She added that there was a time a formerly abducted woman butchered her co-wife with a *machete* “so I don’t want any dirty characters in my home” and that her son should find another woman. This disorganised our relationship and I am now living alone (Aci Lorna, FACM).

According to the study findings, some men who enter relationships with the FACM may wish to maintain such relationships, but negative public opinion makes them fear going against the social pressure from the family and the community. In a cultural context in which marriage is a key cornerstone of family and community life, failure to find long term marriage partners appeared to be one of the greatest hindrances to social reintegration.

Secondly, it should be emphasised here that the cultural expectation of a young woman is that she will unequivocally submit to her husband. In some cases, however, what happens appears to be outside the control of the FACM as depicted in the following statements:

Another problem we have is that for us who returned from captivity with children, once a man picks interest in you people always ill-advise them saying ‘even that one who has returned from the bush is very senseless’. So you find that men are no longer interested in us or you find that most of us who have returned from captivity, we do not have any kind of stable relationship with any man. So most of them [FACM] have settled alone and for those who have men, the men pretend to love them but they do not like the children that you came back with. All the time in the house, he is reminding you that ‘do not behave like you are from captivity in my house’. So I found out that it is difficult to live with men .....Even me (sic) who is speaking I also had a man and lived with him for only three months and we separated.... (Ladwara Maureen)

On the other hand, there are other girls who will not tell the man that she was formerly abducted or that she has children. So, when her husband or her mother-in-law gets to know then they will begin to say that they do not want demons or any formerly abducted person in their home. Sometimes you might have agreed very well and the man begins to hate your children so in that case it is much better to leave since at times you may not have where to leave your children. At times he just surprises you and tells you he is no longer interested in staying with you even after you have told him everything..... So being young you would still think that if you get another person there might be a difference (Abalo Harriet).

As seen above the FACM have experienced considerable difficulties in their social reintegration. A different reading from a feminist perspective might suggest that given the agency necessary for survival of bush experiences – post-bush submission is not acceptable to the FACM and that children, rather than husbands, are being put first.

In my discussions with the young women, I noticed that they were very angry at the level of perceived negative societal attitude towards them and lack of support. Some young women perceive other members within the community as jealous and envious of their progress. The FACM believed any positive thing happening in their lives is constructed negatively by the community. They thus lead their lives knowing that the community has, in a way, ganged up against them. The effect of this is further seclusion and isolation of the FACM.

It appears that the perception of worth and dignity among FACM was severely constrained by their perceived rejection from a section of society, be it their potential suitors or other people they had trusted. One girl who survived extreme odds in the bush including being bludgeoned and left for dead, tried to commit suicide by taking an overdose of pills when she realised that her (post-bush) partner refused to acknowledge the child she had delivered. The desperation and feeling of hopelessness was further demonstrated by another FACM (Adero Flo): “if I knew life was going to be so hard out here, I should have left these children in the bush. It is very difficult trying to raise these children alone without support from anyone”. Flo’s responses suggested displaced aggression towards her children: and she stated that whenever they erred she would mete out disproportionately heavy punishment to them. According to her this was because she felt rejected by society.

### **The Relationship between FACM and other People within the Community**

The study showed that overt stigmatisation was limited although it still exists. Discussions with community members and FACM also indicate that many people in the community whose abducted children have not returned were not happy with the FACM:

Other community members...whose children have not come back [not returned from captivity] *don't look at them* (FACM) with that same heart (sic). They [community member] have that bit of jealousy despite the training they have received...awareness raising...but some few cases still exist where some members

are still jealous and say you came back but mine {their abducted children} did not come back (NGO staff, Gulu district).

It is as if those families are considered lucky to have their daughters return alive whereas other families do not even know if their children are still alive.

Some of the FACM indicated that in quarrels and arguments with other people, they were often labelled as demon-possessed even though these were simply 'normal' everyday interactions. Similarly, the children of FACM were also accused of being "rebel children" and full of "cen" (demons) when they were involved in fights with other children as they played together. Focus group discussion with communities suggests that there is no evidence that children born in captivity are more aggressive than other children in the community. Because of negative public perceptions, some of the FACM had decided to keep a low profile and tried to de-link their history from their bush experience as much as possible. This was to protect their children and to ensure that their experiences in the bush did not stand in the way of their personal development. The fear of society's attitude and behaviour has also meant that some of the FACM withhold information from children about their parentage and belonging.

'Name calling' and stigmatisation remains strong despite the numerous community sensitisation meetings and training activities:

*The reason as to why I said it (stigmatisation) is happening is that, for example, when I am passing by someone could say: 'do you see that lady passing, she is former abductee (sic) and it is hard to understand her'. So even if you were annoyed by someone and you remained calm they will still tell you that 'you are used to funny things...you are used to killing people...that is why those things disturb you [experiencing nightmares]', so it makes our lives difficult (Evas Amono).*

From Pabbo, I did not tell anybody that I am from the bush or this is the son of Kony. One day when they were playing with other children, they insulted him that: 'look, your head is like that one of Kony', so I asked them: 'who told you that this child belongs to Kony?' I went and told their parents however, they continued calling him the son of Kony. I just kept quiet but they later stopped on their own. In Lacor, one day my son was coming from the market where he had bought sugarcane, on his way a boy asked him to give him sugarcane but he refused. He then said 'you are very stupid, you look like Kony, look Kony castrated Otti and ate his penis'. My son came back crying; I asked and he told me everything. In the evening I went to the boy's father and told him about the incident. He called 3 of them and told them never to say such words again. (Anena Jackie).

In the above quotations, stigmatisation, especially through labelling and name calling, reminding the children that they have been fathered by rebels, emerges as a key issue, causing mental anguish to the child mothers and their young children, thus affecting their reintegration. The account by Anena Jackie however shows that the father of the child who had insulted her son, took appropriate action to stop this negative behaviour- so this is indicative of at least some measure of community solidarity for the FACM.

### **Peer Support among FACM**

It is noticeable that the young women in the study had lived together in the bush for a long time, ranging from two to seven years, and had often been exposed to similar challenges. The circumstances they shared brought the FACM into some kind of crisis-induced closeness and cooperation. Findings suggest that the motivation for peer support among the FACM was influenced by the deeply uniting experiences they shared while in the bush; the difficult reintegration process and the perceived negative attitudes many of them experienced within the community.

Some of the young women were “co-wives” in the bush or lived in the same unit and on return found it easier to connect with each other and offer each other mutual support. Other motivations were reportedly to enable their children continue playing together. PSS agencies like GUSCO, World Vision and CPA also required the FACM to be in groups to make it easier to provide support. In these instances, FACM living together and staying close was as much a contrived process as a natural one. Some FACM settled together to derive counsel and advice from each other about how to manage life after returning to the community. Other FACM indicated that they resorted to the support of their peers because this was the only support available given the negative reception by villages and relatives some of them experienced. For some FACM, the security situation was a key consideration and a catalyst in their decisions about where to settle; the safest place for many was with people they knew and had lived with previously

Many young women interviewed indicated that they had benefited positively from peer support, which had enabled them to share parenting skills, support each other emotionally and acting as carers to children of their friends. Other FACM also indicated that peer support was instrumental in identifying networking opportunities and ensuring

that such information reached other young women. Other benefits and outcomes for young women involved in peer support groups have been in raising the levels of confidence, public speaking and assertiveness. Some young women indicated that group work has helped them to develop leadership and planning skills which they can apply in their normal day-to-day life.

**Figure 7.1: Model showing the different relationships and interactions the FACM are engaged in**

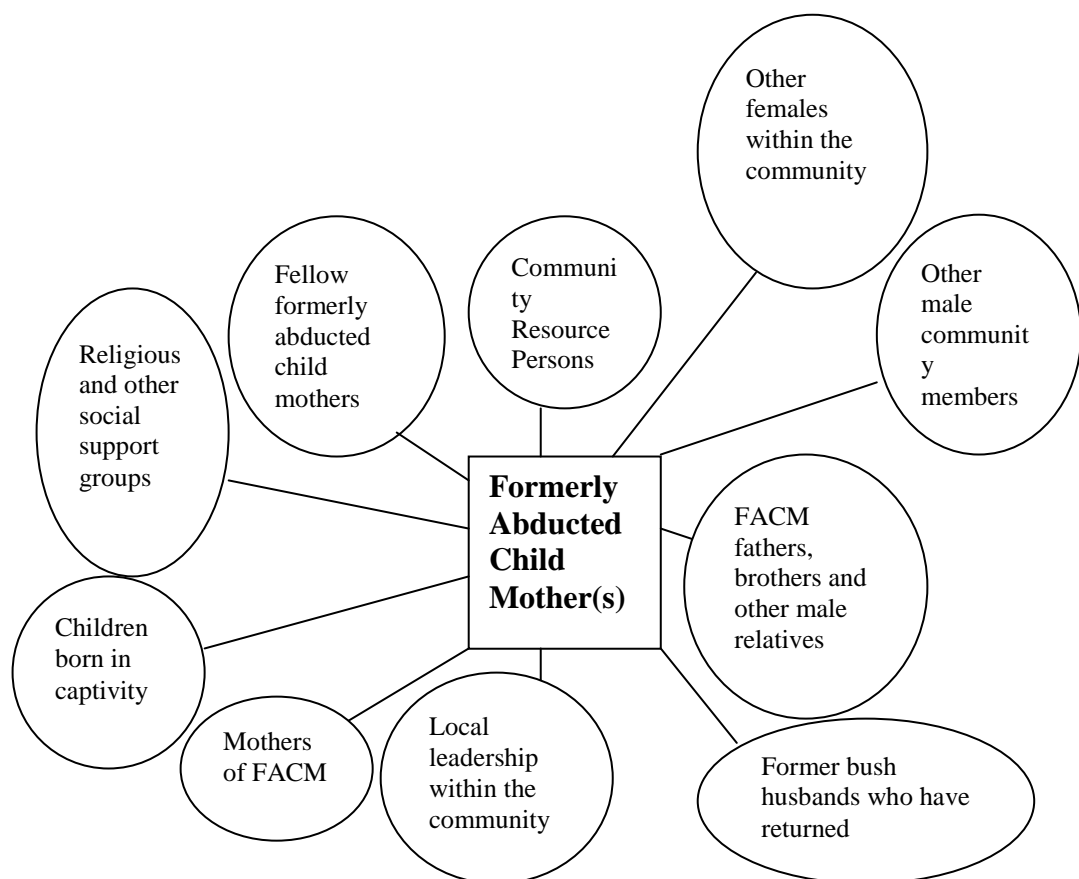


Figure 7.1 shows that the relationships in the web are bi-directional indicating the differential relationships FACM have with people in their environment. In other words, if one considers the interactions between the FACM and the CBC, it is a mother and child relationship. However, the FACM could also directly interact and relate with other CBC who stay with them or in the vicinity of their homes. Other interactions within the personal sphere include the relationship between the FACM and their parents. The study has indicated that the nature of the relationship between the mothers and the fathers

varies, with mothers seemingly portrayed as more supportive of the FACM. The relationships with other male/female relatives have varied based on a number of factors ranging from perception of the FACM and their children and initial preparations of the family by the psychosocial agencies. It is important to indicate that outside the personal sphere of relationships, the FACM also interact with PSS agency staff. Some of the relationship is forged with local government officials.

## **Other Factors Affecting Reintegration of Formerly Abducted Child Mothers/Young Women**

### **Nature of the Return Process from the Bush**

I have already indicated in chapter six that three main processes enabled the FACM to return home: getting rescued by the government army (UPDF) during battles; escaping on their own initiatives when opportunities for escape presented themselves; and being released by the rebels, especially between 2005 and 2007. There were two main routes;<sup>32</sup> for returning home: passing through a Reception and Rehabilitation Centre (RRC) (normally run by a PSS Agency) or going directly to the community (family). These different routes through which the FACM returned home are further elaborated on in the proceeding sections.

### **Direct Return to the Community**

The study indicated that some of the FACM returned from rebel captivity directly to the community, in many cases rejoining their families in the IDPCs and thus bypassing the army's Child Protection Units<sup>33</sup> (CPUs) and the RRC) set up by PSS Agencies – and the physical, psychological and health support they provided. Focus groups with community members and consultation with key informants as well as child protection structures at the community level suggested that the FACM who returned home reported to the LCs or

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<sup>32</sup> I use this to distinguish girls returning either through a Reception Centre or going directly to the community (home).

<sup>33</sup> Child Protection Unit (CPU) was a unit within the Army's main division tasked to ensure that children who are rescued or who escaped from rebel captivity and presented themselves to the army are well treated before being referred to the PSS counselling agencies. There was a close working relationship between the Army's CPU and the main PSS agencies running Reception Centres for psychosocial support to the children. Children spent between a day and one week in the CPU. This contrasted with the Reception Centre where the time spent ranged between 2 weeks to 6 months depending on the needs and requirements of the child. FACM tended to spend more time as the agencies traced their relatives, prepared them for the reunion and attend to their physical health needs.

other local leaders and requested not to be taken to the army detachments, or RRCs. In other cases, the FACM were not aware of such facilities.

### **Return through PSS Agencies**

Interviews with key informants and the PSS Agencies supporting the reintegration efforts, such as World Vision and Gulu Support the Children Organisation (GUSCO), indicated that many children returned through RRCs. The study suggests that for the return of children and young people through the RRC was conditioned by certain situations. These ranged from the FACM's perception of the army and local authorities; whether FACM were rescued in battles or taken to the army and local leaders by other people who in turn directed them through CPUs to the RRCs.

In terms of the duration of stay in the bush, it has been suggested by key informants that those child mothers who spent a longer time with the rebels were more likely to pass through RRCs. Interviews with the FACM indicated that the decision not to pass through a RRC was mainly determined by factors other than the duration of stay in captivity, although the latter also made a contribution. The subsequent section further expounds on the reasons determining the nature of return. The main RRCs were operated by GUSCO and World Vision working in partnership with other agencies.

### **Factors Determining the Nature of Return**

A number of reasons were advanced by both key informants and the FACM themselves explaining why some returned directly to the community and others passed through the RRCs. It suffices to note however, that some of the factors relate to the personal perceptions of the returning young women while others relate to other prevailing factors within the community. The latter include lack of awareness and limited appreciation and the belief by FACM and their families of the added value and uniqueness of conventional institutional psychosocial support.

#### **a) Fear of Recrimination by the Army (UPDF)**

Narrative interviews indicated that during the period of their captivity, the FACM had been indoctrinated with ideas that if they returned home they would be killed by the



UPDF for having been with the rebels. Explaining the fear of passing through the Army's CPU and RRC, one of the FACM, Abalo Harriet, had this to say:

From the bush they would tell us that if you return home, they are going to kill you or give you poison. It was also indicated that the government does not want us, the Acholi, so there was no need for us to return home. We should fight until we succeed in overthrowing the government. Yet you find that there is nothing to eat but they would give convincing advice.....The programme for going through GUSCO was already in place but the way I returned, my fear was not to go through the government. I thought that maybe if one goes through the government just like we were told from the bush, one might be killed together with his/her children.

Another FACM added:

So I stayed at his [first civilian she made contact with on escape] home and he gave us some cassava to eat. After that we started walking and he carried the child and we reached Ajulu. So the old man told me that there are some soldiers *here. I told him I don't want to go to where soldiers are for fear of being killed...* if it is like that [if he wanted to take her to the soldiers] then I will go back and leave you with the child (Lamaro Patricia).

Considering that most of the children were abducted when they were young, many came to believe what they were told by the rebels. This was however, a ploy to discourage the abducted children from escaping: a seemingly successful strategy in many cases. This is indicated by an initial reluctance of the abductees to escape and the reported high number of children who returned directly to the community. Since the rebels had significantly blocked access to such information from most children, they had little opportunity to know the real situation at home. The fear of the UPDF thus made it more difficult for the young women/child mothers to pass through the CPU in the barracks and the RRCs.

The RRCs therefore played a key role in demystifying the myths told to the children about the government army and agencies and also increased their assurance in the post-reunion period. Those who passed through the RRCs were thus not fearful of the army and they returned to the community with a positive perception about the UPDF.

b) Indoctrination of FACM by the Rebel Captors that they will be infected with HIV/AIDS

Closely related to the fear of the UPDF is that the rebels indoctrinated the FACM with information which kept many young girls confused as to whether it was appropriate to have any contact with the army at all on return. These were told that they would be deliberately infected with HIV/AIDS when they returned, generating fear among the FACM and meant that many young women avoided passing through local leaders, the army or the RRC. Maggie had this to say:

We were also told that all the people living in the camp are infected with *HIV/AIDS including the government army. They would say 'so if you go back you will be infected as well'. So they would also tell us that the voices you hear over the radio, [recordings of returnee child mothers imploring their colleagues still in the bush to come back home] are for people who have already been killed (Ladira Maggie).*

c) Limited Knowledge and Awareness of the Community

What also emerged during the study was that some FACM who returned home directly were not advised by their families on whether to access RRC services or not. It has been reported that many families through omission or lack of knowledge did not provide important information to their returning children. Yet such information and advice could have enabled the returning young women to access RRC services. This lack of access to the right information regarding PSS support at the RRC thus led to reinforcing fear and misconceptions. For some of the FACM, the inability to pass through the RRCs was occasioned by lack of information regarding amnesty and presidential pardon. This further undermined their reintegration efforts, as they avoided being identified as formerly abducted and lived in fear and apprehension<sup>34</sup>. However, consultations with RRC staff also suggested that some FACM who went directly to the community were later referred for support and specialist counselling to the various RRCs. This was, however, only possible in situations where families were informed or the community child protection and psychosocial support structures were operational. Testimonies of social workers from PSS Agencies also indicate that child mother referral to RRCs was minimal.

Discussion with key informants also revealed that some families and communities were at times ambivalent towards the needs and situations of the FACM and did not consider

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<sup>34</sup> Information from Focus groups and Key informants

referral to the PSS Agencies important. Although this situation could have been aggravated by lack of understanding of PSS needs of the FACM, it made it difficult for those who went to community directly to cope.

#### d) Desire to Avoid Extended Separation from the Family

In-depth interviews with the FACM who went directly to the community indicated that one of the key determining factors for taking such an approach was a strong desire to be instantly reunited with their families:

[After escaping from the rebels] So I started walking and when I reached close to the tree, I saw an old man. So I first hid somewhere because I thought I might be killed but I was so hungry and I said to myself let me just go and meet the old man..., When I appeared on his compound he ran away thinking that I was a *rebel because I had tattered clothes. I told him 'do not run I would like you to help me' so he came back and started asking me who my parents were and I told him my mother's name. Then he started asking 'are you the grand-daughter of Oywello and do you come from Pawel?' And I said 'yes'. Then he said 'are you the one they were saying got lost when you were still young?' and I told him 'yes' then he said 'how about this one?(pointing at my child) and I told him that was my child. Then he said 'my child you are welcome back...'. He then said that I should not worry and that he would walk with me until he finds my family members....So we walked and reached Laliya and he went to find my mother who came and carried the child and started crying... she said now that you have come back home...we will always be together, you will not go anywhere again (Lamaro Patricia)*

In such cases therefore, the FACM could be made aware of RRC facilities but thought it would separate them for longer from their families. It is appreciable that the FACM had spent months and in many cases even years away from their families. Considered within this context, the desire of the FACM to be quickly reunited with their families and not spend more time away is understandable.

#### e) Perceived Safety and Security in the Family

The perception of safety and security in their natural families also played a key role in determining the route taken by FACM. The ultimate goal of some FACM was being with their family. They imagined that a quick reunion with their family would provide them with security and safety which they could not experience while with the rebels. For these FACM, the main factor was related to trust. While they had confidence and trust in members of their own family (nuclear and extended), they were not sure of others outside

the family, having just emerged from an environment where the defining characteristics of a relationship were not trust but fear and subjugation<sup>35</sup>.

The family was thus viewed as being more secure since the FACM knew their families but had no or little idea about what to expect from the RRCs. This is also understandable since children normally look up to adult family members for provisions and protection. In this case, the FACM who returned still valued that protection from their families, despite the fact that the family had not been able to prevent their abduction<sup>36</sup>.

### **Effects/ Implications of the Nature of Return for Reintegration**

#### **a) Slow PSS Recovery**

The study suggests that the nature of return had a strong bearing on the level of psychosocial well-being of children, with those who went through RRC coping better psychosocially compared to those who went directly to the community. For example, one of the FACM returning directly to the community had been experiencing nightmares, a sign of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSDs). Her reintegration problems were also exacerbated by a family that was not aware of how to support someone who had been through an abduction experience:

I keep on dreaming that I am abducted again and they wanted to kill me because I escaped. And when I dreamed like that I would be sad and imagined that the rebels would take me back. So, I would always remain in the house without moving. If I told my mother she would say that was just a dream and that there is nothing going to happen to me. Even my siblings, we had a very good *relationship with them but they say sometimes that 'you know we can walk with you but you can easily cause us trouble because if they find us together they will kill all of us since they already know you'*. So on hearing that even if they told me to go with them for firewood, I would refuse and remain at home (Caroline Laloyo).

Similar issues were also reported by other FACM who did not pass through RRC, and also confirmed by the PSS Agency staff, local leaders and CPC members. It was reported that FACM who went directly to the community had to rely on their own resources to cope with significant psychosocial and emotional difficulties.

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<sup>35</sup> Narrative interviews with FACM

<sup>36</sup> Narrative interviews with FACM

b) Limited psychosocial and socio-economic support

Findings indicate that limited psychosocial support was accessed by the FACM who went directly to the community. They had to rely extensively on their own resources: psycho-emotional, social and physical to cope with the difficult lives within the IDPCs:

There is a difference between us and FACM returning through the centre [RRC]. For those who went through the centre, their children are being supported and they also got some support. I see them sometimes going to town and they come back with things. For them at least they were given something to start their life with but for me my parents have to struggle in order to get some clothes for me *and if they don't, then I have to struggle on my own* (Lamaro Patricia).

As noted in the preceding section, identification and earmarking of the FACM to receive physical, emotional and other socio-economic support was easier for those returning through RRC. Bypassing RRC clearly resulted in FACM having fewer choices and options for support, as indicated by Lamaro Patricia:

I feel like I am useless. It would have been better if I was dead. I do not want to bring problems to my parents because once you have been brought up by *someone you don't have to give more headaches by making them take care of your children*. At least if I had not gone through this, I would have been the one supporting my parents. If I had gone to school, I would be finishing by now...*I would have done some course.... so those are the things I feel so bad about but I cannot do anything about them.*

Lamaro Patricia's experience illustrates that confidence, agency and opportunities for coping with post-bush life are more constricted for those FACM who went directly to the community. Humanitarian support for physical items such as food was also not easy to come by for the FACM who bypassed RRCs. This was because the registration process (for food support) within the IDPCs, to which many of them returned, was quite laborious, bureaucratic and problematic. Many FACM therefore indicated that they had to rely on their mothers or other family members to receive support from humanitarian agencies on their behalf.

c) Lack of Documentation of Return and its Effects on Further Support

The FACM who went through RRCs had documents signed by local authorities verifying their abduction and also records of their time at the RRCs that made it easier to follow them up and provide referral services or recommendations for additional support to new agencies targeting FACM. In sharp contrast, documentation of the abduction and return

of ACM who went directly to the community was in most cases unavailable. Ascertaining whether the FACM were genuinely in captivity thus fell squarely on the local leaders and the community child protection structures. Cases have thus been reported where FACM have been bypassed for services for which they qualified simply because their status could not be verified. However, in some cases the Community Resource Persons (CORPs) were reportedly frustrating the process of reintegration for some of these young women<sup>37</sup>. In one sub-county in Gulu district (Bungatira), confrontation almost occurred between the FACM and the CORPs over lack of transparency. A detailed discussion of the challenges and pitfalls of working with Community structures is presented in Chapter eight, eleven and twelve.

The issue of documentation of the return process for the FACM who did not go through RRCs is part of a wider data management problem concerning abduction and returning children. As put by one of the key informants, the districts lack comprehensive statistics on children who returned from captivity, including child mothers:

If you go today to the office of LCV [District Chief Executive] and ask for the number of child mothers... how many child mothers came back? There is very scanty information, with little up-to-date documentations...that is why I said some *information need to be documented and be studied*.... I think these children born in the bush are born with problems and as they grow the problems grow and tomorrow when the problems grow it may not be interesting at all; this needs to be deliberately addressed and tackled, and the starting point is compilation of a strong database on them (Mathew Aboda).

It would seem that the inability to retain adequate and up-to-date information significantly constrains programme implementation and service delivery to the FACM.

#### d) Limited Opportunities to Utilise FACM Social Networks and Exploit Social Capital Resources

Earlier in this chapter I pointed out how the FACM developed their own social capital within their network which was exclusive to those who returned from captivity. My interviews with the FACM who returned directly to the community indicated that the prospects of such social capital resources were very limited and remote. This is attributed to the fact that most FACM who returned directly to the community did not

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<sup>37</sup> Focus group discussion with child mothers in Bungatira sub-county, Gulu district

wish to be identified as formerly abducted, and as a result they do not interact closely with or source out other FACM for social cohesive efforts.

According to staff of GUSCO, World Vision and CPA, it is only where there has been an agency initiative to bring out the FACM within the community that they eventually came out. It is also important to note that the FACM who did not pass through RRCs did not get the opportunity to live closely with other young women to form stronger ties which would later prove important for the functionality of their post-bush social networks.

### **Significance of Groups and their Role in RR**

This study suggests that groups played very significant roles in the reintegration process of the FACM. One FACM in *Lubanga Lakica Child Mothers' group*, Patiko sub-county recovered her self-esteem through participation in group activities:

I want to put this clear that when I came back from the bush, I had no hope but through this group and project, I am able to talk now, afford to do business and I have gained my self-esteem (Focus group with FACM, Patiko sub-county, Gulu district).

Another added:

This group has helped us a lot. We used to be the laughing stock; we had lost hope but now we are able to stand on our own taking care of our children, the most important benefit. I have gained business skills out of the training; am also able to meet basic needs, own items without borrowing....the support from Organisations like World Vision has helped to give us access to credit (Focus group with FACM, Patiko Sub-County, Gulu District).

Group membership has reportedly enhanced livelihoods of the FACM within the community. This includes mutual social support among the members where the young women provided peer counselling support to each other. Findings indicate that FACM who were in groups and members of a village savings group were not dependent on their families for day-to-day survival and other basic needs. According to one FACM, groups provided access to some resources which they could otherwise not get on their own.

The group approach for supporting FACM has however been criticised for excluding other eligible persons:

The child mothers are very many in the community. But not all of them have been taken on board and supported: very few were taken. Every problem is the same; a *fair selection should have been used as those that haven't been supported have not had their problems solved* (Focus group discussion, Palaro sub-county, Gulu district).

### **Role of Child Mother Agency in the Resettlement Phase**

The FACM initiated many activities to meet their needs. According to one FACM who resettled in a rural area:

It is true for us who returned from captivity we always work a lot and when people look at you working they think that you are a slave or a drug addict. For example, if you go to our home now you will find what I have harvested and you would think that there is a man in my life but I do not have any man. .... but when I harvest what I planted they [other family members] come and get a full truck of my harvest, beans saying that they are going to keep them in town but *once it reaches town they sell everything and don't give me the money* (Abalo Harriet).

This FACM has transferred all her energy into cultivation. It is noteworthy that in a traditional Acholi home (male-headed), the man is responsible for opening the land (initial land preparation) but in a female-headed family, the woman has to do this on her own. In the case of Abalo Harriet, while she has exhibited strong positive agency in working to ensure food for her household, the control over the products has been hijacked by some family members. This is a situation where social structures (family network) have acted negatively to constrain FACM's agency.

FACMs' agency had however, been significantly buttressed by external support as indicated in this comment from a Project Coordinator of an Agency supporting child mothers in the community:

The support is there for the young mothers and when you interact with them they would say that without the support from World Vision, they would be worse-off. Many of them are thinking of expanding their Income Generating Activities (IGAs) and a number of them have already acquired animals like goats, chicken and other livestock.... *we do hope in the long term that these things will come to pass and they will earn a lot more money out of their project...but they have already exceeded the expectations of the organisation* (Okumu David).



Individual FACM reacted to and managed the same situation differently. This is also a testament to the different levels of individual resources and personal strengths of the FACM which had a great bearing on the agency.

### **Role of Mothers and Other Female Relatives in post-reinsertion Support**

One of the key emerging issues from the study is that the gendered dimension in the post-return period positions one category of women (mothers of the FACM) as being more supportive compared to other people within the home and families (especially their male relatives). Many FACM indicated that they found their mothers very supportive and were more able to accept them and their CBC unconditionally compared to other male relatives. Comparatively, however, the mothers were very excited about their daughters and took it upon themselves to support the FACM, nurture them and help them adjust to the changed context to which they have returned. Mother support was also reportedly significant in helping the FACM manage their new roles as mothers in a post-bush situation, albeit being children themselves. The supportive role of mothers was depicted by one FACM:

*My mother told me that I should not quarrel with anyone and I shouldn't do anything bad to anyone and that she thanks God that I am still alive and healthy and since I had a baby girl I should not say anything about those who talk ill of me. She also told me that I should not even show them that I was upset with what they said and that I shouldn't be annoyed with anyone (Adero Flo).*

However, the response of fathers is also culturally understandable. Normally in the Acholi traditional society, girls do not interact very closely with their fathers while they are generally freer with their mothers<sup>38</sup>. This reaction and behaviour of the fathers and other male relatives does not therefore imply that they do not care about the FACM. The fatherly role to the CBC has also been cited by some FACM. Findings indicate that the position taken by men in the lives of the FACM varied between different FACM.

While the mothers were perceived as being very close to the FACM and supported their post-return adjustments, another category of women (mothers-in-law) were not very

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<sup>38</sup> Focus group discussion with elders of the cultural institution (Ker Kwaro Acholi). According to the elders, this is enshrined within the Acholi cultural and everyday relationship between men and women.

supportive. These were the mothers of the young men with whom the FACM entered into relationships after their reunion. Interviews with a number of FACM who had ever been in a relationship indicated that their biggest challenge was the lack of acceptance by their potential mothers-in-law. According to one of the FACM:

When I got married to Ocira I never imagined that she [her mother in law] was going to be so difficult. When after three months I started noticing a change in her attitude I at first thought it was due to some other family issues with neighbours. Later every time I take her food she would refuse to eat, when I ask her why she would tell me she was full (had eaten) then I would see her prepare her own food and eat. A little later on I started hearing that she was telling people in the neighbourhood how I was such a bad daughter-in-law and she fears *for the life of her son.....this was so difficult for me* to handle, and I went back to our home (Eunice Acora)

Such strong opposition from female relatives of the suitors of the FACM reportedly led to collapse of many relationships.

### **Influence of Gender on Acceptance of Child Mothers' Children**

An issue which emerged from the study, but which was not a focus of the original study was how gender affects the acceptability of the CBC. According to Mathew Aboda, an emerging scenario has been the lack of acceptance of male children in FACMs' maternal homes:

The message we have been receiving from some sections of the community is that families are showing signs of rejection of child mothers who returned with male children. This is because the families imagine that the children would compete with their own children for limited family resources. So we now have a situation where instead of families celebrating the return of their daughters, it appears as if some of them were not prepared to accept the children they returned with.

Although the feeling of disdain for male children appears to be subtle, it seems that some families would willingly accept their daughter's female children but have reservations about accepting the boy children. The apparent acceptability of girl-children is predicated on the fact that girls are married off when they come of age (18+) and would not take up permanent spaces within the home. Contrastingly, the boy children permanently belong to that home and will start their own families there. The fear of the families and communities where the CBC and their parents have resettled would be that if the boy

children grow up in their (relative's) homes<sup>39</sup>, they could in future struggle/fight for available resources within the family, especially land, with their own children (maternal relatives'). A positive development towards resolving this situation has been the pronouncement of the traditional cultural institution (Ker Kwaro Acholi) on the future of the CBC. According to the Paramount Chief:

As a cultural institution we also decree that the children born in captivity belong to the clan of the mothers. These should be treated as any other child in the home where the mothers have settled and should not be reminded of their past background when still young. We recognise that children are innocent and could not determine the circumstances in which they should be born. In this regard therefore, they have a right to enjoy an unfettered childhood as other children who were born in the natural family situation outside the bush. We also decree that it is culturally unacceptable for any person to treat children born in captivity and their mothers as less than human.

## **Summary and Conclusion**

In Chapter seven, I have presented some of the core relational and contextual factors affecting the reintegration of the FACM. I presented findings with regards to the nature and dynamics of the relationship between the FACM and significant people in their environment including their children, family, peers and other people within the community. Findings indicate that the FACM relate well with their children generally, although they have struggled to support them socially and economically. Relationships with community members are also erratic with some people accepting the FACM and others treating them with contempt. The acceptability of the CBC has also been shown to be significantly gender-biased with girl children more likely to be accepted than boy children.

Findings further indicated that the nature of the return, that is whether the FACM passed through RRC or not, has a strong bearing on post-reunion support. It is indicated that young women who passed through the RRC cope much better in the community. They are provided with both family and agencies' support for psychosocial and socio-economic reintegration. Some of the key factors that determine the nature of return are FACMs' fear of recrimination by the UPDF; indoctrination of the FACM by the rebels;

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<sup>39</sup> in family settlement in Acholi rural villages one family (normally comprising several households) settles in one homestead although huts for different households would be situated in different parts of the homesteads. There are salient indicators identifying one homestead from another, and the home is normally called by the name of the grand father (patriarch).

limited community knowledge and awareness about the importance of PSS support to the FACM; and the FACM's own desire to be quickly reunited with their family and perceived safety and security in the family.

The opportunities for socio-economic reintegration for the FACM who went directly to the community were also significantly constrained compared to those who passed through the RRCs. This is because the latter were more likely to be part of a social networking group. FACM who went directly to the community usually lacked official documents verifying their status and this further complicated their post-return support. It should be noted that the FACM were returning to a conflict-affected communities where the usual resources to support socio-economic adjustment could not be accessed and utilised. As a result the FACM who bypassed the RRCs had to rely extensively on their own resources.

Chapter seven also explored the role of child mother agency in the reintegration process noting that while agency itself was self-driven its effectiveness was limited by structural and contextual factors. Personal resilience appeared to lay the foundation for the exercise of agency but this does not offer a complete understanding. Agency and structure were identified as important concepts in facilitating reintegration.

Lastly, I presented the contribution of gender regarding reintegration of the FACM and their children. Findings show that FACM were more likely to be supported by their mother than by their prospective mother-in-law. The study identified that boy children were less likely than girl children to be welcomed by their maternal families. The next chapter (eight) presents the contribution of child protection structures to reintegration processes.

## **CHAPTER EIGHT**

### **COMMUNITY STRUCTURES FOR RESETTLEMENT AND REINTEGRATION**

#### **Introduction**

This chapter describes and presents the nature and significance of child protection structures and systems in the study locations as a support framework for the FACM. Two categories of child protection systems were identified: the traditional system and the modern structures set up by development agencies. Under the traditional system, the protection and support of children is embedded in the cultural and socio-economic structures of the community. The main structures for enforcing such a system were the local chiefs, elders, and cultural committees. Their authority was derived from the unwritten social institutions, rules and norms in place.

Recognising reintegration as a long-term process and that psychosocial and socio-economic support for FACM needs to extend well beyond their return to the communities, different agencies developed community based structures to aid the reintegration process. These structures included: Community Volunteer Counsellors (CVCs) utilised by World Vision and GUSCO; Psychosocial Support Practitioners (PSSPs) used by GUSCO and Save the Children, Denmark; Parents Support Groups (PSGs) utilised by Concerned Parents Association, and Community Resource Persons utilised by Caritas Gulu Arch Diocese. More recently, a harmonised structure (Child Protection Committee) was adopted by all agencies working in northern Uganda. While these harmonised Child Protection Committee (CPC) structures proposed by UNICEF and the Government's Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development (MOGLSD) in the last few years could have worked in streamlining child protection at the local levels, these too were affected by an approach characterised by a focus on individual NGO objectives rather than collaborative working. Sustainability has further been hampered by the practice of giving monetary incentives to the members of the CPC structures.

Chapter eight further examines the significance of social capital in the reintegration process. I consider social capital as a key resource in the reintegration of the FACM, especially networks of social and economic support.

### **Community and FACM's Perception of Effective Reintegration**

Interviews and focus groups with the local community, FACM and key informants suggest a similarity of perceptions of reintegration. It is the belief of the communities and the young women that reintegration objectives should focus on restoring functionality, psychosocial stability and mutual co-existence between the FACM and the wider community<sup>40</sup>. Other indicators of effective reintegration include absence of stigmatisation and discrimination by the community of the FACM and their children, and their integration in community socio-economic activities. Unconditional acceptance by members of the community and freedom to engage in relationships with members of the opposite sex without harsh moral judgement was also considered a key indicator of reintegration.

The perception of effective reintegration among the FACM seems to be determined by psychosocial, socio-cultural and socio-economic wellbeing. Access to credit through Village Savings and Loans Associations (VSLAs) was also identified as important for the reintegration process. In essence, many of the young mothers appeared to be happier and fulfilled if they were able to take independent decisions, were self-reliant and were able to meet the social and economic needs of their families.

Whereas programmatically reintegration had been perceived as ensuring that the FACM return to a pre-abduction state of affairs as far as possible; analysis of the context suggests that there are significant numbers of people who have psychosocial problems even though they have not been abducted. This is a result of the protracted nature of the war and the long term prognosis for the region<sup>41</sup>. The conceptualisation of reintegration therefore, should go beyond returning someone to a pre-abduction situation; it should enable them to function better within the emergent socio-cultural setting.

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<sup>40</sup> The wider community includes all parties who interact with the FACM comprising members of their immediate family, extended families, friends, in-laws, community members, local and central government.

<sup>41</sup> See World Vision Uganda (2008) Project Proposal: Vulnerable Children and Youth Reintegration Project, Uganda Children of War Rehabilitation Programme.

## **Community Structures and Systems for Child Protection and Reintegration**

### **Description of Current Child Protection Regimes**

Two categories of child protection structures exist in the study areas (community) at the moment: the traditional child protection structures where support for children was provided within the family and the community; and the conventional child protection structures formed by government, civil society and international humanitarian agencies. There were social expectations and obligations of the entire community to watch out for and support children in the community. For example, if one was to find a child in danger or in the wrong, one would be expected to support or correct the child on the basis of the notion of collective responsibility towards all children in the community<sup>42</sup>.

Focus groups with community members and elders indicated that the protracted conflict has, however, weakened traditional protection mechanisms. Thus for many, the centres of power and authority became the camp management committees that were elected by the community in the IDP camps. Child protection support did not always feature highly on the agenda of camp leaders who were preoccupied with securing food, shelter and the security of camp inhabitants. In their efforts to enhance child protection therefore, humanitarian and development agencies thought it imperative to identify individuals within the community whose primary duty would be to support war affected children and their reintegration process. Interviews suggest that a number of civil society agencies operated different and parallel structures to support vulnerable children, including FACM. The core defining characteristic of these structures is that they all targeted children affected by the armed conflict.

Since 2007, the emphasis of the development agencies shifted to supporting what has been called Child Protection Committees (CPCs). This apparently came about due to the limitations and weaknesses in the prevailing structures, as explained by one of the core staff who participated in designing the CPC structure:

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<sup>42</sup> Discussion with traditional Elders, Rwodi (Chiefs) the Acholi cultural and traditional institution (Ker Kwaro Acholi)

*...in the last three years, the emphasis of the humanitarian actors and the development agencies shifted to supporting Child Protection Committees.....This was after realization that the CVCs were not addressing the core protection issues at the community level. One would go to the community as GUSCO [one agency], and you would never get information from the CVCs trained by World Vision, or CARITAS. They trained them to look at their organizational needs and every organization had some information it was protecting..... so it was not benefiting the community... UNICEF just came to see how we can harmonize it, by supporting the establishment of the CPCs (Olwedo Nicholas).*

It appears that the CVCs like other structures established by NGOs for child protection owed more allegiance to their founding organization than to other agencies or local government. Inter-agency sharing of information and cooperation was often lacking and this led to a proliferation of structures and a duplication of work, with each organisation struggling to maintain a presence in the community.

Interviews with district child protection staff suggest that in order to resolve these difficulties, calls were made to harmonise all these parallel and overlapping structures within a central Child Protection Committee working across all agencies. While psychosocial support has continued, the new strategic approach to working with the CPCs included a shift in focus to working not only with formerly abducted children but also wider categories of orphans and vulnerable children. The effectiveness of widely focused services in meeting the specific needs of formerly abducted children has however been the subject of concern.

Interviews with local district officials and agency staff indicated that CVC structure is at best dormant; although some were still active, being funded under the auspices of individual projects. Where project interventions have phased out, the CVCs have not been active to continue supporting the FACM/FAC in the community. Coordination efforts of the CPCs also appear to be a challenge in the absence of strong local government (Sub-County) commitment to coordination meetings. Findings suggest that meetings are reportedly only held when there is a civil society organisation supporting it logistically<sup>43</sup>.

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<sup>43</sup> Discussion with CPCs and Civil society agencies in Gulu and Amuru districts.



### **Analysis of current Community Child Protection Structures**

Community level child protection at the time of the study was organised around CPCs as indicated in the previous section. Key actors in child protection have been given jurisdiction over certain sub-counties for purposes of providing effective leadership and coordination support.

Interviews with PSS agency staff working within the region suggest that the CPCs only work effectively where there are financial and other kinds of motivation. It was a generally held view among respondents that the functionality of the CPC structures was contingent upon logistical and strategic support by the actors in child protection. This position was also confirmed by interviews with staff of GUSCO, one of the indigenous PSS Agencies working with the Child Protection Committees. Asked whether the CPCs could work without any significant financial support the following response was obtained:

It is very tricky. I foresee that when there is no support at all, these structures may not even be sustainable... If at all they are to work not all of them will do it like when our project ended last year, very few have been doing the work... I think in my location they had a meeting once in a period of like six months. So you can see if we are to stay away for maybe one year or more nothing will even be done. It is like they need a lead NGO to be driving them (Akidi Zerinah).

While monetary and other forms of motivations play key roles in sustaining CPC commitments, some appear to be genuinely committed to the work. It is however not known how much longer these can work with minimal external facilitations. Other NGOs also confirmed that the CPC and other structures were mainly trained by the respective NGOs to do their (NGO) work<sup>44</sup>.

Another key limitation identified by respondents was the emphasis of tagging different agencies to act as lead in child protection intervention at the community level. Findings suggest that although this might be considered a factor in the feasibility of the structure, it is also a barrier for the community exercising effective ownership. This is due to its tendency of making the CPCs report through the lead NGOs instead of through the CDO based at the sub-county. Respondents were, however, also sceptical of leaving

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<sup>44</sup> Interviews with Child Protection focal person, Gulu District and the Manager Community Services for one of the district.

coordination of such work entirely in the hand of the CDOs as attested by one of the CDOs:

The sub-county is trying but you know we have resource constraints. Although we have data for everything we plan for, we cannot intervene because we do not have the capacity to go and do research except working through different partners like you are hearing from ARC and other partners. We are trying actually to lobby for some support through the PRDP which is coming to make us go on the ground physically. In the mean time we still do not have the capacity although we have it in our plan to reach them [children] the community (Ocira Patrick).

In addressing community-based child protection, some respondents maintain that the CPC structure can work with a little more reorganisation:

It is a very good strategy. The only way we can improve on the CPC is first of all by anchoring communication. We would like to support the CDOs to be people-based within the community. We can improve on the CPCs when the CDOs are in the community. Two, we are looking at decentralizing the process from the sub-counties to the parishes. We should form the CPCs now at the parish level because people are going back home and you know our parishes are very large and far apart (Olwedo Nicholas).

The view among some respondents is that to ensure sustainability and continuity the composition of the CPC needs to comprise actors with other responsibilities within the community.

Illustrating the dilemmas arising out of the new coordination mechanism, the focal point person for child protection in Gulu district noted:

There was a lot of mismatch of programme implementation so this one came as a result of merging the psychosocial support working group with child protection working group. The issue of the psychosocial support which actually addresses the problem of these child mothers was left out.... It is not there. We used to discuss thematic areas during our child protection working group and they overshadowed all the activities of psychosocial support. We wanted to see that at least in the Child Protection Committee there was a representative from the CVCs.... Much as we still recognize them [CVCs] to be the integral part of child protection no support is being given to them. How do you expect them to move? We have not been training them for the last seven years... it is coming to eight years now (Obol Andrew).

Further interviews with CVCs and CPCs indicate little collaborations between them. These two structures are the most conspicuous in supporting the FACM or children

associated with fighting forces. The effectiveness of CPCs has also been reportedly affected by inadequate training and dissemination of relevant documentation and guidelines for action and response:

The Child Protection Committee structure in place is really good but it has a gap especially in issues of child protection policies. That is why the Ministry of Labour, Gender and Social Development has laid down policies about child protection. These policies have been brought to the district and the district has sent them to the sub-counties but they have not been disseminated to the communities and the local leaders. So instead of interpreting these policies, and having them discussed with the community so that they are understood, this has not been very well done (Omara Amos).

Dissemination limitations thus significantly constrain the implementation of child rights programmes at the community level.

### **The Roles and Support to FACM by Local Leaders**

Community focus groups and key informants interviewed identified the roles that have been played by local leaders in the reintegration of the FACM. Citing the Children Act 2000, the focal point person for child protection in Gulu district indicated that the Act gives a mandate to the Secretaries for Children Affairs (SCAs) to champion the cause for all children at the community levels. The SCAs have been mandated to follow up on all cases involving child abuse and neglect and to promote the best interests of children as defined by the Act. Findings suggest that the legal framework notwithstanding, government support to the operationalisation of the roles of the SCAs in areas experiencing civil conflict has reportedly been quite minimal. It was reported that some activities are planned, but few resources have been released to facilitate their implementation<sup>45</sup>.

Interviews with district leadership indicated that many SCAs have received training and other support from local governments in partnership with NGOs to report cases of child abuse. However, where training is provided, little facilitation comes through and when it does, it is normally through support from development partners such as UNICEF and other NGOs within the area. There are situations where the NGOs and local government expect the local leadership structures to report to them using the latter's own resources in

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<sup>45</sup> Interviews and discussions with civil society organisations and staff from community development departments of Gulu and Amuru

areas where social services (including police stations) are not easily accessible to community members. In such cases, it becomes difficult for the local leadership structures, and the cases get neglected or resolved at the local level. In many cases however, the local solutions might not be in the best interest of children and do not promote justice for them, like parents settling child sexual abuse cases outside court thereby allowing the perpetrators to escape justice.

Again, because many agencies had trained community resource personnel to provide psychosocial and emotional support to the FACM and other children in the community, SCAs were utilised in only a few cases. In most cases therefore, the SCAs did not play an active role in addressing child protection concerns at the local levels, except for some who were integrated in the created structures. Interviews and focus groups with FACM also present a mixed result on the role of local leaders: on the one hand some FACM showed appreciation of the roles of local leaders; on the other it was indicated that the local leaders have not been very supportive and have been an obstacle in the reintegration process.

The tendency of some local leaders to frustrate the process of Resettlement and reintegration process was cited by a number of FACM. A couple of child mothers interviewed in one sub-county, Gulu district, indicated that the Chairman of the sub-county local council and his team frustrated the process of developing a community-based training activity for an indigenous NGO. The local leadership was of the view that if such programmes were to be implemented in the sub-county, they should benefit all children who need their services. But when looked at from the resource-based perspective, the agency reportedly had limited resources which it wanted to maximise. In this case the local leadership just shut down the facility, an action which meant that FACM missed out. As a result, the potential multiple benefits in terms of providing psychosocial and socio-economic stability to the FACM was lost completely. In another incident in Bungatira Sub-county, one child mother reported hostility towards her by the local leader who reportedly embarrassed and insulted her in public:

Our leaders here are not good, for example, one time I was insulted by the LC in a public place saying he will deal with me with my ill manners and ignorance from the bush yet I had not done or said anything at all.... and even on UN day I was insulted and I cried in public. So these things are happening and people are

very jealous and if it was possible I should not stay where people are (Florence Abito)

This helps to explain why some child mothers withdraw from their own communities and do not open up easily to other members of society. Often, the young women were unsure how they would be treated and were concerned that the community would hold a grudge against them for the actions they were forced to commit during their time with the rebels.

In focus groups, examples were given of local leaders registering their children and other relatives as FACM in order to benefit from programmes and support directed at genuine FACM in the community:

Others who are entrusted by the community are just making money out of our problems. *When a request is sent for the formerly abducted people's names to be registered for assistance they only register their relatives who were not even abducted and any help that comes goes to them.* (Focus group with Child mothers at Coope, Bungatira sub-county).

## **Social Capital and FACM**

Social capital has played a very key role in the reintegration process of the FACM. As indicated in Chapter Two, social capital refers to the informal networks, associations and trusts on which the parties can rely for socio-economic, psychosocial and emotional resources to enhance the social functioning of the group. For some FACM, social support groups provided a strong support which helped them to cope with the challenges of life in the post-bush community. One FACM narrated how they had decided to settle close by each other within the Gulu municipality so that they could provide emotional, physical and socio-economic support for each other:

Among us here we always try to encourage each other because right now like in Kabedo-ong where we are, you cannot go and ask for something from someone else and get it. So we always ask for things amongst ourselves since we are close to *each other.....we always encourage each other, share ideas and advise each other* (Aloyo Maria).

Again, social capital resources were also complemented with physical capital, financial capital and other resources to achieve better socio-economic outcomes for the FACM. Findings indicate that while some support came from outside their groups, the FACM on

their own made efforts to raise financial capital through savings, petty trade, farming and other activities. However, for those in rural areas, participation in group activities, where they existed, were more formal and less personal, although some social support was also given among the groups through sharing of experiences and coping strategies.

### **Challenges of Building Community Social Capital**

Community focus groups indicated a number of challenges in building social capital within the community. Some challenges pertain to the haphazard patterns of displacement where the settlements within the camps did not exactly follow the same patterns as in the original villages. Settlement patterns in the latter were dictated by socio-cultural ties and agricultural work organisations locally known as '*Te Kweri*'. The uncertainty of displacement where the risks to which the communities were exposed increased also proved great stumbling blocks to the development and continuity of traditional social capital.

Interviews with key informants also indicated that the proliferation of development and humanitarian agencies who attempted to fill the spaces and vacuum left by the changing socio-cultural dynamics in the aftermath of the war in one way also contributed to the dwindling of community social capital. Interviews with elders indicated that while community members derived mutual support using mainly local resources before the war, different agencies came to the community in the inter-war period to provide varied kinds of support. This in a way undermined the importance of traditional social networks and collaborations. Both community members and key informants asserted that war per se could not have been the only factor affecting traditional social capital degeneration and reduction in social support. While the latter did not disappear completely, increasingly communities and families began relying more on the agencies and other support centres than the intra-communal and mutual support systems that existed before the war.

Focus groups and individual interviews revealed new forms of social capital resources and social groups in existence in the aftermath of the conflict. These were limited to particular social groups (e.g. FACM and other groups in the IDPCs) that constructed boundaries and more exclusive accessibility rights. Many of such social capital networks

were formed around socio-economic needs. Only members of such groups would derive support from group members, e.g. VSLA.

Although the socio-capital resources and dimensions in the pre-war situation, such as group farming and other close activities would normally bring all people within a family together, some social capital resources available to individuals during the war and the recovery phase might not be available to their family members. For example, women who are members of '*bol i cup*' (Village Savings) group have access to the group capital resources but this does not apply to their husbands. This exclusivity to the rights of access in a way also created relationship problems among some couples and individuals within the community, an issue that raises questions on the gender sensitivity of some interventions. Thus, instead of the social capital resources bridging community relationships and creating harmony and strong socio-cultural and politico-economic ties, in some cases it brought alienation. However, the new forms of social capital seem to outweigh the limitations.

Another social capital challenge or contributory factor to the decline in social capital as known in the pre-war situation is the limited opportunities during the war for cultural development initiatives and activities which bring communities together and remind them of their heritage. It was a view of members of the cultural institutions that the inability of the community to practise its cultural heritage and aspirations reduces the opportunities for social cohesiveness which is an important factor in developing community social capital. Other challenges to building community social capital comes from the limited recovery interventions. Few interventions have been directed at harnessing community social capital or the development of opportunities for creating more social networks and structures. The limitation in the number of interventions utilising non-conventional means and mechanisms for promoting socio-economic development within the community robs the latter of opportunities to effectively utilise some of its own resources. All these constrain the capacity of the community to offer socio-economic and psycho-emotional support to the FACM, although FACM could also position themselves to benefit from the emergent forms of social capital intra and post-conflict.

## **Traditional Child Protection Systems**

### **Perceptions and Practice of Children Rights in Acholi Traditional Society**

Focus groups with elders and other community members indicated that child protection was a major role of families and communities in Acholi society. Children were jealously guarded and protected in Acholi traditional society although the war and its aftermath significantly limited the capacity of families and communities to ensure child protection. According to the Paramount Chief of the Acholi, cultural practices and norms actively promoted the best interest of children. The protection of children was vested in the clan leadership although most of these responsibilities were delegated to families and members in the community to execute. It was further indicated that child abuse was abhorred and not condoned. Society had its own sanctions which were levelled against parents or community members who abused their children. It was also reported that many Acholi proverbs and riddles prepared and advised both parents and children to fulfil their obligations towards one another.

Focus groups further indicated that children's responsibility was also well elaborated in Acholi social set-ups as espoused in the riddles and proverbs. Parents would train their children over the *wang oo* (*evening fire place discussion*<sup>46</sup>) and other organised forums. However, where a child erred, members of the community other than their parents also had powers to discipline him/her. According to the elders in the council of chiefs, this collective approach to disciplining an errant child was society's own method of ensuring that its children abide by its expectations at all times and not only in the presence of their parents.

The socio-cultural organisation of the Acholi provides that the children be confined to their duties as children performing their cultural roles, which include but are not limited to ordinary chores in a home. Children's roles and responsibilities were gender-segregated with boys performing different roles from girls. The children were expected to help adults in domestic activities and display respect to older members of the community and to each other.

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<sup>46</sup> The evening fire place (*wang oo*) was an institution in itself. It was the forum within which the cultural values, conventions and norms were passed from the elders to the future generation (children). The discussion was normally led by the overall elder (head of the homestead). It was also along the fire place that food would be served and everyone within the home would eat from there.



Before the war, and in spite of the advent of modernisation and western ways of life, Acholi's culture was very strong. The socio-cultural institutions regulated everyday life, with men, women and children aware of what was required of them. Children were taught at the 'wango' and knew their roles as looking after the compound, supporting their fathers in home management, farming and for the girls helping their mothers in the kitchen and weeding. What Acholi culture instilled in children is respect, discipline and obedience (Focused group with council of elders).

The social organisation thus required children to respond to requests and directions of adults, and where children did not do that, they were appropriately disciplined. However, the punishments were regulated and parents and community members were not allowed to exert excessive punishments on children.

According to the council of chiefs and focus groups with both male and female elders the socio-cultural norms, values, and practices in a very strong way protected children from exploitation by families and members of the community. It was a generally held view among elders and traditional opinion leaders that the rights and welfare of children were taken care of in these frameworks. Although they were not called rights, society was clear on its expectation and obligations towards its children. In one focus group with both male and female elders it was revealed that the socio-cultural practices were not harmful to children. They did not, however, rule out isolated cases of child abuse which were also derided by the social sanctions and norms. For example, one of the key social sanctions protecting children from sexual abuse and early marriages as indicated by the elders was the practice of confirming a girl's maturity by looking at certain physical development attributes that would signify the age of 21-24 for girls, which is clearly above the age of childhood even by United Nations Standards<sup>47</sup>. Findings also indicate that children in the traditional Acholi society were not involved in wars. War was an adult issue and children and women were protected and not killed or tortured during war.

Focus groups with elders also indicated that the breakdown in the implementation, subscription and adherence to the socio-cultural institutions implied that even the traditional norms and value systems have become adulterated. Practices such as gender based violence have thus emerged and become rampant, contrary to socio-cultural expectations.

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<sup>47</sup> Some of the features examined included the back part of the leg, which would be different for children and adults. These were attributes indicated by the elders in three locations, the council of chiefs and advisors, and local traditional cultural committees in Paicho sub counties, Gulu Districts

## **Traditional and Other Cultural Mechanisms for Protecting Orphans and Other Vulnerable Children**

The generally held view among community members was that Acholi traditional cultural values and practices effectively provided for the protection, welfare and development of orphans<sup>48</sup> and other vulnerable children. To ensure the full realisation of their rights and growth potential, Acholi tradition encouraged the community to care for orphans and other vulnerable children. There were socio-cultural norms and regulations regarding support to orphans depending on their age and other socio-cultural and economic factors within the community<sup>49</sup>. When a mother died while she was still breast feeding, an alternative feeding mechanism would be found for the child. Normally the child would be adopted and breastfed by the mother of the father (paternal grandmother), a sister of the deceased or any other close relative who was available.

Other options for raising the child would be supplementary feeding involving usage of goat or cow milk to ensure that the child received the best nourishment for its growth and development. Older orphaned children would be taken as other children within the homestead and the head of the home or any other assigned male relative would assume fatherly responsibility for them. These would thus have the same rights and access to family resources like all other children within the homestead, as revealed by a focus group discussion with male and female elders:

In Acholiland we have always said that orphans would be fed via the wang oo. This was based on the fact that in any Acholi homestead food *would be served outside at the 'wang oo' and all people would eat together*. Selfishness was discouraged and all women were compelled to cook and bring food for everyone within that homestead. These practices significantly got eroded during the war but they have been strong cultural safety nets for upbringing of children without mothers or fathers. The Acholi cultural values did not promote any form of discrimination against orphans, and other children were not required to remind the orphaned children of their situation

While these were the traditional prescriptions as enshrined within the Acholi value systems, the war and its aftermath made it difficult for people to volunteer to meet the

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<sup>48</sup> An orphan is defined here as a child who has lost both or one parent.

<sup>49</sup> Focus group with council of elders, Gulu district

needs and welfare of orphans and other vulnerable children<sup>50</sup>. As a result, a new phenomenon of child headed families was created, a situation which was not known before the war and the massive displacements to camps. This was conditioned, partly by the cultural degeneration and inability of the traditional social support system to absorb the emerging challenges of war orphans.

### **Roles of Traditional Institutions in the Reintegration Process**

It has generally been accepted that the traditional institutions play a very key role in the reintegration process:

As Ker Kwaro Acholi, we have very many chiefs whereby they are spread all over and it was their role and responsibility to take care of those children, to consider their problems and resolve them. But I must say that the current chiefs are not like the previous *chiefs*. *It is like some of them don't even know their roles and responsibilities* [with regards to these children]. And to some extent, you find that even the cultural chiefs have problems with their own subjects and that explains why they always fail to help such vulnerable groups (Agweng Ida).

It is a widely held view in the community that the general acceptance of children who have gone through the horrific experiences of abduction has been enhanced by the support of the traditional leaders<sup>51</sup>. Initially, the emphasis of most PSS agencies operating in the region was on supporting modern structures in the community such as the local council officials and other community structures as described in the previous section. However, the difficulties and challenges with the sustainability of working with the modern structures made the agencies rethink their approaches.

Key informant interviews also indicated that processes such as the de-encampment also made the agencies realise the greater importance of bringing traditional structures on board to enhance ownership of interventions and sustainability of the outcomes as these structures would continue well beyond the lifetime of any project. The utilisation of the traditional structures and resources has also been aided by the willingness and commitment of the cultural institutions in supporting such initiatives. This institution has reportedly traversed the Acholi sub-region preaching the message of peace,

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<sup>50</sup> Interview with child protection focal point person Gulu district; discussion with traditional cultural leaders in Paicho sub counties

<sup>51</sup> Interviews with cultural leaders, Acholi cultural institution. This was also confirmed by interviews with key informants and other actors in child protection in northern Uganda.

reconciliation and co-existence with formerly abducted persons including the child mothers.

Many traditional practices to ensure a smooth return of the FACM and other young people exist in Acholi society and are under the custodianship of the Ker Kwaro cultural institution (see also chapter ten). These have included the traditional practices of mato oput [drinking the roots of oput tree], gomo tong [bending the spear], nyono tong gweno [stepping on an egg], moyo cere [cleansing the hills] and moyo kum [cleansing the body]. It was a view among the elders that such practices were critical for a peaceful return of individuals and coexistence among individuals in the communities. These practices are a preserve of the elders and are performed after certain preconditions are met to promote social harmony. Of all these practices the most conspicuous is the mato oput which literally means drinking the roots of the oput tree. It symbolizes the reconciliation of persons (at family or clan level) who had wronged each other normally involving crimes of murder whether committed deliberately or inadvertently. Interviews with Ker Kwaro traditional institution officials suggest that the Institution has structures right from the district level up to the villages to perform traditional ceremonies aimed at promoting RR of the FACM and all other people associated with the fighting forces. I make more reflections on these traditional resources for rehabilitation and reintegration in chapter ten by discussing their efficacies in the light of the literature.

## **Summary and Conclusions**

In this Chapter, I have presented findings with respect to the context of reintegration of the FACM, that is, the kind of environment to which these young people and children would return. I began by making a presentation on the child mothers and community's perception of effective reintegration. I also presented stakeholder perceptions of the child protection structures prevailing in the community. These were noted as traditional and modern structures, with the latter created and supported by PSS agencies. Findings suggest that both these sets of structures face enormous challenges as avenues for support to the FACM and the CBC. The significance of social capital and how the FACM have developed their own social capital resources have also been presented. Importantly the conceptualisation and protection of children in Acholi traditional society as well as a description of traditional resources which can promote reintegration was also presented and elaborated.

Chapter nine presents the perspectives of stakeholders on the interventions that have been implemented for the FACM and other children affected by armed conflict. Information is presented on the PSS agencies' rehabilitative and reinsertion interventions, including preparation of both the FACM and their families for the reunion process. The depth of knowledge, community response to the messages and follow-up support and vocational training are all presented and discussed. Lastly, unintended consequences of the interventions are also discussed.

## **CHAPTER NINE**

### **PERSPECTIVES ON INTERVENTIONS FOR FORMERLY ABDUCTED CHILD MOTHERS**

#### **Introduction**

Chapter nine presents stakeholders' perceptions of the interventions carried out to support the reintegration of FACM. Data for this chapter were obtained from interviews with key informants, focus group discussions, narrative interviews with FACM, as well as a review of project plans, documents and relevant evaluation reports. My findings indicate that several interventions were carried out to support the FACM's reintegration, starting with remedial support at the reception and rehabilitation centres. This chapter engages directly with some of the core interventions from the points of view of the project stakeholders. The interventions discussed include: centre-based support to prepare the FACM to return to the community; preparations of the community to receive the FACM, including knowledge penetration and response of the community to sensitisation messages; follow-up support to reunited FACM; socio-economic support targeting reunited FACM and vocational training.

#### **Preparation of the Community to Receive FACM**

##### **PSS Agencies Interventions Regarding Reinsertion**

Several development agencies provided support to the FACM when they returned from the bush. Interviews conducted with the Gulu district local government staff suggested that two main agencies operated RRC. GUSCO started receiving children in 1994; and World Vision Uganda Children of War Rehabilitation Centre opened in 1995. At the RRC the main thrust of the activities was to ensure that immediate basic needs of traumatised children were met and psychosocial support provided before being reunited with their family. Interviews conducted with RRC staff of GUSCO and World Vision indicate that support activities in the RRC ranged from individual counselling and group therapy sessions and other structured activities such as basic learning to prepare the children to return to schooling or join vocational institutions. The interviews indicated

that individual counselling was reportedly aimed at enabling the FACM recount their experiences in order to come to terms with what had happened as well as to enable social workers to arrange a support plan for the young women. Alongside individual counselling, group therapy was utilised through play/dance activities and storytelling to encourage the children to express their feelings. Findings indicated that there was variance in approach to psychosocial support at the RRCs with GUSCO being open to children undergoing traditional cleansing ceremonies, while World Vision adopted a mainly Christian counselling approach. The latter approach involved utilising Christian principles of forgiveness, prayers and songs to enable the children find peace with themselves and those who have wronged them.

In-depth interviews with PSS Agency staff also indicated that efforts were made to work with family members of the FACM during their visits to the RRC. This was achieved through what the agency called family talk with the visiting family members to sensitise them to the needs of FACM.

We recognise the important role of parents and the immediate family in helping the FACM to adjust to post-reunion life at home. For that matter World Vision has it in practice and policy to hold dialogue and supportive interactions with their family members. Such discussion focuses *on parents' attitudes on the returned child*, what family resources will be made available to them and how to support the coping process of the FACM (Aneno Jacinta).

Through such processes the families were advised about how to interact with the FACM to enhance the success of the reintegration initiatives. According to another social worker with GUSCO, the challenge with the approach was that families were rarely met in their natural settings (homes) but talked to mainly at the RRC. The best approach according to him was to reach families in their natural environment and also to open dialogue with other relatives and extended family. However this was not the usual practice.

Other activities to complement family counselling and preparations included making pre-reunion visits to assess family situations and the family's readiness to receive and care for the returning FACM and her children. However, one of the key limitations with this was that at the height of the conflict, some families were not traceable as they had

relocated<sup>52</sup>. The end result was that the actual reunion took place elsewhere, mostly in a rented house in the town (Gulu Municipality<sup>53</sup>). Findings indicate that some agencies, for example GUSCO, paid the rent for FACM for about a year after resettlement within the community. According to the Programme Coordinator of GUSCO this was reportedly to enable the FACM acclimatise to the new home environment and also learn skills and utilise the seed money provided. Explaining the dilemma of reuniting FACM with their families in the IDPCs, one informant noted:

*When I reflect on our efforts at reuniting children in the IDP camps.... that was still a location that was in transit...it wasn't a natural home environment. If we didn't have camps and we had taken these people to the community... there would have been a very great change because in the camp almost everybody was suffering. Yes...people were relying on handouts... so, how do you expect somebody who is relying on handouts to support (FACM) somebody who is coming without any thing? (Obol Andrew)*

Another key informant also picked out the issues of location of reunion as a challenge in the RR phase:

*Socially they [FACM] are also not being well reintegrated in their communities since some of them have not even gone to their original homes Well, I would say the camp situation was really artificial... very artificial and it could not even provide a proper living for their children (CBCs)...Therefore, it could not provide proper protection and safety for these child mothers and their children. To me, it didn't do much in terms of reintegrating the child mothers into the communities because they were living a kind of life of fear. They did not know what would happen to them anytime...For me if we talk of settling... they settled but they did not reintegrate into the communities because there were so many other needs that needed to be met....It doesn't mean that when one goes and settles in the camp then they have reintegrated (Omara Amos).*

This statement implies that the FACM were not reunited in their original homes as should have been the case. The context of reunion in was the temporary IDPCs, with the FACM living in fear from the community. It was the view of some stakeholders that other aspects of life which might have helped to enhance the chances for effective reintegration were not fully met. The FACM were reunited in a context which was

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<sup>52</sup> Consultation with agencies running reception centres (World Vision and GUSCO)

<sup>53</sup> Interview with the Focal Person Child Protection for Gulu district suggests that most (estimated at 80%) of the FACM who passed through the Reception Centres within Gulu district are actually resettled within the Municipality suburbs. It has also been indicated that while many of the girls initially went to the rural areas, they returned to live within the vicinity of the town.



vulnerable to rebel attack. The IDPCs themselves had other socio-economic and spatial challenges which made post-reunion adjustments difficult for the FACM.

Several PSS support agencies carried out a number of community sensitisation activities on issues regarding war-affected children. These were directed at addressing the reluctance of family and communities to provide unconditional acceptance to the FACM and their children. The sensitisation programmes were also conceived within the child rights and child protection framework. Interviews conducted with PSS agency staff indicated that sensitisation activities always focused directly on the plight of children who returned from captivity. The sensitisation meetings were complemented by radio programmes as well as distribution of brochures and posters to community members. This was explained by one agency staff as:

In addition to carrying out community outreach (sensitisation) activities GUSCO also used the print and electronic media as a way of reaching to other stakeholders. Such stakeholders include school children, teachers, ordinary community members and other actors within Northern Uganda, and elsewhere in the country. We have produced several thousand copies of different types of posters promoting relevant messages in child protection and to fight stigma and discrimination against FAC and FACM. We have also conducted many radio programmes, often done on a weekly basis and a few national TV sessions to promote interests of children affected by armed conflict in northern Uganda. Over the years we have received very good feedback about these media (Betty Ayaa).

Interviews with PSS agency staff also suggest that advocacy for children affected by armed conflict was also attempted through local, national and international outreach initiatives.

### **Knowledge Penetration**

In-depth interviews and focus groups with local communities suggest that while some effort has been made to generate and disseminate information about living with children and young people returning from the bush, significant gaps in terms of coverage and depth remain. These relate primarily to changes in the recovery and development context which gave rise to new challenges as depicted by one of the key informants:

As we are now in the post-conflict situation.... land problems have become rampant.....and most affected group of people are the child mothers. This is simply because some of them came back home and did not find their

parents alive. There is therefore, no person to show them their land boundaries....where their parents lived... that is another challenge. Secondly, they came back home with children...these children born in captivity are not fully accepted by their relatives or parents (Agweng Ida)

Therefore while efforts were made to provide information when the majority of people were still in the camps, the process of returning home from the IDPCs to original villages presented different obstacles to reintegration. For example, as indicated in the preceding quotation, some FACM had difficulties in claiming land from their families in situations in which the parent(s) had died<sup>54</sup> and other male siblings who might have accommodated them were too young to act. The young women were often left wondering where they would return to at the disbandment of the camps.

Interviews with some FACM as well as local government and NGO staff also indicated that some FACM have opted to remain in the IDP camp for fear of reprisals and revenge from communities against which they were forced to commit atrocities. Some community members were reported to have made statements like “if you come to the village, we are going to deal with you like you dealt with people when you were in the bush”<sup>55</sup>. A case was cited of a young mother, in the former Alero IDP camp (Amuru district) who had decided to postpone her return to the villages because of such threats. This young woman even asked the local leaders to find her another place to stay rather than her own village where she was born and brought up<sup>56</sup>. While these challenges were documented by the community leadership, interventions to address them did not appear to exist.

### **Community Response to the Sensitization Messages**

The study suggests that the response of the community to sensitisation and advocacy messages were mixed with some community members demonstrating sensitivity to the needs of FACM and others exhibiting a lack of care or concern. Focus groups and narrative interviews suggest that the outcomes of community outreach activities have

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<sup>54</sup> The challenge for many child mothers, especially those who have lost their parents, are that it is the people closest to them such as their uncles who have turned against them and do not want them to settle on their land. This could also be driven by cultural perceptions of women as not worthy to inherit property.

<sup>55</sup> Focus group discussion with community leaders and actors in Alero sub county headquarters, Amuru district. Not sure what ‘actors’ means

<sup>56</sup> Focus group with local and community leaders, Alero sub-county, Amuru district.

been mixed. While they have generated positive public perceptions of the FACM and FAC among community members, in other cases, anger and grievances of the community did not seem to have abated, as indicated by this comment:

Let me add a bit, concerning our brothers and sisters who returned from captivity, these children are still facing a big problem. First of all, there is a lot of stigmatization/finger pointing because of what other people at home see them possessing [Non-food items given by PSS agencies]. For example, they may be given some support so that they can go back to the life they had before captivity. But some community members are not *happy about that. So, the community begins to think that 'they were in the bush and committed atrocities and are now being treated better than us'...that is what brings about stigmatization.* Secondly, finding a partner to marry when they are back at home is a problem. As I talk, I have some examples who have tried to get new partners to live with but they have *separated now. Some people say that 'she was in the bush and doesn't understand'. This makes it difficult for them to settle in their husbands' houses* (focus group with CPC, Patiko sub-county, Gulu district).

The reintegration challenges and lack of effective response of community to the FACM were also confirmed by interviews with NGO staff and local community. It was noted that perceived acceptance and community “good” reception of the FACMs was only for a short period of time. With time many FACM experienced difficulties of different magnitudes with their family and communities, especially when physical items given them by PSS agencies were used up.

Findings indicate that community leadership played an instrumental role in influencing public opinion. Examples were given in which communities had developed their own ‘laws’ on child protection and advice about how to handle formerly abducted young people. This was in a bid to specifically address the issue of stigma against CBC and children associated with the fighting forces more generally. The traditional cultural institutions added a “cultural voice” in promoting the needs of FACM as indicated in Chapters seven and eight.

Most agencies utilised local community structures such as the CPCs and the CVCs/CFs and peace facilitators to enhance not only the children’s psychosocial functioning but also to raise awareness about child protection generally and issues pertaining to the welfare of the children returning from the bush. All these were undertaken to enhance the community response to the needs and challenges faced by the FACM.

## **Follow-up Support**

Follow-up support refers to the process of reaching to the FACM who had been reunited through a PSS agency. The main purpose was to determine how the FACM were coping and to enhance their post-reunion coping resources. This was premised on providing additional psychosocial support, mediating any emerging conflict and providing additional information to the FACM (e.g. for socio-economic opportunities).

While the study did not investigate the follow-up of the FACM within the community, some issues emerged regarding its significance. Follow-up seemed to have been mainly applicable in the cases of FACM who returned home via RRCs. However, a few FACM who bypassed RRCs were also followed up and supported. Follow-up support was mainly provided by community resource persons attached to the PSS agency, and rarely directly by agency staff. Interviews with agency staff showed that community-based structures such as the CVCs and CPCs had, despite their challenges, followed up more children than the agency staff:

I would also like to say that at least with the community structures the follow-up has been more effective compared to the agencies. This is just because they are already within the community and at least they know some of the challenges these young mothers are going through. So, when they go for follow-up they really know what to address. At least they do not wait for complaints [from the FACM] to be aired because these are the very people where the complaints are taken (Muno Lillian).

When we realised that we were not going to have the different agencies follow-up and provide additional support to the child mothers and other children who were leaving the reception centre, the organisation [World Vision] moved to get Community Volunteers Counsellors to provide basic counselling. In the rural settings, the community volunteer counsellors are very significant in the lives of the children who were from the centre [RRC] and created a close link with them. The CVCs have been able to refer the children elsewhere for support, linking them to the local authorities if they could not handle...making some referrals here and there (Aneno Jacinta).

The CVCs were mostly associated with formerly abducted children. The roles of the CVCs were presented in chapter seven.

All of the FACM interviewed indicated that follow-up was crucial in helping them to adjust to life within the community and also acquire some useful information which enhanced their accessibility to opportunities:

Although I was counselled and advised on how to live within the community, at reunion, I met certain challenges which I had not anticipated. I had difficulties in relating to some people within my family and I also experience more difficulties responding to the insults that my children were exposed to by other children. Other children were accusing them of being rebel children and they would come back home crying. Because of all these challenges I felt depressed many times and this affected my business activities. So when madam [name withheld]...came to see me and find out how I was doing I opened up to her. She was able to offer me more support and advice and also had a word with the family members and neighbours. Because of her support I felt much better and developed better resilience to withstand further challenges (Oroma Nancy).

It was also generally agreed by the FACM that they felt well-supported when visited more frequently by the PSS staff. The need for follow-up support appeared to be greater for the FACM in the initial weeks following reunion with families or resettlement within their community. However, while follow-up was expected to be periodic and systematic, this was not the case with all the FACM I interviewed. A number of the FACM said that they were followed up only once or twice during a period spanning several months or years. This was also confirmed by staff of core agencies involved in psychosocial support as seen in the following:

We have really been trying to do follow-up, but as we said, there are challenges. I see it [follow-up] as supportive but it has not had the best results that we expect. And then not only that, there has been a challenge with follow-up because many children are taken to the community but minimal follow-up is done, at least GUSCO has tried but some agencies like... [Name left out]... when you go to the community they [the FACM] *will tell you that they have been reunited 'but no one has ever come to visit us... at least we are happy today you are here'*. So, I can conclude that follow up is not very effective. Agencies have reunited children but very minimal follow-up has been provided (Lakareber Hellen).

PSS agency staff indicated that the frequency of follow-up was constrained by a number of factors including the security situation, high workload in the RRC, and other organisational commitments. Interviews with both key informants and FACM suggest that the nature of settlement (urban or rural) in the return period determined the frequency of follow-up visits.

Interviews with FACM and PSS Agency staff indicated that the FACM who resettled near the Gulu Municipality areas were followed-up more frequently compared to those who resettled in other outlying and rural areas. The inability to follow-up on a regular basis the FACM who resettled deeper into the rural areas was attributed by GUSCO staff

to limited time or opportunities. One of the FACM identified some of opportunities she was able to access by settling within the Municipality:

I trained in tailoring course courtesy of referral by GUSCO. Because of this skill, I was later on taken by KPC (Watoto Church) to work in their tailoring project. *We were paid. They didn't take long to teach us because many of us had basic skills in tailoring. We were making dolls, table clothes, etc. If you sew ten sets, you would be paid UShs 100,000/= but the material is not enough because they bring it from outside [abroad]. Sometimes you stay without doing anything because of lack of material. In a month I report daily... even if you are going to do nothing. AVSI is also sponsoring my child at school (Anena Jackie).*

Follow-up was also made difficult by the FACM relocating to other places (both within and outside the district of reunion) without leaving information on their exact location. This problem was also mentioned by key informants with one noting:

I would like to cite an example where child mothers from GUSCO were reunited at home, follow-up was being made by staff of GUSCO, and all of a sudden when they [GUSCO staff] went to the community these people [the reunited child mothers] had changed their location. The staff could not trace them (Obol Andrew).

Interviews with local government staff also indicated that effectiveness of follow-up was even more constrained by inconsistency in programming approaches among different agencies. An example was given of an agency which was re-admitting the FACM into institutional care, preferring to support them within its own facilities in Gulu Town rather than in the community. The official noted: “the same people who had been reintegrated in the community, who should be acquainted with life in the community, were again *brought to institutions like Action International*”. This suggested that the process of reintegration was undermined by such an approach.

## **Socio-economic Support**

Findings indicate that a number of the returning FACM, especially those who passed through RRCs were provided with socio-economic support to rebuild their lives. However, some concerns were raised about the efficacy of such support:

Economically almost 80 percent were supported... whether the support had been meagre but at least they were supported.... I think the support was not timely. You know when these people came back they had many psychosocial difficulties. As they were getting settled in the community after reunion, that was the time to

involve them in socio-economic development activities. They were however, given support immediately on reunion when they were not yet ready. We should have allowed them time to think through what actually they wanted to do with their lives. With some kind of excitement the support was quickly squandered [especially those of a directly financial kind]. I wish these people were supported later [several months after reunion], they would be able to maintain the support (Obol Andrew)

The concerns highlighted by this comment were also confirmed by other interviewees who stated that monetary support did not work out as planned. The main concern seems to have been that the timing of the support was not appropriate. The young women were given support at a time when they had not fully recovered and had many other issues on their minds. As a result most of the support provided as seed money to the FACM was not very well used by the beneficiaries.

## **Design and Implementation of Vocational Training**

### **Key Aspects and Design**

Vocational and skills training was conceived and developed by a number of agencies as a quick approach at providing the FACM with a means of establishing a livelihood. Interviews conducted with agency staff indicated that these interventions were built within a broader psychosocial response programme, for example, GUSCO's support to war-affected children and the World Vision Uganda, Children of War Rehabilitation Programme. Some agencies considered not only abducted children but also those whose education or means of livelihood were disrupted by the war. But the key priorities were usually children and young women returning from the bush.

While some interventions were directly implemented by psychosocial agencies, there was also extensive reliance on local artisans who were allocated trainees for vocational training. These often trained the young women on behalf of the PSS agency. Interviews with the FACM and PSS agency staff suggested that most trainees were 'placed' for a maximum of nine months although some trained for less, for example, three months. However, key informant and narrative interviews indicate that while the main focus was on the FACM to enable them gain the practical skills in their "chosen" field, the range of training choices for them was very limited.

## **Limitations of Vocational Training**

The approach used by psychosocial agencies in determining and designing the training activity was problematic. The focus seemed to be on what was feasible and implementable within a short project time span yet the FACM were expected to gain skills that they could use for the rest of their lives. Key informants suggested that the design of these skills training programmes was based on the interests of the organisations in satisfying donor demands and driven by pressures of tangible outputs to enhance reporting on project progress. It was thus not based on a real consideration of a minimum timescale that would be needed to fully train someone to the required level of competence given the emotional and learning challenges faced by FACM.

Moreover the training was ad hoc in nature in terms of organisation. Findings further suggest that some local artisans were unable to train other community children using their own resources if the agencies did not provide support. Further discussion and analysis reveal that neither opportunities for continuity or further development of skills were taken into consideration. Apprenticeship opportunities which could have enabled such processes and involvement of the local leadership and other support structures were ad hoc and temporal rather than strategic. A key limitation in the philosophy behind the training design was that its focus was on giving basic hands-on skills rather than strategic life and practical skills<sup>57</sup>.

Although the NGOs realised the importance of conducting a market analysis to determine the availability of opportunities for the trainees once they finished their training, there was little evidence to suggest that this was ever carried out. This is because the programmes never changed at all in terms of the depth of training and the variety of the skills on offer. Interviews with PSS staff further indicated that the scarcity of trainers with specialised skills and expertise in the locality also affected the diversification of the training programmes. Furthermore, the nature of the design and delivery of the vocational and skills training implied that aspects of long-term sustainability and reintegration needs of the FACM were given little consideration at this stage. This is because, as indicated earlier, the enrolment of the FACM into the training programme was rushed and did not take into account the context or viability of options

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<sup>57</sup> Interviews with key informants and PSS agency staff



for income generation<sup>58</sup>. Indeed findings suggested that many FACM who trained in tailoring and other vocational skills failed to utilise these skills upon resettling within the community.

Discussion with agency staff also indicated that the amount of money available to them to provide training and also procure tools for the vocational graduates was in most cases inadequate:

The other challenge they face regards their livelihood. It is true that some FACM were supported and others did not receive support and for the few that did, it was inadequate. Others went for skills (vocational) training where the skills training did not even give them the kits. Others who received the kits were not even able to practice with it. Within the community, those who trained in salon [hairdressing] were given kits but they are not practising because many potential women customers do not go for hair dressing.....utilising the money that they could use for salon for buying food and other items for the household... And those who were given sewing machines, complain that they were not given a start-up fund..... so they even end up selling the machines and do not practice the skills (Odoki Biri biri)...

As seen from the quotation above it is clear that the FACM were trained but they had not been able to apply the skills they acquired. One of the reasons given for this was that their training was of low level and did not enable them to compete with people who had trained over longer periods. The inability of the FACM to mobilise financial capital to “*put some materials up*” for those who trained in tailoring, and lack of tools to operationalise the skills learnt were also cited as obstacles to skills application. The other reason given was that the tools in the skills area they trained in are very expensive and many of the new graduates were not in a position to buy them on their own. This was further hampered by the volatile security context which made it difficult to generate alternative financial capital due to displacement and diminished economic opportunities.

Factors that explain the lack of skill utilisation include, but are not limited to, the imposition of the skills on the FACM; the changing nature of the context which rendered the skills learnt ineffective; and limited, if any, opportunity to take on different vocational skills or upgrade the present ones. The demands of motherhood, which made it difficult to put enough effort in the learnt skills and the desire for a livelihood which guaranteed a quicker and more sustainable source of income also played a part.

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<sup>58</sup> Also supported by the Child Protection focal person Gulu district.

## **Negative Unintended Consequences of the Interventions**

As with most social development projects, the programming for children affected by armed conflict has had some unplanned side effects. Some of the key negative effects:

- The FACM misusing the seed money given for their business start-up;
- Community perception of support to FACM as a reward for the latter's involvement in war;
- Failure to apply skills learnt
- Dependency syndrome which was created in some FACM and which affected their capacity and ability to develop self-reliance initiatives.

## **Summary and Conclusions**

Chapter nine has presented the PSS interventions in the area of study. These included centre-based psychosocial support, preparation of parents and extended family to support their returning children, as well as an analysis of the effectiveness of community outreach especially in terms of how the sensitisation messages penetrated the community and the response of the community to such messages. The response of the community was dependent on a number of factors such as participation and community leadership in influencing community public opinion and the approach used, which in some cases resulted in communities not being reached with the message. Within this chapter, I also discussed the factors affecting follow-up support which appears to be crucial to post-reunion adjustment to life within the community, especially where intra-family or intra-community mediation is provided to address challenges. All these activities contribute to the building and maintaining of good relationships between the FACM and their communities.

In this chapter, I have also presented findings with regards to the ways in which socio-economic support played a key role in the reintegration of FACM as well as the influence of social networks established by the FACM.

Efforts at reintegration of the FACM also involved provision of socio-economic support to the FACM, with those young women who passed through RRCs receiving more support compared to those who went directly to the community. However, some FACM utilised the support effectively while others did not. Vocational training constituted one of the key skills rebuilding approach for FACM. However, the quality of the training and

FACM's marketability and self-determination in choosing skills were points of contention among commentators and development agency staff. Other challenges such as training a number of FACM with similar skills, the short duration of the training and dependency syndrome were cited as some of the key obstacles.

In chapter ten I critically analyse the findings and explore the implications more widely using the theoretical and conceptual framework developed from my review of the literature.

**PART III**  
**ANALYSIS, THEORETICAL DEBATES AND**  
**DISCUSSION**

# CHAPTER TEN

## STRUCTURE, AGENCY AND RIGHTS

### Introduction

Chapter ten draws on the wider literature and theoretical frameworks to analyse the main themes explored in Part II. I have relied on child rights discourse, structuration theory and (African) feminist theoretical perspectives to discuss the young women's experiences of conflict and reintegration. I specifically draw on feminist theoretical positioning of patriarchy, gender and power to situate the experiences of the girls and child mothers in a context which is mainly patrilineal in heritage.

While it is not my intention to defend patriarchy, I borrow from Bakare-Yusuf's work (2009) noting that much as men have taken leadership positions within Acholi society, the authority and influence of the woman was appreciated and recognised in many situations, especially pre-war and outside the bush. Women had jurisdiction over certain socio-cultural institutions and looked at their role as complementing that of men in addition to retaining considerable agency for independent action. Acholi society espoused role complementarities and mutual co-existence between men and women although both pre and post-conflict complexities in gender relations exist. However benevolent paternalism is not the same as equality and it appears that the rights of women and children, were dependent upon social institutions, which faced with challenges and waning influence (due to conflict and other factors), meant that women and children in Acholi society have been exposed to significant abuse and rights violations.

The argument developed in this chapter does not position patriarchy as being anti-women and children, as indeed many social institutions and practices still safeguard the rights of children and uphold the authority of women; instead, the discussion centres on the significance of gender roles cast through a cultural lens and played out through both patriarchal and matriarchal power in a post-conflict situation. The study raises complex issues about gender, culture and conflict and at critical points within the chapter, the

socio-cultural patriarchal arrangement of Acholi society is juxtaposed against rebel bush society.

Throughout the chapter, analysis and discussion follow the themes that emerged from the data. I begin by discussing and situating the experiences of the abducted girls in the bush, and explore the concept of agency in the resettlement and reintegration efforts outside the bush. Broader debates on the issues of rights, culture, gender and child protection are presented as well as an analysis of the manifestations of matriarchy/patriarchy in the bush. The chapter also discusses the issues around sexual exploitation and subjugation of the girls in captivity, the proximate determinants of these experiences and their potential effects as well as the influence of gender issues in the reintegration process. Lastly, I discuss the significance of relationships for the resettlement and reintegration process.

### **Girl Children's Experiences of Rebel Captivity: Limits of Agency and Resilience**

As was discussed in Chapter two, agency in this study is taken to refer to the initiatives, the actions (more than just intentions), and the fortitude of the FACM to prevail over extreme difficulties and personal challenges (see Sewell, 1992; Giddens, 1984; Wendt 1987). In some cases, this agency required employing special resources (intra-personal or otherwise) for the FACM to manage the situation they were in. Archer (2000, p.2) describes agency as the “*necessary precondition for human activity rather than passivity*”. It should be noted that this agency is exercised within a socio-economic and politico-cultural context which is both complex and dynamic at the same time.

Drawing on structuration theory and the agency structure debate (Sewell, 1992; Wendt 1987; Giddens, 1984) I recognise both the importance of human agency as well as the importance of rules, regulations, norms and value systems in regulating human interactions. I do not subscribe to the view that human agency is purely a preserve of individuals and that their actions are not affected by structural influence. I also do not agree with the view that structures are too metaphysical to determine everyday relationships (see King, 1999). While I acknowledge that even where laws, norms and regulations aim to protect rights and minimise socio-economic disadvantage, there are situations when social institutions and structures are destroyed, devalued or severely affected by upheavals such as conflict situations, as is the case in Northern Uganda.

In explaining the experiences of the FACM I find myself drawn to Giddens' (1984) views of agency as reflecting an active and creative individual. The girls were not just passive but initiated actions to influence their situations. Although Giddens tends to talk of the significant influence of the individual in 'creating and recreating' social structure, in some situations the influence of the individual in positively shaping social structure is very difficult. This explains why, despite the young women's personal agency, they were unable to counter abusive behaviours and their rights were still violated. These violations were occasioned in part as a consequence of the structural system developed by the rebel establishment which had power and control and the girls were therefore unable to shape such structures to their advantage.

While analysing the experiences of abducted children in Mozambique and Angola, Honwana (2006) questions the amount of power held by the children in the bush, equating agency to power, and wonders whether the children were in any way aware of the things they had control over. Quoting Giddens (1984) she writes that in such situations the children should be able to exercise some control over self and others. Honwana (2006, p.70) argues that even if people claimed they had no choice, "*recognition of the constraints under which they acted need not mean in Giddens terms the dissolution of agency as such*". Honwana thus takes the position that child combatants in captivity can be considered as agents in their own right because they mobilise resources at certain moments to alter their activities or those of others. Such behaviours included pretending to be ill and making numerous efforts to escape. While I recognise the significance of individual acts of resistance and resilience, it is important to point out that in my study different degrees of agency and opportunity were available to the FACM at different times, but the space for choice was itself very constricted or determined by specific prevailing circumstances.

The limitations of the choices or alternatives within the rebel establishment explain why many of the young women returned with children fathered by the rebels. The bush was not considered the best place to raise children and the young women had not chosen to become mothers but motherhood was still forced upon them (see also Angucia, 2010; Honwana, 2006). This restriction of power to transform the situation in the favour of the girls confirms the observation that while all people have access to some degree of agency

and exert some control on structures, this power is unevenly distributed. Bjorkhaug (2010,p.1) while examining the experiences of former child soldiers in Colombia notes that although the children were not passive victims, the extent of choices available to them was shaped by “particular experiences and circumstances”. This suggests that the range of choices impact the exercise of agency.

The efforts of the girls in trying to navigate through difficult circumstances, show the innate power of agency (Honwana 2006), but also suggest that this agency has its limitations and demonstrates that accessibility and control of resources which determine the power to influence the structure is not uniform. In most situations, whoever has a greater access to and control of power or resources will set the rules and determine the structure which regulates the behaviour and actions of those with less power and access to controlling resources. This indicates the complexity of the interplay between agency and structure in human interactions. Individuals initiate actions and may attempt to recreate the structures in their environment (Giddens, 1984) even if they do not have control over all structural forces (Smith 1998; Sewell, 1992; Wendt 1987; Turner 1986). Although some schools of thought (such as the interpretative school) underplays the significance of external structures and emphasise human actions and relationships as principal forces in agency (King 1999), in circumstances in which human rights, socio-political stability and social justice are undermined, such as in conflict situations, structure may play a greater rather than lesser role.

It is inappropriate to depict FACM as docile victims even during the period of their captivity. In the current study, these young mothers were self-directing, took responsibility (where possible) for their personal safety in the bush (and that of their children) and in many cases, initiated the process of returning home (see also Allen and Schomerus, 2006). Rather, it was the strong will, against all kinds of odds that precipitated the return of many of the child mothers alive (see chapter six). In many cases, however, this expression of agency did not provide safety and many girls died in the process of return or were severely maimed. Looked at another way, obedient acquiescence and strict compliance to the expectations of the rebel commanders and a pretended show of “trust” in the rebel systems was also a form of agency demonstrated by the girls to enhance opportunities for survival and later escape. In such situations attempts at escape would be avoided to give the impression of a relationship of trust



between captor and captive or “husband” and “wife”. Because the rebels perceived that the girls could be trusted they were given greater freedom which was then used later for actual escape.

From a general and wider sociological basis, it should be noted that even social rules and regulations can be changed because culture itself is not static and is influenced by people (Branch, 2008; Sewell, 1992). Cultural change, however, is not always beneficial for all in society. This is the situation in Northern Uganda where the social norms/customs and rites which used to regulate the Acholi cultural practices have been abrogated by the rebels<sup>59</sup>. In fact, the rebels created their own sub-society with its own rules, regulations, and practices (sub-culture which included systems for the violent subjugation and oppression of the children they had abducted).

Young women’s experiences of rebel sub-culture had a significant impact on their post-bush adjustment. It affected their reintegration into the outer society, a society which subscribes to a different set of rules and values and had different structural features from the ones in the bush. This explains why writers such as McKay (2004) and Frerks et al. (2005) suggest that the reintegration of abducted girls is affected by inability to adjust to the pre-existing social expectations and behaviour required of a girl in a normal [Acholi] society. This is because while with the rebels, the girls missed out on being socialised into the Acholi culture and were not familiar with the social expectations of girls of their age groups. It might partly thus explain the social rejection and lack of acceptance many girls in my study faced in reintegrating within the Acholi society, although this view is not accepted by all within the region. Regardless of these different viewpoints, this study clearly showed that the girls’ experiences in captivity (including motherhood) had a strong bearing on their later adjustment.

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<sup>59</sup> This is not to say that all cultural practices were necessarily positive or good for children and women.

## **Patriarchy and Matriarchy in the Bush: New gender dimensions**

As indicated in chapter six, oppression and subjugation of the girl abductees were carried out both by male and female perpetrators. The study showed that the girls were dominated not only by males but by other females with a higher social status and position of power. This suggests a hierarchy of leadership and organisation that is not only gendered but is also subject to culturally determined social positioning based on age and seniority (see Warner et.al., 1997). The question that might be asked therefore is: was this a way of the women venting their anger on the girls or getting back at society for failing to protect them? It is possible however that some of these women high up in positions of rebel leadership went through the same situation, and were simply behaving according to the subculture norms in the bush, creating a cycle of violence in a morbid form of socialisation.

This phenomenon of younger girls suffering at the hands of other women challenges the view that domination is solely a consequence of patriarchal power and indicates the use of matriarchal power against fellow women. It is, however, possible that such negative expression of power against fellow women could be a coping mechanism employed by the women oppressors to ensure their own survival within the rebel establishment.

While violence is clearly not only a male domain, the behaviour of the senior wives depicts extreme forms of survival mechanisms (see also Bjorkhaug, 2010). It is pertinent to note that the confrontational behaviour of the senior wives also reflects the tendencies among some women in polygamous homes. What also needs to be said is that this subjugation of the newly abducted young girls was usually for a short time. Once the girls became mothers themselves or got assigned their own houses by the bush “husbands”, they would escape such ill-treatment by the other senior wives (see also Angucia, 2010). It is however, also recognised that in the normal Acholi society, young girls help their mothers in their domestic duties. The same can be said of other maids recruited to work within a homestead. But in the bush this seemed to have been taken up as an instrument of oppression and subjugation.

The emerging dimension of subjugation in the bush where the girls were abducted and placed within rebel households raises critical issues about gender relations in situations of crisis. The collusion of more powerful wives who ganged up with their husbands to

physically and emotionally abuse other girls is also indicative of agency, though with negative effects. It is possible that that these women were exploiting the situation in their society to maximise their own survival and comfort. Competition among girls in rebel groups (captivity) for favours has been reported in other studies such as Honwana (2006). In Honwana's study the rebel soldiers in Mozambique were serially exploiting the girls sexually, but in my study in Northern Uganda in most cases one girl was allocated to a rebel husband who exclusively controlled her sexual rights. What is also significant about the Northern Uganda situation is where we see girl-on-girl violence within the context of captivity.

### **Agency in Post-Bush Reintegration Efforts**

In the post-bush environment there was greater control by the FACM of their own agency with regard to survival, re-adjustment and resettlement within the community. However, while the FACM showed strong resilience in working to transform their lives and those of their children, gendered social expectations also acted as a constraint to social reintegration. In some cases however, the FACM created their own structures buoyed by social capital resources developed from the bush, their Reception Centre experiences and close relationships formed with other young women during their time in the bush. Boas and Bjorkhaug (2010) following a study of the civil war in Liberia, advocate a reintegration system where social networks and ties formed by the young people during conflict and captivity are positively exploited.

This study indicates that the creation of FACM-owned structures where the membership of groups and interactive frameworks are based on shared experiences helped to improve their post-conflict situation. These structures promoted the exercise of agency and increased the FACM's success in socio-economic activities. This situation was enhanced by improved accessibility to resources, and seed grants (See also Allen and Schomerus, 2006) and highlights the importance of the interaction between the FACM, NGOs and local government structures. Although as indicated in chapter nine, current interventions have not done much to promote this collective agency in order to create a stronger "social agency" for the FACM to positively influence their reintegration and future (see also chapter eleven). There is thus need to focus efforts at creating a situation within communities which not only fully and manifestly promote the rights of FACM but which also addresses the latent and subtle constraints that affect self-actualisation.

Agency and the way in which it is exercised are affected by the socio-political and socio-cultural structures which determine its utilisation and significance. The concept of agency itself is, however, a contested one with different views and perspectives of what it entails or its manifestations (see Archer, 1997, 2003; 2000; King, 1999; Shillings, 1999; Smith, 1998; Sewell, 1992; Dessler, 1989; Wendt, 1987; Turner, 1986; Giddens, 1984).

The rules, laws, norms and expectations of behaviour according to gendered divisions both facilitated and constrained the exercise of such agency (see El-Bushra and Sahl, 2005; Archer, 2000; Shillings, 1999; Sewell, 1992; Dessler, 1989). How the FACM responds to the situation she is in appears to be one of the key factors determining whether the situation will be utilised as an opportunity or experienced as a constraint. It is also important to point out that in the aftermath of the prolonged conflict, many rules, norms and social institutions of the Acholi culture lost their significance and power (see Ochen et al 2010; Bukuluki et al., 2008; El-Bushra and Sahl, 2005). The new challenges demanded new ways of coping and the FACM had to adapt accordingly to their new socio-cultural situations.

One cannot assert authoritatively that agency was more important than structure in negotiating the reintegration process. This was dependent on accessibility to opportunities, resources and other complex socio-economic and political factors within the local communities. What mattered therefore was not only the personal strength and ingenuity of the FACM in managing the structural and environmental constraints but also all other issues in determining effectiveness of the reintegration<sup>60</sup> process. It is important to note that for some of the FACM, their ability to exercise personal agency in enhancing coping and reintegration was severely constrained by high poverty levels, community attitudes, and low level of education (see chapter nine).

The concept of child mother agency is imperative in rehabilitation, resettlement and reintegration planning since interventions that utilise the strengths, coping resources, opportunities and personal resilience of the FACM are more likely to be effective (see Haeri and Guirbal, 2010). It is unfortunate therefore that many interventions in situations

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<sup>60</sup> Reintegration is here understood as a process whose end might be indeterminate, although guided by several process indicators.

of conflict are focused on people's weaknesses and needs. Even when development agencies claim to be utilising a rights-based approach, the practical applications seem to be driven more by needs. Haeri and Guirbal (2010, p. 107) reject the assumption and depiction of women as mere victims in conflict interventions:

... in the midst of conflict, women themselves cope with war by adopting new roles and taking on new responsibilities. This may mean taking a direct part in the hostilities as a combatant or leaving the private sphere of the home to find employment to take care of her children.

Haeri and Guirbal (2010) thus critique the construction of women as vulnerable, arguing that this description erases the richness and complexity of women's experiences of war. While women's agency should be acknowledged, the difficulties depicted in the above quotation and also indicated by this study is a product of oppression, rights violations and parochial interests of one powerful group (rebels) over another less powerful group (abducted girls). The identification of women's resilience and fortitude during conflict should therefore not minimise the brutality of these experiences.

### **Gender, Children Rights and Culture: Implications for Resettlement and Reintegration**

It was pointed out in chapter six that the abduction of girls was not only a result of the rebels' deliberate policy to target children for easy indoctrination, but also as a result of the failure of child protection regimes. It can be argued that once the war broke out, the government should have done more to protect the communities of Northern Uganda from rebel atrocities. The lack of effective protection of children<sup>61</sup> also suggests the failings in governance within Northern Uganda during the period of conflict (see Dolan, 2006).

While Acholi society is patriarchal in nature; decision making is not necessarily unilaterally undertaken by men. Women and children were reportedly involved in decision making but this was not always visible as it happened in private domains, in homes. Such consultations could be about management of domestic resources such as land, livestock and cash crops. What emerges regarding gender relations is that women

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<sup>61</sup> Child Protection in this case is conceived of as the provision of security to the children in the context of the war, and ensuring that their rights to life, torture-free lives and other social and economic rights as defined within the Children Act of Uganda (CAP 59) and the CRC is respected. This also include protection from abduction, involuntary recruitment into the army or conscription by the rebels, accessibility to food, education, health safe water and other such basic social services.

possibly influence decision making but such decisions are mainly publicly announced by men. This thus gives an appearance of the decisions being made by men only. However, while systems were in place to ensure women's and children's participation in family and community's affairs, the regulations were controlled by institutions in which women had limited if any supervisory roles and institutional heads were male. While female elders' voices were heard, the privileges of "custodianship" arguably provided men with the opportunity to manipulate systems to the possible disadvantage of women and children. Although it is also recognised that participation and consultation of both women and children was provided for in day to day lives and activities, it is also notable that this was at the discretion of the clan leaders/family heads, powers which were susceptible to abuse. In the Acholi society it is, however, difficult to fully and effectively differentiate between the personal and the familial interest due to accepted male family leadership.

Findings from the focus groups with elders (male and female) suggest that the Acholi cultural and social set-up had clear norms, regulations and practices which protected children (see chapter seven); and that gender-based violence, child sacrifices, sexual abuse, maltreatment and abuse were unequivocally rejected and heavily sanctioned. However, some practices such as the corporal punishment of children was heavily practiced across Acholi communities and in many cases children were inflicted with physical injuries which left long term emotional and physical scars on them. There is evidence that the social institutions abhorred the practice of gender-based violence. Womanhood was celebrated and serenaded in society (see also Oyewumi, 2000; Mikell, 1995). Historically, in situations of the show of man's power (war) women were involved indirectly by providing their blessings both at individual household level and at the clan level. The matriarch (queen mother in some cases) was implored for blessings prior to launching war against other clans; an illustration of some women's power and influence<sup>62</sup>. In modern days, such blessings are still requested for other social/community development activities which promote social cohesion within the community.

There were social expectations of children. For example, children were not allowed to move alone at night and in the dark, and were expected to be obedient to their parents/guardians and all other older people within the community. Communal chastisement of children was practiced to show that the expectation of good behaviour

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<sup>62</sup> In my discussion with the elders in Gulu it emerged that war was only initiated when there was a justifiable cause locally called "*Lapir*", without which no war was waged.

was from the community, not only one's parents. The views of respondents were that these practices ensured that by and large, children grew up in a supportive and protective environment. These social institutions for child protection reportedly also ensured that orphaned children were given the same privileges as all other children within a home (chapter eight). However, there will have been situations where traditional practices did not protect women and children from abuse (see also Ochen, 2011; El-Bushra, 2003) and some children may have been exposed to violence.

Considering the broader, though unwritten objectives of traditional child protection systems within Acholi society, there is clearly some commonality with some aspects of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). The socio-cultural child protection regimes advocated the protection of children from abuse and exploitation and the key principles of survival, participation, development and best interests of the child were implied in the Acholi socio-cultural institutions responsible for promoting children's welfare<sup>63</sup>.

The social mandates in Acholi dictate that children do not go to war, and during combat women and children should be sheltered and spared (see also Ochen, 2011). While the construction of childhood might differ depending upon social and cultural factors, the objectives of child protection in this instance cut across cultural understandings. Some Acholi practices, however, go against the tenets and values of the CRC, for example, the marriage of girls as a strategy for buffering the family against poverty or redress effects of serious misfortune. From a traditional perspective, such practices may be motivated by good intentions, but do not comply with modern day conceptualisations of rights<sup>64</sup>. The abduction of children therefore contrasts significantly with the socio-cultural perception of war as an adult activity. As such the direct involvement of children including girls in war was an unprecedented act in Acholi society. The very social institutions and provisions which had protected children from rights violations were thus abrogated (see also Angucia, 2010).

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<sup>63</sup> It is recognisable, however, that situation have emerged over the years where acceptable standards of child protection and development have not been fully met.

<sup>64</sup> These kinds of practices were however the exception rather than the rules, when socio-cultural institutions were still very strong.

The abduction of children by male rebel soldiers can be viewed as an extension of patriarchal hegemony which prevails in the normal Acholi society, where men are the real power brokers and custodians. Although under the normal societal situation (peace times) patriarchal powers and privileges were reportedly used to advance communal and social interests<sup>65</sup>, here they were being used to abuse and violate the rights of the girls. What emerges here is that the protection which the normal pre-conflict society and its social norms and institutions provided to the children ceased to be effective (see also Frerks et al., 2005; De-Berry, 2004). Therefore, while there might be conceptual similarity in terms of the aims and objectives of child protection between the Acholi socio-cultural institutions and the CRC and African Charter on the Rights of the Child, in practice the contextual changes brought about by a diversity of factors including conflict present significant obstacles for children's enjoyment of their rights/welfare.

Considering that social values and norms of conduct were violated by the rebels during war, it is possible that the lack of considerations for women and children's rights owed its origin to deep-seated socially embedded structures and social institutions (e.g. El-Bushra, 2003; El-Bushra and Sahl, 2005).

My analysis of traditional Acholi cultural norms and institutions based on interviews with both male and female elders suggests that the existence of patriarchy per se might not actually imply oppression for women and children<sup>66</sup> (see also Bakare-Yusuf, 2003) and that the experience of rejection and subjugation faced by some of the FACM at the hands of both male and female agents suggest a more complex situation. This study thus calls for a re-examination of the concept and practices arising from patriarchy values vis-a-vis the rights of women and children: what aspects negatively affect children in conflict situations and which ones provide an important buffer for child protection? There is a need to review further the construction of rights and privileges for different categories of people within a framework of social accountability and within specific localities. The experiences of the African woman/child and in this study FACM existed in both these

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<sup>65</sup> Interviews with elders of the traditional cultural institution, which is the custodian of the Acholi cultural values. According to the elders, the vesting of leadership powers in men was to ensure social order but not to misuse these powers to mistreat other people including women and children. This view might however be contested as to whether they genuinely represent the interest of women and children, and not only at reaffirming prevailing social institutions which promotes dominant patriarchal hegemony.

<sup>66</sup> I understand that this view can be contested and there are situational and locational variances across different communities, clans and tribes across Africa.



spaces within conflict-affected and pre-conflict situations, which is both complex and pluralistic. War, as any other socio-cultural events has an important bearing on such experiences as Honwana (2006) notes; culture involves a multiplicity of gender discourses that vary contextually.

This analysis therefore lends credence to the work of some African feminists who argue that the pursuit of women and children's rights is a much more complex issue than just pitting men against women or patriarchy against matriarchy (see Mikell, 1995; Oyewumi, 1997, 2000, 2003). Furthermore, Mikell and Oyewumi suggest that many African social institutions are misunderstood and wrongly portrayed as working against the actualisation of the potential of women and children. In Northern Uganda, the construction of womanhood was different in the bush with the rebels than in the wider Acholi society. In the latter, socio-cultural and legal instruments provided protection for underage girls (Ochen, 2011; Berge and Milsom, 2010). What I mean here is that the cultural expectation of marriage is a relationship between two consenting adults, followed by ceremonies and negotiations between the families involved. Sexual violence of under-age girls and forced sex (as was the case in the bush) was not socially sanctioned. These social structures which regulate sexual practices and marital unions among the Acholi seemed to have been broken by the rebel establishment. It is, however, important to acknowledge that sexual assaults on girls were not only confined to the bush and did occur even before the war (Allen and Schomerus 2006) but these were limited and sporadic and not as systematic or extensive as within the rebel ranks or intra-conflict situations. Furthermore, practices of early and even forced marriages for perceived economic gains have been reported outside the bush. Some cases of underage marriages (of girls well below 18, in Acholi society a person under the age of 18 is considered a child) occurred among non-abducted communities, mainly due to the declining significance and limited enforcement of social norms (see El Bushra, 2003).

When the Acholi cultural institutions are historicised, it is clear that not only have children's rights been violated but that these violations themselves represent a breach of cultural mores. During the conflict, girls were raped, physically-abused and made to become mothers and child-wives on an unprecedented scale (Angucia, 2010; Allen, 2005, 2006). The behaviour and sub-culture of the rebels challenges and contests the legal and the socio-cultural construction and interpretations of rights and the very

essence of social justice. It can therefore be argued that the rebels' actions are an aberration of the Acholi culture and do not necessarily represent what El-Bushra and Sahl (2005) portray as the result of deep-seated patriarchal domination. While the rebels' abduction of children can be regarded as an extension of patriarchal power, this behaviour was clearly against established broader socio-cultural positions on children, women and war.

Despite this, it is the case that social impoverishment in the wider society and displacement of people has exacerbated the problems of child abuse (Republic of Uganda, 2007). The key lesson here is that social and cultural cohesiveness and the resistance of communities to shocks are to some extent dependent on socio-economic stability with instability breeding negative cultural environments or an adulteration of cultural values which may then leave children at risk of harm.

The current study suggests that culture is a critical issue in the reintegration process of both the child mothers and their children born in captivity. The community acceptance of children born in captivity to abducted girls depended on whether the child was a boy or a girl. Children of the FACM were treated as though they were members of another clan. The question arose as to where the young women could take their children and what future would they have if society (including their own families) did not fully accept them as worthy of all rights and having access to resources within the family. According to some studies, the perception and behaviour of the FACM's maternal relations derive from the male superior position in the cultural disposition of the Acholi (Maina, 2010). In this case, it was used to deny children an opportunity to actualise their rights<sup>67</sup>. I have mentioned this because as shown earlier, there were situations within the traditional conception of rights and child protection which seemed to promote rather than undermine children's welfare<sup>68</sup> (see also Ochen, 2011).

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<sup>67</sup> When the issue of gender and male powers was raised with the cultural institution of the council of elders, it was indicated that the prominent position of men in the home was to provide leadership and not dominance. It was also indicated that a man cannot take a unilateral decision within the home concerning family resources without involving the wife and his children. As indicated in section 9.4, situations might exist which render such consultations untenable or ineffective. Moreover women were also depicted as having considerable influence and power over food stuff and other family assets. Gender relations in Acholi are therefore contested, with scholars such as El-Bushra (2003) providing their own interpretations yet opinion leaders and elders also have their own positions.

<sup>68</sup> Interviews and discussions with members of the Ker Kwaro elders Council in Gulu Municipality, Paicho and Awach sub-counties.

While the pre-conflict society was more inclusive of children regardless of their parentage, in the post-conflict Acholi society, a different situation existed. Other studies also indicate that children conceived out of rape/sexual violence can be discriminated against, rejected, and not provided with the support they require which also suggests that children's rights may be mediated through other, possibly more powerful, cultural norms which if breached, then threaten the very rights that are espoused within the community (Josse, 2010). Another study evaluating reintegration programmes in Uganda also identified the complexity of the situation for children born in captivity and how they are disadvantaged by their heritage (Allen and Schomerus, 2006). McKay et al. (2010) on the other hand suggest that the acceptance of these children is linked to the economic situations and progress of their mothers.

The reported lack of acceptance of boy children by a significant section of the communities indicates the patriarchal nature and entrenchment of male-oriented lineage systems. Families therefore sought to protect the interests of boys within those families and communities that the FACM were returning to. Girls on the other hand were looked at as a source of income, since it was believed that they would at some point attract a bride price and move away from that home. The objectification of girls and women as a source of wealth has been heavily critiqued by feminist and development commentators (Zeitzen, 2008). Where boy children were rejected, this is likely to be because the families they were reunited with did not want them to compete with their own children for the limited family resources, especially land. This marks a departure from established socio-cultural practice in which orphaned children, children captured/rescued in war and all other "clan-less" children would have previously been integrated within the family and community (see chapter eight).

The cultural institution (Ker Kwaro Acholi) has taken a position that all children born in captivity (boys and girls) belong to the family of their mothers. While this is a strong position taken by the custodian of Acholi cultural practices and traditional values, it is not clear whether this would mean the unanimous acceptance within a community already divided as a result of the conflict. It is possible therefore that isolated actions of people and families exhibiting hostilities towards FACM and their children, especially male children will continue being experienced. For those FACM experiencing family

rejection however subtle, their long-term reintegration path seemed to be more problematic because of worries about the future and welfare of their children.

The protection of children in conflict situations is premised on international humanitarian laws and conventions as well as national legislation and statutes (see chapter four). Beyond this, as I have argued in the earlier section of this chapter, different communities and tribes have their own social institutions, norms and regulations which form fundamental aspects of the socialisation and protection of children (see also chapter eight). Findings suggest that many communities in Northern Uganda including the Acholi have strong allegiance to their culture, which guides social interactions on a day-to-day basis. This is, however, not to deny the fact that contextual changes both directly as a result of the conflict and other factors have been brought to bear on the socio-cultural institutions.

As indicated in chapters seven and eight, culture plays a key role in children's socialisation, in how childhood is defined and in the determination of children's privileges and responsibilities. It has also been indicated that locating child protection interventions outside of local situated culture could jeopardise the outcome of such interventions (see also chapter eight, eleven and twelve). The consideration of cultural issues in child protection programming have contributed to some scholars arguing in favour of finding common ground between international rights agreements and local socio-cultural situations (see Honwana, 2006; Shepler, 2005). The sentiments expressed by Honwana, also supported by this study are that effective protection of children from direct involvement in conflict requires the harmonisation of local and global understanding of children's rights which should be translated into local world views and should be locally sanctioned.

In studying children affected by armed conflict in Sierra Leone, Shepler (2005) noted that a point of intersection between international child rights discourse and local child protection arrangements situated within the local culture might need to be found. It is my view that the portrayal of children's rights as something different from what exists in the traditional society might alienate communities and compromise children's welfare. I am aware, however, that certain societies might have some cultural practices which may not be in the best interests of children. Even in such situations, points of intersections can

still be found. Where they are non-existent a dialogic approach can be adopted to mitigate harmful effects of such practices. The contextualisation of interventions arguably provides the best approach for a particular community at a specific point in time. Honwana (2006) and Francis (2007) also raise the significance of the social construction and perception of childhood among African communities, which is different from age-based developmental life stages which separates childhood from adulthood in western societies. These considerations are important in developing effective interventions for the different categories of returnees.

Findings in this study suggest that in Acholi society just like in many African communities, the transition from child to adulthood is based on rites of initiation and how children are adjudged to have developed the skills to perform certain tasks (see Chapter eight). According to Honwana (2006, p.41) the children in African societies are generally perceived as resilient and strong rather than weak and vulnerable; and childhood is defined on the basis of “social roles, expectations and responsibilities” rather than just age. Children at different ages were considered as such and opportunities were created for them to enjoy their childhood. This contrasts significantly with the involvement of children in armed conflict, where their childhood is visualised as lost and wasted (Bardin 2005). Francis (2007, p.223) also suggests that the “cultural and social construction of childhood is important in understanding the role that indigenous resources and institutions could play in the social reintegration of child soldiers”. There seems to be a clear agreement among scholars who have studied African societies that there is a need to integrate the socio-cultural issues and dynamics in both the understanding of childhood and the design of interventions for the post-conflict reintegration of children affected by war. There is concern, however, among development commentators that the current international child protection paradigm and subsequent programming appears to heavily favour western cultural perspectives over equally important non-western ones in defining protection problems and in prescribing responses. There seems to be evidence that a lot of what the CRC defines as rights resonates more with western modes of values, with local construction of childhood and preferred responses critically ignored.

So in Northern Uganda as elsewhere in Africa, some of the child protection and reintegration models are based on a construct of foreign-tested approaches that ignore

alternative and perhaps more socially and economically appropriate models of assistance that make use of existing social channels and could reach more children, including perhaps those most in need. In Northern Uganda core questions to consider include: how is the definition of children in Acholi society consistent with the CRC? At what points do we consider some one as a child socio-culturally? How do we define the precarious situation of the FACM who in many cases conceived well before they were eighteen? Are they still children or does their responsibility in a way propel them into adulthood?

### **Traditional Resources for Rehabilitation and Reintegration**

As shown in chapter eight, the current study suggest that traditional and indigenous resources/mechanisms exists to complement efforts at rehabilitation, resettlement and reintegration of children affected by armed conflict. Such structures and mechanisms are inbuilt within the local situated culture and social institutions. There is agreement among scholars and commentators that traditional and indigenous resources play a critical role in the lives of the children and young people returning from captivity, yet such crucial roles have been mainly neglected both within academic and policy debate (Bainomugisha, 2011; Murithi, 2008; Liu Institute for Global Issues, 2005). In Northern Uganda, the Ker Kwaro traditional institution is the vehicle within which traditional approaches as a means of reintegration and peace building have been promoted, with many children having gone through some form of traditional cleansing ceremonies (see Bainomugisha, 2011).

Murithi (2008) recognises the importance of the local indigenous institutions in promoting social stability, rebuilding trust, reconciliation and reconstituting order. He identifies several practices across different communities in Africa, discussing those actions performed both during and after conflict. The main traditional and indigenous peace building mechanism in Northern Uganda as elaborated in chapter eight are Mato oput, kayo cuk and tonu ci koka among the Acholi, Langi and Mahdi respectively. These are communities who have been severely affected by the conflict in the region. Studies (e.g. Murithi, 2008 Bainomugisha, 2011) have indicated that these local mechanisms have wide appeals in the areas of application even though they are yet to get national and international recognition, a situation complicated by the fact that many times parallel processes exists for national and international accountability (see chapter four and ten).

Arguing for a stronger social institution for peace building, Murithi (2008, p.22) notes that “there is absence of social trust in Northern Uganda and yet reconciliation remains essentially contested in terms of what it is and how it can be brought about”.

According to Acirokop (2010, p.49) “Mato oput literally means ‘drinking bitter root,’ as it is made from the ground, bitter roots of the oput tree, which is common in Acholi. The ceremony aims at re-establishing relationships suspended between two clans in response to a killing, whether deliberate or accidental”. Other commentators note that the mato oput among the Acholi serves more than one function: restores relationships between families and communities, preserve law and order as it proactively prevents social chaos and thus promotes the community cohesion and good relationship (see Bainomugisha, 2011; Murithi, 2008; Liu Institute for Global Issues 2005). Mato oput is traditionally known more for handling murders and such violent crimes but according to Murithi, mato oput has also been used to handle both minor and major crimes.

Other than mato oput, other key mechanisms for reintegration and peace building in Northern Uganda are moyo kum (cleansing the body) which literally translates into cleansing the body of impurities to remove the bad spirits the FACM (in this case) could have got through her sojourn in the bush and to keep away ill-health (Acirokop 2010). Here, ceremonial slaughter of a goat and applications of some of its parts to the body of the person being cleansed is done so that the bad spirits are chased away. Over the last few years the Acholi have also carried out the practice of moyo cere/piny which implies cleansing the areas (hills) where abductees and other people affected by the conflict could return. Such practices were supposed to cleanse the areas of any evil spirits as many atrocities were committed by the rebels in people’s villages. The objective is to make the area safe for the return of the communities including FACM. Yet there was also the practice of gomo tong (bending the spear). This was a ceremony where conflicting parties agree to put a final end to the feud. Nyono tongweno (stepping on an egg) is a ritual which is performed on a member of the family who has been absent for many months, and in cases where one was presumed dead, another ceremony called lwoko pig Wang (washing away the tears) is done to restore the relationship supposed to have ended by the presumed death of the family member (see Acirokop, 2010).

The Acholi traditional justice system is thus based on restoration where the perpetrator of violence acknowledges his wrong doing and is forgiven by the aggrieved community and is restored with full communal rights. According to Bainomugisha (2011) there is research evidence that traditional approaches to reintegration and reconciliation have improved family relationships and reminded communities of their collective and cultural responsibilities to resolve and accept their children returning from the bush, no matter the perceived extent of their crimes. It is noteworthy that these mechanisms have the potential for promoting post-conflict reconciliations among the communities in Northern Uganda, considering that it is widely understood and accepted by the majority (Bainomugisha, 2011). Its efficacy will however also depend on the extent to which the affected people perceive justice to have been done to them.

The roles and utility of traditional and indigenous resources cannot thus be called to question. For effectiveness, peace of the participants, there is need to meet social and emotional needs. In Rwanda for example, the Gacaca courts enabled the reconciliation process at community levels and handled thousand of cases and the results and issues were accepted by the community (see Bainomugisha, 2011). I recognise however that some of the traditional approaches could be gender biased (Murithi 2008), though in Northern Uganda the institutions of the *rwodi* now effectively have female elders as well (*rwodi okoro*) who would effectively ensure women's interests are met and their unique situations recognised. The literature also suggests that traditional approaches are inclusive, depending on local resources and thus sustainable compared to conventional approaches which are bound by project time frame and heavily donor resource dependent. Moreover, one of the core advantages of the traditional approaches is its emphasis on restorative as opposed to retributive justice, focussing on generating and not destroying social harmony (see Bainomugisha, 2011; Murithi, 2008; Liu Institute for Global Issues, 2006).

The close cultural cohesion among the Acholi in the North also provides significant opportunities for acceptability of the traditional approaches to reconciliation and reintegration although traditional leadership and authority to enforce social norms and institutions have been severely weakened by the conflict (see Carlson and Mazurana, 2010; Ochen et al 2010). The usability of the local and traditional resources have also been confirmed by children in a couple of studies, where most of the children



interviewed admitted having found such resources more useful than the conventional western approaches (Bainomugisha, 2011; Boothby et al., 2006).

Mato oput is however limited with regard to acknowledging of truth of the crimes. What versions of 'truth' will the perpetrators accept considering that stigma and fear might linger with the perpetrators? This is because it relies extensively on wilful confessions of the perpetrator; also perpetrators might fear acknowledging wrongdoing to avoid persecution by the aggrieved. Besides, from a moral point of view, one wonders whether it would really be in the best interest of children for child perpetrators of crimes against communities to be subjected to such a public scrutiny and confession. For children such an approach might be in contravention of the CRC articles, considering also that stigma and finger pointing might follow a public acknowledgement of crimes further denying children the acceptance sought from community (Acirokop 2010). What is the most appropriate method for accountability by children for crimes committed? Who will be involved, will it be only adults or children also? Some of these issues remain unanswered and they thus limit the efficacy of such a process (see also Acirokop, 2010). Moreover, different philosophical orientations among agencies supporting reintegration programme also affect utilisation of traditional cleansing approaches (Acirokop, 2010).

Murithi (2008) also wonders whether such indigenous mechanisms would be very effective where the very institutions implementing them, such as the elders, have been victims of the conflict, with their authority significantly weakened. Another challenge with the application of the traditional approaches to reconciliation, reintegration among communities in Northern Uganda is that many of them were not provided in a systematic and well regulated way, not all children have gone through it and some agencies have shunned them. This thus affects the formalisation, monitoring and evaluations of their impact within the community.

I have also shown in chapter eight that some of the traditional provisions for resettlement and reintegration like mato oput were made to cater for isolated crimes and not mass crimes against a whole community. Questions have thus been raised regarding whether mato oput will effectively address current emergent situation in Northern Uganda or new approaches and adaptations are required (see Acirokop 2010). It has also been posited that sexual offences and sexual slavery have not been fully defined and explained within

the traditional Acholi justice system (Acirokop, 2010). Identification of the victim is also central to the reconciliation, but can the children and other people associated with the LRA identify their victims considering that mass crimes and atrocities were committed over several years in different locations both within and outside Uganda?

### **Sexual Exploitation and Subjugation of Girls: Proximate Determinants and Potential Effects**

Girls within the rebel establishment in Northern Uganda were used as objects by dominant men who were in physical, emotional and psychological control over their lives. As elaborated in chapter six, the allocation of girls to rebel officers and men for sexual exploitation generated strong opposition from all girls interviewed (see also Allen, 2005). This resistance demonstrates agency and resilience; but the girls' agency was not adequate against structural powers of gender, the gun and rules within rebel ranks. This suggests that even during the most difficult of circumstances, some opportunities for agency exist, although they are significantly constrained by structural forces (Sewell, 1992; Archer, 2008).

The current study raises similar issues to studies of child sexual exploitation in other countries in the developing world. In South Africa, some studies have shown that men look for virgin young girls to have sex with to ostensibly cure them from HIV/AIDS based on a widespread myth that sex with virgins cures HIV/AIDS (Mosack, et.al 2010; Shefer and Foster, 2009; Tallis, 2008; Oaksford and Frude, 2004; Leclerc-Madlala, 2002). This potentially exposed many young girls to HIV. The current study contrasts with the South African situation in that the decision to abduct young girls and raise them as wives, albeit child-wives, was seemingly predicated on their presumed freedom from HIV and other diseases (see Annan et al 2010). The assumption was that being virgins they would not have contracted HIV.

In her study of Mozambique, Honwana (2006) cites cases of multiple and systematic rape of girls in rebel captivity with the most beautiful taken up by commanders while the others would be shared among the rank and file, often sleeping with different soldiers or even more than one soldier each night. This however differs significantly from the situation of Northern Uganda (chapter six) where allocation of the girls was more systematised and regulated. This creation of boundaries and exclusive access over sex

with the girls is reflective of the Acholi cultural prescription of sexual exclusivity. It is however, devoid of other aspects of legitimacy and ceremonies which precede socially sanctioned sexual relations with mature young women.

This highlights the influence of gender and power in the control over women's sexuality (Shefer and Foster, Tallis, 2008; Richter et al., 2004). The domination of women in captivity, including of their sexuality transcends the cultural prescription and negotiations of sexual rights and marriages within Acholi society in which the culturally negotiated marital arrangements reflect a social undertaking backed by socio-legal institutions. So, while outside the bush, sexual rights within the Acholi society of Northern Uganda are closely guarded with families only agreeing to marriages of mature girls; in the bush these 'marriages' were forced with very young girls.

In the Mozambican case, Honwana (2006) points out both the presence of mutual support among girls living together as concubines of the same commander and also competition among some of the girls for favours from the rebel commanders. This often brought macabre consequences, with some of the girls being shot to death. While it cannot be said that similar situations existed among the rebels of Northern Uganda, especially for newly abducted girls, direct control over the girls and their allocation to 'husbands' seemed to be vested in the overall rebel commander. Noting that girls and women suffered the brunt of the war in Mozambique, Honwana suggests that both government and rebel soldiers perpetrated crimes of rape and sexual exploitation. A similar situation was also recorded in Northern Uganda (see Dolan, 2005).

Another similarity between the Northern Uganda situation and Honwana's reports of Mozambique is the motherhood experiences of the girls in the bush. In both situations, girls were not happy about giving birth in the bush, recognising the inhumane environment they were living in. In Mozambique, some crying children were reportedly shot so as not to reveal the rebels' positions (Honwana, 2006). In both situations, however, children were born and reared (see also Angucia, 2010).

Studies have identified the devastating long-term effects of sexual exploitation on the interactional, emotional, survival, physical and mental situations of children and young people (Mosack, et.al 2010; Honwana, 2006; P'Olak, 2005; Bardin, 2005; Oaksford and

Frude, 2004; Richter et al., 2004; Leclerc-Madlala, 2002). Other psychologists and social scientists, (e.g. Tremblay et al., 1999 and Moeller et al., 1993) have also written about the long-term consequences of child abuse including sexual exploitation on the emotional and psychosocial wellbeing of an individual. Unwanted pregnancies, exposure to disease and mental breakdown are some of the common effects reported by these studies. Others have included psychosocial difficulties, low self-esteem and, as indicated in Chapter Six, social ostracisation. Burman and McKay (2007, p.317) illustrate the challenges facing returning child mothers in Sierra Leonean societies, where despite the community having knowledge of their experiences of sexual exploitations, when they say: “families and communities often have difficulties accepting them because their experiences are so antithetical to the traditional cultural norms”.

Like other scholars, Honwana (2006, p.77) raises the issue of the significant effects of sexual violation of young girls and women in situations of conflict. She writes:

Sexual violations of young women have devastating effects. The experience of *captivity and sexual slavery destroys a girl's sense of home and security; of self-worth and power, of the possibility of safe interpersonal relationship—indeed if any future at all. People on the island say that the war left profound marks on the young people, particularly on their sexual behaviour....girls getting used to sleeping with many men during the war.*

As in this study, Honwana (2006) also reports situations of girls formerly associated with fighting forces, facing difficulties in getting marital partners in the post-war period. These issues are more extensively explored in Chapter Six. It is clear that young women's experiences of conflict significantly disadvantage them and affect the achievements of personal goals in later life. Unfortunately, most intervention programmes for these young women tend to focus more on physical needs and socio-economic reintegration without considering personal goals for marriage and long-term relationships. As earlier indicated, the difficulties experienced by the young women as a result of their captivity and the subtle social rejection cannot simply be attributed to the existence of patriarchy in society. The girls were indirectly blamed for what happened to them in the bush. As these young women sought to re-establish themselves within their communities they experienced major difficulties in establishing stable intimate relationships (which is a societal expectation) and were viewed as sexually irresponsible if as often happened, their partner left them. The moral standards applied to FACM returning from rebel captivity were not, however applied to girls who remained at home

(non-abducted) and who also veered from culturally accepted expectations of sexual purity. This suggests that FACM were seen as being more deviant because of their experiences.

When the young women tried to seek marital relationships with young men within the community, they often faced opposition and rejection by the mothers and sisters of the prospective suitors. This rejection included physical and emotional abuse, both subtle and overt. The decision for the FACM to seek to establish marital relationships was itself an agential one. Whereas the young women's own mothers were very supportive of their daughters, the mothers of the suitors actively opposed these unions. It appeared that perceptions of the FACM as aggressive, arrogant, and unworthy partners (see also Frerks et al. 2005; Annan et al. 2010) drawn from hearsay and assumptions was a major reason for opposition. Personal testimonies of the young women suggest that many were left by their would-be husbands as a consequence of societal pressure rather than because of relationship difficulties (see also Angucia, 2010). It appeared as if the FACM were being punished for having been part of the rebel system even though this had been forced upon them. While on the surface forgiveness, reconciliation and unconditional acceptance were preached, in reality many of the FACM were subjected to punitive societal behaviours, which I were influenced by power which in turn was influenced by gender and culture.

Many of the FACM who sought relationships were deserted by their partners who succumbed to social pressure that the young woman was considered impure and unworthy. These opinions were held by both men and women (see chapter seven). Many times subsequent relationships failed again due to the situation described above thus creating a vicious cycle driven by what I call social opinion and negative perceptions of the young women. It is possible that many of the young women might fail to get lifelong marital partners on account of their past (see also Rector et al., 2003). This social rejection of the girls shows the resoluteness of social structures which still puts strong demands on people within society to act in the accepted ways. In a way therefore, a rejection or denial of the otherness of the circumstances of the returning child mothers and young women is exhibited. The challenges the girls encounter are therefore possibly a creation of social structure, which includes patriarchy and other socio-cultural dynamics as well as traditional value systems (Burman and McKay, 2007).

## **The Significance of Relationships in the Reintegration Process**

It should be noted that the lives of the FACM both within and outside the bush involved many different relationships as indicated in chapter seven. Findings suggest that while in the bush the girls had very little power, if any to influence who to relate to, their post-bush relationships gave them greater control and choices. On rejoining society, the FACM found themselves in a complex web of everyday relationships with different people within the community. These included their own children their immediate and extended family, their peers, suitors, general community members and agency staff. The literature acknowledges the importance of healthy relationships not only for recovery from psychosocial shock but also to enable the process of change within the community (see Angucia, 2010; Karame, 2009; Okello and Hovil, 2007; Swaine and Feeny, 2004). The quality of the relationships is contributory to the success of the reintegration programmes.

In my analysis of the relationship between FACM and their children I noted that while the love for their children came out prominently, social structures and discrimination stood in the way of other relationships forming (e.g. marriage). As indicated in Chapter six many of the FACM that tried relationships that did not work out abandoned them for the sake of their children. This again demonstrates strong agency and the fact that the child mothers at least want to be in charge of their lives and regarded the development and welfare of their children as their paramount concern (see Dessler, 1989; Wendt, 1987).

Whereas the love for one's own child is arguably inherent in the mother-child bond, the sustenance of that love and practical care was dependent on some external factors. Discussions showed the importance of the role of mothers and in some cases aunts in helping the FACM to manage the relationships with their own children. The FACM talked of their fathers as accepting them back into the family but most of the support appeared to come from the mothers who were seemingly closer to the girls compared to the male relatives. It is also possible that these relationships were induced by the natural closeness among women, with the FACM being freer to talk about certain issues with their mothers than their fathers. There were however other male relatives who provided close support and were genuinely concerned for the FACM (chapter seven).

Interviews with the FACM indicated that they had a deep longing for their family but on return many did not receive the kind of support they expected, whether emotional, social or economic (see Adanan, 2010). For parents, it was a different kind of experience as they no longer knew the daughters that returned to them; they were strangers to each other. Some of the parents expected that their girls would return looking like when they were abducted; even, the same size and height. This shows that they were rooted in the past because this was the mental image they had of their children at abduction (see also Maina, 2010). It is possible that many parents felt resentment that they did not have the opportunity to be involved in the development of their children. In some cases however, parents and other close relatives had difficulties accepting their children as they did not easily fit into the social systems and threatened family honour and dignity (chapter seven).

The dilemma of the FACM was compounded for those that returned and found that their parents had died. These young women had to fend for themselves in most cases and faced the uncertain and unprecedented task of claiming their family land. Unfortunately, the clan leadership systems which might have protected the rights of vulnerable and orphaned children have also had their powers and influence significantly reduced by the conflict dynamics (see chapter eight). This was more difficult for the girls who had very young siblings, as property management and inheritance tends to be transferred along male heritage lines.

Other respondents commented that the general atmosphere in post-conflict Northern Uganda is that of land greed where different individuals seek to capture as much land as possible not only from FACM but others as well. The view expressed was that many people, not only FACM were experiencing alienation and being denied their land rights. Women and maternal relatives tend to suffer more than other male family members whose land rights are defined by social institutions. Veale and Dona (2009) have questioned the assumption that the extended family will support children affected by war. They note that some agencies pay more attention to the numbers than the quality of reunification processes. Observing that the current literature on reintegration seems to be in favour of community-based approaches rather than individualistic paradigms, they argue that this has not been fully embraced among agencies. They further point to a

complex web of relationships involving children affected by war where a male relative (an uncle) might consider a child as belonging to him and therefore he is entitled to all rights within the home. On the other hand, children within the home might consider that same child as an orphan, an outsider to their family, pointing to complexity in interpretation and construction of relationships among different generations in the same family.

The study showed that if both the nuclear and extended family unconditionally accepted the FACM together with their children, the quality of reintegration was enhanced. Blattman and Annan (2008) as well as Annan et al. (2010) agree and suggest that family acceptance constitutes one of the strongest grounds for the development of resiliency among formerly abducted youth in coping with life in the community. The challenge of not fully accepting returnee young women or their children is thus not only an experience of Northern Uganda. In Sierra Leone, young women returning from war were also reported as being perceived as “other” by the family and community with the latter constructing boundaries which the FACM were excluded from (Burman and McKay, 2007, p.318). Another study discussing the challenges of post-conflict reintegration in Sierra Leone and Liberia suggests that the lack of effective social and family support has led the returning child soldiers to “perceive armed factions as their surrogate family” and support network and thereby seek a recourse to violence, aggression and gun mentality in resolution of disputes (Francis 2007, p.208-209). It is significant to note that many FACM who had grown into young women and attempted post-reunion relationships indicated that they felt unwanted in homes they were married into.

The perceptions among community members in Northern Uganda are also that FACM exhibit some aggression in their relationships with other people including potential suitors (see Frerks et al., 2005; McKay 2004). This aggression may in part be explained by the violence the young women had been exposed to in the bush. It may also be a response of the FACM to a context which was difficult, judgemental and which placed demands on them to conform to societal norms as to what is a ‘good’ woman. As survivors of abduction, brutality and both male and female dominance, these young women have experienced and expressed a high level of agency and resilience which may mean that they question the expectations of wifely submission. Furthermore, removal from their communities at the very time they would have been inculcated into the socio-



cultural requirements of Acholi womanhood means that they have missed out on crucial socialising influences, which may too have a bearing on their post-reunion lives. Indeed, Francis (2007, p.208) suggests that the destruction and militarisation of childhood “has led to disrespect for constituted authority and elders...”

The importance of focusing interventions on relationships becomes even more critical when we consider the fact that the children and young people return to the same communities within which they may have been forced to commit atrocities (see Allen and Schomerus, 2006; Honwana 2006; McKay 2004; McKay et al.,2010). Honwana (2006, p.5) refers to this as a “contradiction of reintegration”. This therefore raises the need to work on building effective relationships between the FACM and their communities. I have indicated in chapter seven that some of the FACM in Northern Uganda were threatened by people from their villages on the suspicion that they had committed atrocities against them. This also shows the complexity of reintegration interventions and the difficulty in predetermining community responses. In this instance, the community had been ‘sensitised’ to the circumstances of FACM which suggest that deep resentments against the FACM existed. The study points to the need for new approaches to building relationships, which go beyond general community sensitisation and engage communities in more dialogue. I am aware, however, that some scholars dismiss the idea that social stigma and challenges are widespread and that social acceptance increases with time (see Annan et al. 2010). While it is important not to over-emphasise difficulties or to attribute the actions of a few individuals as being representative of the wider community, it is equally important to recognise the silent rejection which lingers in society for a long time and needs to be redressed for effective reintegration.

The complex web of relationships between FACM and significant people in their environment depended on a number of inter-related factors: personal agency, family support and acceptance, access to information and other resources and agency support. The most important factor determining the quality and effectiveness of reintegration however was the quality of the human relationships between the FACM and their families and communities.

## **Summary and Conclusions**

In this chapter, I have discussed the main themes from the study within the framework of the key theoretical debates and the conceptual framework of the study. The main thematic issues explored were gender, culture and children rights, children's experiences of captivity, significance and limitations of agency and the implications of these factors for the reintegration of the FACM. The chapter also explored the issue of patriarchy and matriarchy and the points of convergence and divergence between culture, children rights and feminist theory; as well as the contemporary discourses on children rights and the significance of relationship in the reintegration process. The following chapter (chapter eleven) analyses the interventions within the socio-cultural context and makes reflections on wider issues of programming for children affected by armed conflict.

## **CHAPTER ELEVEN**

### **THE NATURE AND POLITICAL DYNAMICS OF INTERVENTIONS**

#### **Introduction**

The foci for this chapter are the interventions that have been implemented to address situations of the FACM. I begin by discussing the contextual issues around the return of the FACM, as well as a critical reflection on the prevailing child protection structures and the significance of group dynamics in the reintegration process. Next, I analytically explore the different aspects of the interventions including their core characteristics, target beneficiaries, intervention strategies and key assumptions as well as general limitations. Finally this chapter considers the forms of monitoring and evaluation, lesson learning processes, and linkages pertaining to early recovery and development within Northern Uganda as well as wider issues relating to interventions philosophies are made.

The main argument in this chapter is that while NGO support has been helpful to the reintegration process, their conceptualisation and manifestation has in most cases ignored the FACM's aspirations. Further, the indicators for interventions have in most cases met donor aspirations but not the actual changes which war-affected communities would have wanted to see. The inability of the interventions to effectively empower the FACM and their communities have also been conditioned by the limited incorporation of lessons of (implementation) experience as well as the lack of conceptualisation of interventions which responds to the changing development and conflict realities within Northern Uganda.

#### **Contextualisation of Factors Affecting the Nature of Return**

As demonstrated in chapter seven, a number of factors determined the nature in which the young women and child mothers returned home from the bush. This study chimes with earlier studies which indicated that FAC returned both through the RC and some went directly to the community (see Annan et al., 2006; Allen and Schomerus, 2006).

Annan et al. (2006) estimates that as much as 50 percent of young people (including girls) went directly to the community without passing through any RRC, with Allen and Schomerus (2006) suggesting an even larger proportion going directly to the community.

Factors preventing FACM passing through RRC ranged from fear of recrimination by the UPDF; fear of contracting HIV/AIDS; lack of information among community and family members; FACM's desire to avoid extended separations with families and perceived safety and security of FACM in their families (see chapter seven). Many of the FACM interpreted going through the RRC as passing through the army as indeed the army wanted time to extract intelligence information from the returnees. There were however cases of FACM who were sent directly to the RC and never passed through the army's CPU.

Contextually, HIV/AIDS is a serious issue in Uganda with up to 6.4 percent of the population infected (MOH, 2006). In Northern Uganda, the situation is even more appalling with 8.2 percent of the population being HIV positive, a situation partly attributed to the war (Government of Uganda, 2010; Bukuluki et al., 2008; MOH, 2006). Considering that for most of those affected their life expectancy gets significantly shortened; using HIV as a means of scaring young women could be a very effective tool. Furthermore, the failure of the families and the communities to recognise the importance of the young women passing through such RRCs constituted one of the most significant reasons for the FACM failing to pass through the RRCs. It is also important to note here that a combination of factors could have influenced the decision to go directly to the community or pass through RRC.

It has been noted in chapter seven that FACM's inability to pass through RRCs had some implications on their post-conflict adjustments. They reported slow PSS recovery, limited external support, reliance on own resources for PSS and other needs, and limited opportunities for social networking. The inability to refer FACM to RRCs denied them the space to exploit the social networking opportunities which were created in the RRCs. It further denied them the opportunity to position themselves to receive socio-economic and other support from these agencies (see Allen and Schomerus, 2006). This is because the FACM that went directly to communities were simply not known to the PSS agencies or in cases where they were known, the PSS agencies preferred dealing with FACM who

passed through their RRCs. The tendency of the PSS agencies to prioritise their former clients is also dictated by limited funds and resources (Ochen-Awich, 2009).

It is apparent therefore that many of the FACM that went directly to the community were exhibiting high levels of psychosocial problems unlike their counterparts that went through the RRCs because they received no systematic and conventional psychosocial support. The reported psychosocial (PSS) difficulties among FACM returning directly to the community raise questions on the effectiveness of the traditional social support system. Traditionally when people are exposed to critical events, it is normally members of the extended families (in most cases older family members) who provide that needed emotional and physical support. However, the experiences which the FACM had gone through in the bush were very complex and it is possible that the traditional coping resources could have been inadequate in such situations (see also Angucia, 2010). Studies conducted in Northern Uganda also confirm the view that many FACM and other FAC that did not receive agency-based PSS support still exhibits signs of trauma and psychosocial difficulties (Annan et al., 2006; 2007; Baines et al., 2006; Caritas, 2009; World Vision, 2009).

Writing on benefits of passing through the RRC, Allen and Schomerus (2006, p.43-44) note that the CVC indicated a significant difference:

... about the relative benefit of passing through reception centre, they stated that they find FAPs who have been through reception centres easier to handle: the difference is that talking to those who passed through reception centres is easier *compared to those who didn't pass through the reception centre. Also behaviour alone can differentiate the two. Those who came home directly are rough and those who passed through the centre are polite* (Allen and Schomerus,

It is thus possible that those FACM that did not pass through RRCs are far less supported compared to those that did. The FACM that went through the RRCs indicated that the times spent at the RRCs and the psychosocial programmes they went through were instrumental in enabling them to achieve psychosocial recovery and wellbeing (Impact Options limited 2010; Allen and Schomerus, 2006). Although RRCs might also have had some limitations, their overall impact on the FACM's PSS wellbeing was positive.

## **Analysis of the Current Community Child Protection Structures and Systems**

Chapter eight presented ideas about community based structures for child protection and it was noted that two systems exist: based upon traditional and modern structures. Within the modern structures local government structures and camp committees have been buttressed by several structures created by agencies to respond to child protection concerns at the community level. The latter structure (including the more recent Child Protection Committees), however, also presented new challenges. Interviews indicated that however much these created structures are made to embrace their community-based nature; the interactions between these structures and the agencies do not preclude sub-conscious ownership by either the agency or its staff (Ochen-Awich 2009; Abola et al., 2009).

Analysis of the current child protection structures in Northern Uganda suggests that agency staff was more preoccupied with meeting their own output targets (using CPCs and other similar structures) than the ultimate objective of developing these structures or buttressing them to perform their prescribed functions and roles. The philosophy of support seems driven by dominant development discourse, fuelled by donor requirements for quick accountability and less on long-term developmental change for the intervention target groups (see Bebbington et al., 2008; Dagnino, 2008).

So, while the theoretical strategy and philosophy was about strengthening the child protection structures to address situations of rights violations within the community, the agencies often expect these structures to meet their own individualised project targets (Save the Children 2010; Impact Options 2009; Abola et al., 2009). These interests were in most cases divergent and in some instances even presuppose the objectives of setting up these structures. With these challenges, the potentials for these structures to make meaningful impact in enhancing child protection and response at the community level are uncertain.

It is clear that district structures have left most direct intervention activities to the civil society actors, an abdication of responsibility in my view. Non-governmental agencies

have taken a central role yet it should have been the government's responsibility, with the former complementing the latter's efforts. It also appears that the current child protection structure (CPC) is more suited towards the needs of the OVCs than FACM or FAC. While I am not arguing for the return of structures which only address the interests and needs of those affected by war, I am also mindful of the fact that sensitivity to the experiences of FACM be considered. This would at least ensure that the interest of children and young people with psychosocial challenges is addressed.

The efficacy of the CPC structure has been bedevilled by many challenges arising from the environment. These include sub-conscious ownership by founding agencies, community wide expectations for monetary facilitations and limited direct support from local government structures. Documentation of impacts has been further hampered by the poor record keeping of the CPC members; the sub-county and the district local government (see also Save the Children, 2010). Systematic attempts at data capture and management are often done within a context of poor documentation and limited opportunities to incorporate learning from experience. It is my view that failure to document, share and learn from the prevailing experiences hinders such child focused interventions from being of benefit to a wider children constituency.

Moreover, discussion with FACM suggests little efforts on the part of the community-based child protection structures to rigorously look out for them and their children for support. Very few of FACM have thus been systematically followed-up and supported by the CPCs. The CPC training curriculum does not take into consideration the psycho-emotional, physical and socio-economic development rights/needs of the FACM and their children. Thus efforts at direct targeting and identification of support, if any, for the FACM have been thwarted. The issue of concern has been that when the strategic change in approach in working with CPCs came, no clear alternative arrangement was made to support FACM. It was as if the agencies imagined the FACM and other FAC were no longer in need and yet situation analysis reports and other studies clearly indicated that psychosocial support remained a critical intervention need for Northern Uganda (see Caritas 2009; Baines et al., 2006). It is only when the CVCs were operational that efforts were made to follow up the FACM.

I recognise however, the view that community-based reintegration is best achieved by targeting all vulnerable children as a group, resources permitting (Allen and Schomerus,

2006; Maina, 2010). Due to the challenges discussed above, I therefore argue against creating a unified CPC structure or any other harmonized system of child protection as a stand-alone entity within the community. The wisdom and efficacy of stand-alone structures within the community for child protection work should be critically reviewed. Experience has shown that where created structures are made to report through the lead agency; they come to regard themselves as staff of the latter organization, thereby undermining their independence (GUSCO, 2010; Abola et.al., 2009; Ochen-Awich, 2009).

In Sierra Leone, a post-conflict Child Welfare Committee structure set up to address situations of reintegrated children could not effectively be operationalised due to low community ownership, limited political will, poor data management systems and reduced donor funding (Save the Children 2010). Another review of interventions for post-conflict Sierra Leone and Liberia also discouraged creating parallel and stand alone structures, which cannot be sustained (Bernard et al., 2003). Although structures were set up to address emergent child protection problems in the community, they have not worked effectively largely due to little direct government support.

Reflection on the CPC structure suggests that similar scenario might be encountered in Uganda with stand-alone structures for child protection. It is worth noting that the feasibility of independent CPC structures could be more relevant in a conflict setting where communities are close by each other and as such reporting and coordination is easier. But the current context (post-conflict recovery) has changed with the majority of people leaving the camps where they have been displaced for several years.

I am therefore sceptical about the efficacy of the CPC structure or any other harmonised systems of child protection as a stand-alone entity within the community to handle children issues in the context of the recovery and development phase. Besides, the amount of resources available for such work and facilitation of the CPCs is linked to concentrated and sustained interest of donors in a locality as demonstrated in both Northern Uganda and Sierra Leone (Kalibala and Elson, 2010; Save the Children, 2010).



## **Group Dynamics and Reintegration**

As indicated in chapter seven and eight, the literature also suggests that peer support and group processes are critical for promoting social reintegration and positive coping of the FACM (McKay et al., 2010; Allen and Schomerus, 2006). McKay et al. (2010), however, points out the importance of agency staff in facilitating peer group processes. Again, the information sharing with the other group members ensured that members were able to exploit opportunities available within their environment much more than those who were not in groups. In many cases, the groups also operated a rotational savings and loans association, which further provided the FACM with needed credit. In Northern Uganda some groups also received training on savings, income generation and micro-enterprises development and management.

Sociologically groups have much more intrinsic values than the sum total of their individual members with group members obtaining more benefits than people acting alone (Haralambos and Holborn, 2008; Giddens, 2006; Arrow et.al., 2000; Gokhale, 1995). Moreover, the principle of the norms of reciprocity which seem to reinforce mutual support are more applicable to tight and socially obligatory groups than individuals (Gouldner, 1960). Gruenfeld et al. (1996) also found that groups whose members are known to each other are more able to pool information and integrate different perspectives than those groups where members are not very familiar with each other.

In the current study it was noted that those that are involved in interactive activity within the community report less stigmatisation and negative public attitude. This could be attributed to the fact that these young women have financial resources and are therefore not perceived as a burden. It is also possible that their positive interactions with other people in community generated more social capital and “comradeship”. Again, groups are known to community leadership and are therefore in a vantage position to be identified or nominated for further support from other Agencies. The prospects for mobilising more resources for group members are thus enhanced. Group membership also provides greater opportunities for utilisation of both bonding and bridging social capital (Haralambos and Holborn, 2008).

The approach of the key PSS agencies (Save the Children, World Vision, GUSCO and Concerned Parents Association) in engaging both FACM and non-FACM within the community as group members provided avenues for mutual and social support and reduced stigmatisation. This is also confirmed by recent studies (McKay et al., 2010; Team Initiatives Limited 2010; Allen and Schomerus, 2006). The approach also created a friendly interactive environment for the FACM and perhaps helped the child mothers to openly share their predicament within a non-judgemental environment.

There are also cases where individual PSS Agencies working with a particular group would recommend the group for more support to other Agencies, enhancing their capacity to be seen and heard in the community (see McKay et al., 2010). It is possible that where FACM have a stronger voice in the community they can access educational/scholarship opportunities for CBC; access land and other productive resources; and seek support for other FACM. It is also possible, however, that individual needs of FACM might not be fully met even in their groups and in such situations their vulnerabilities continue.

Commentators such as Silver (2007) and Turshen (2004) have also noted that group approach could have the unintended consequence of excluding other people from equitably sharing opportunities available to group members. Silver (2007) refers to this as the creation and development of new boundaries between insiders and outsiders. It is therefore possible that many FACM who require support but do not have access to information and membership to these groups have been left out. In Northern Uganda, exclusions could be due to the membership ceiling, joining requirements or other factors. There is a high possibility that some child mothers who try to join the groups could have been left out due to the membership ceiling. Therefore new approaches to address the situation without bringing about social exclusion and inadvertently promoting social injustices are necessary.

The exclusionary tendencies of groups raise moral issues on child protection and the children rights discourse. Questions arise as to why people that qualify for support have been left out. This could explain why some actors did not consider the group approach as an effective way of addressing the needs of FACM, advocating a mainly community-oriented approach which addresses FACM needs within communities instead of

individual targeting (see Mazurana et al., 2008; Annan et al., 2007; Annan et al., 2006). This approach, though, is limited by the demands it puts on resources, which might not be readily available for large scale community-oriented approach. However, for effectiveness these community-wide interventions should combine with specific targeting as will be discussed in chapter eleven.

## **Analysis of Current Interventions for FACM**

### **Nature of the Interventions**

As indicated in chapter nine, the defining characteristics of the interventions for addressing the plight of formerly abducted child mothers comprise a number of dimensions. Some interventions were developed to meet the psychosocial needs of the child mothers at the RRCs and in the community. Others were designed to respond to the psychosocial challenges of the family of the returning FACM. In the post-reunion period, interventions have also been developed to address the reintegration needs involving socio-economic support, vocational training, follow-up support and other related activities.

Intervention activities within the RRCs involved a series of initiatives to ensure that the FACM return to a normal state of psychosocial wellbeing, addressing their fears and doubts as well as preparing them to re-settle within the community (see also Allen and Schomerus 2006). Regarding counselling support (group or individual), Barenbaum et al. (2004) note that there is no evidence at present pointing to preference of one method over the other although individualised approaches would help people deemed to have been severely affected. Barenbaum et al. (2004, p.54) also observe that the absence of a random controlled design makes it difficult to make “unequivocal conclusions on the success or otherwise of PSS interventions”.

While this might be the case, in contemporary programme evaluation, it has been accepted that qualitative evaluation of interventions focusing on outputs and perceived outcomes provides useful information for project stakeholders (see Morra-Imas and Rist, 2009; The Sphere Project, 2004). Modern social sciences afford various viewpoints, perspectives and approaches on social phenomena due to both ontological and epistemological positions.

Some commentators have criticised PSS agencies operating RRCs for reinserting children into a morbid and insecure community, (Blattman and Annan, 2008; Allen and Schomerus, 2006). In evaluating effectiveness of RRCs, Allen and Schomerus (2006) note that there is little data on how the formerly abducted persons have coped on return to the community. They note that within the RRCs the children are rarely consulted by staff on their readiness to return home let alone involving their family in such decisions. Despite these challenges, however, Allen and Schomerus conclude that many children returning through RRCs attested that the centres were very supportive in their recovery process, a scenario which the current study also confirms.

Reunification of FACM to IDP camps was due to the fact that active combat (conflict) was still going on. It is generally understood among the agencies that on cessation of the conflict, the FACM and other FAPs would move back to the original homes. This situation challenges dominant approaches in DDR intervention as reintegration is assumed to have started but the volatility of the context made it a difficult call to make:

If reintegration is taken to mean a return to social or economic normality as a productive member of society the use of the term to describe what happens in northern Uganda is something of a misnomer. The term reinsertion or reunification are perhaps more appropriate. The social and economic conditions in which the bulk of the population of war affected parts of northern Uganda are living are unacceptable and cannot be regarded conducive for a return to normal productive life of FAP (Allen and Schomerus, 2006,p.5).

Allen and Schomerus (2006) further argue that the context of return is inappropriate for all persons whether they have been abducted or not. But the post-2006 periods have seen more movements away from the IDPCs by the FACM to their original homes. These movements have, however, taken place within a context where socio-economic development indicators have not changed much despite the protracted interventions by development agencies since the late 1980s.

### **Beneficiaries**

PSS programming in Northern Uganda targets all children and their communities affected by war. For the FACM, the interventions were aimed at directly supporting them and their children. For most agencies, the support within the community and post-reunion period included follow-up and other socio-economic support directed at mainly

FACM who passed through the RRCs. Initially, the criticism of the Agencies supporting children affected by war was that the FACM were not being effectively targeted with most support directed towards male formerly abducted children. This was probably due to the argument that interventions being implemented were either not reaching the FACM directly or not responding appropriately to their needs as women and girls (Adanan, 2010; Maina, 2010; McKenzie n.d; McKay and Mazurana, 2004; Shepler, 2002). It is important to note that lumping FACM together with other children and young people coupled with limited follow-up drew attention away from their individual issues and needs. It is possible that such an approach could have, for example, failed to identify and effectively address the trauma and challenges of FACM playing the role of child soldiers in the bush. It is noted that FACM who participated in battles would have considerable difficulties coming to terms with their situations in the post-bush periods. Interviews with RRC staff in Northern Uganda also suggested that due to heavy workload, specific needs of children and child mothers could have not been looked at more indepthly (see also Ochen and Okeny, 2011; Allen and Schomerus, 2006). This could have a significant (negative) bearing on their resettlement and reintegration process and perhaps bring about diminished coping among the FACM.

The failure of some PSS and reintegration interventions to bring about a real change in the lives of the FACM could be partly attributed to the challenge of benefit capturing. In cases where the FACM do not seem to be progressing socially and economically, questions are raised yet the problem could be that support intended for them was hijacked. This has been exacerbated by weak monitoring and evaluation processes within the social development sector (MoGLSD 2008). Although the community involvement approach (e.g. participation of local leaders) might meet the requirement of the donor and project implementers (agencies), the real interests and situations of the FACM does not get addressed. Such also is the challenge in recommending a PSS programming where the needs and development aspirations of FACM are addressed within a wider development programme. The possibilities of the FACM missing out on remedial interventions to address their individual PSS needs and socio-economic development rights actually get high. It is thus advisable that for intervention to be successful they should first of all address the individual needs of the FACM and then address wider development issues within the community.

## **Intervention Strategies and Key Assumptions**

In Northern Uganda, the main intervention strategy was to focus on improving the psychosocial functioning of the FACM and equip them with life skills such as vocational training and IGA support. It was believed that this would enhance their reintegration chances in the community. The key assumption for the interventions was that support to the FACM would enable them utilise the skills gained to improve their own livelihoods. It was further assumed that the FACM would accept the vocational training available and on offer by the agency. Although the FACM were not forced to take on a particular vocational training; the options open to them were quite limited (see also Maina, 2010). On the surface therefore, the Agencies could claim that there was self-determination of the FACM to enrol on a particular vocational training or socio-economic activities; in reality however, these were coaxed by the situation into doing what was on offer<sup>69</sup>. This could possibly explain why many of the FACM in the long run abandoned the skills learnt and opted for new forms of livelihoods<sup>70</sup> (see SCIUG, 2008; Blattman and Annan, 2008; Allen and Schomerus, 2006).

Moreover, one donor supported extensive analysis suggests that there is little evidence that the skills learnt have “proved adequate to securing a livelihood” (Allen and Schomerus, 2006, p.42). This problem could have perhaps been avoided if the FACM were genuinely helped to make their own choices after considering available options. In initiatives like training support under Income Generation Activity, there was little focus on the self-esteem and socialisation skills as well as the agency and aspirations of the formerly abducted child mothers (see also McKay et al., 2010). It is my view based on analysing the interviews and the testimonies of the FACM that a better result could have been guaranteed, if considerations were given to the issue of self-esteem.

Elsewhere in West Africa, it has been reported that similar approaches to skills training have had little impact on young people’s longer-term economic engagements (Williamson and Cripe, 2002). The focus has been on training the children and young people, without efforts to expand the size of the market that is targeted. It has also been

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<sup>69</sup> This was also confirmed by local civil society and local government informants working with the FACM.

<sup>70</sup> Interviews with Key informants and actors suggest that many FACM are not utilising the vocational skills they trained in. while this might indicate a problem with the skills and not being able to focus on the aspirations and agency of the FACM, it could also show deeper problems arising out of the hostility and perhaps unpredictability of the context.

pointed out that an integral skills training centre was missing in the PSSP programming for Sierra Leone (Williamson, 2005).

The inability of the agencies to consider FACM's agency and aspirations borne out of their long-term development goals as opposed to focusing on immediate needs (only) was a key strategic omission to the planning for reintegration support. A staged approach with a long-term view of following up individual FACM and tracking their changing needs, aspirations and personal efforts in the post-reunion period would have enhanced the success of most of the post-reunion intervention for the FACM. However, this approach was not utilised by the Agencies working within Northern Uganda, a situation made even more complex by government's abdication of its roles to NGOs and other development Agencies.

A recent analysis of OVC situation in Uganda also identified the problem of lack of real commitment to OVC issues, including children affected by war as explained in part by limited government allocations to the social development sector (Department of Social Work and Social Administration, 2010). As a result, the needs of OVC and the magnitude of the OVC problem increased instead of declining<sup>71</sup>. In the face of dwindling donor funds, agencies have simply not been able to continue with some project activities and many times project activities have ended without the community being prepared or informed about it (Team Initiatives Limited, 2010; Abola et al., 2009).

Another assumption was that the sensitisation in the community would transform the public perception of FACM and promote their acceptance within the community. This was seen as a key indicator of reintegration. It was also assumed that the reintegration programming was such that the Community Resource Persons trained under the auspices of the project would continue to provide PSS support to the FACM beyond project duration. Although some agencies employed the radio and other electronic media to reach out to a wider community, in some cases communities preferred direct face-to-face interactions where they could raise questions for clarifications (Save the Children, 2008). But the resource constraints still restricted opportunities for direct interactions between PSS Agency staff and the target community.

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<sup>71</sup> It is possible; however, that other problem such as high population growth rates, increase in mortality and a rising HIV/AIDS prevalence could in part explain the rising problem of OVCs.

Again, a key limitation of most reintegration programme is that the interventions focused at re-insertion, not long-term reintegration (Allen and Schomerus, 2006). In other words, emphasis was on putting the FACM back into their communities albeit without effective and systematic process of following them up and providing long-term support as dictated by the aspirations of the young women, their children and the changing development context. It is pertinent to note that changes in context might require redesigning programmes and re-orientation of interventions. Yet review of interventions over the last 15 years suggests little change in programme design and strategic approach in spite of the changing context (see also Team Initiatives Limited, 2010; Abola et al., 2009; Ochen-Awich 2009; Allen and Schomerus, 2006).

One of the main limitations of the intervention model is that families and communities have not been proactively and effectively prepared (SCIUG, 2008). As indicated earlier in this chapter, a prolonged and systematic engagement of the reception community has not been carried out, partly due to the emergency orientation of the programmes (see also Abola et.al 2009; Allen and Schomerus, 2006). A fire-fighting approach has been used in community preparations leaving many people out of such sensitisation meetings and trainings. Again this was because many of these projects were conceived within an active emergency context. Findings suggests that the inability of the Agencies to design and develop an ambitious community outreach programme was also due to the limitations in funding and donor interests which seemed in favour of shorter term interventions<sup>72</sup>.

It is, however, important to note that strategic change in thinking and approach to address emerging challenges in the recovery period does not seem to have been given enough attention<sup>73</sup>. This is also attributed to the constricted space for constructive reflections and lesson learning which I expound on later in this chapter. A more proactive and strategic approach to handling community outreach activities and emergent challenges would be recommended. However, it suffices to note here that for the approach to be more effective, the agencies should have developed an intervention methodology which more proactively engages with the community on a sustainable basis. In my view this can best be done by promoting local ownership and perhaps even utilising the FACM themselves to reach out and have an engagement with their own community (see Boas and

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<sup>72</sup> Interviews with staff of Agencies working within the region backed by documentary analysis.

<sup>73</sup> Analysis of current project proposals of the agencies and evaluation reports and interviews with agency staff (including the local government). See also Abola et al., (2009).



Bjorkhaug, 2010). This would therefore open avenues for genuine community involvement in such programmes.

### **General Limitations of the Interventions for FACM**

The general approach to psychosocial programming in Northern Uganda seemed to have been uncoordinated with different Agencies implementing different approaches. This did not provide synergy and the benefits of development networking at the local level. As indicated earlier, the interventions were mostly general, not only aimed at addressing needs and situations of FACM; although specific activities within the project would focus on the situations of FACM. Some of the key limitations of the interventions are discussed in the proceeding.

#### **Lack of a well-thought-out Framework for Reintegration Support**

Reintegration programming in Northern Uganda is a complex field with a multiplicity of actors from the private not-for-profit sector and also from the public sector. Although initially, UNICEF had instituted a framework for national psychosocial coordination meetings (UNICEF 1998), this has over the years become redundant, overtaken by the agency's current focus on child protection as a concept. At the district level, the coordination meetings initially covered psychosocial support as a separate issue. Over the last four years most attention has been paid to child protection programming, resulting in PSS issues being downgraded and relegated.

The emphasis on general child protection indicates UNICEF's strategic country focus. Even at the community level, support to the current structures appears to have been linked directly to child protection concern, with no direct emphasis on psychosocial support. Whereas the changing nature of the context is appreciated, the gradual decline in psychosocial support activities implied reduced funding and interventions for the Agencies that initially supported psychosocial activities. Here I argue that although the general focus on child protection makes it possible to address rights and needs of orphans and other vulnerable children in the community, the opportunities to support effective reintegration of formerly abducted children, including child mothers might be constricted. There is a high possibility that specific psychosocial needs of the FACM and their children might actually not be fully met by such an approach.

As earlier indicated, most interventions in Northern Uganda consider the needs and situations of the FACM within an intervention framework addressing the general needs of communities and other FAC (McKay et al., 2010; Allen and Schomerus, 2006). For most development agencies there is no specific budget line or line of activity devoted entirely to the situations of the FACM. This, therefore, reduced the total resource outlay available for addressing the needs of the FACM. Concern was thus raised about the inadequacy of interventions in addressing the situation of FACM (see Maina, 2010; Burman and McKay, 2007; McKay 2004; McKay and Mazurana, 2004).

Allen and Schomerus (2006) also identify the unique situation of child mothers and the complexity of developing and implementing interventions to address their situation arguing that most of the child mother issues have been ignored. While recognising that not all FACM have the same levels of needs and challenges, they suggest that those passing through the RRCs tend to be more positive and run more viable income generation activities, an issue I explored in depth in chapter six. It appears, therefore, that those child mothers who did not pass through the RRCs seem to be the ones whose problems have been very much ignored; some of the FACM passing through RC also did not seem to do any better in the community<sup>74</sup>.

Some commentators have, however, questioned the approaches used in supporting the FACM with a criticism that development agencies have created dependency among the FACM (see Maina, 2010). The problem of dependency comes about because some of the interventions being implemented by a number of development organisations are short-term interventions aimed at enhancing reporting situation to donors about the number of target groups reached<sup>75</sup>. The real needs of the young women are thus not met effectively.

It is important to note that analysis of programme documents of agencies in Northern Uganda also suggest that the interventions aimed at returning children to the community was not that comprehensive. They were mainly resettlement and reinsertion interventions, which only addressed superficial issues within a short planning

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<sup>74</sup> Discussion with key informants Gulu and Amuru districts.

<sup>75</sup> The argument here is therefore that such an approach creates and cultivates dependency among the FACM instead of empowering them; Empowerment is a gradual and not a one-off process. Perhaps those child mothers who transformed their situation using the support provided could have drawn considerable personal agency to break through.

framework. There was thus no clearly developed framework for long-term reintegration support. In this regard, the community was not effectively prepared to accept children returning from the bush. Again, the girls who returned without children appear to have been better accepted even among their own families and potential suitors<sup>76</sup>. This could also explain the assertion by some of the boys interviewed in Corbin (2008) that girls get married and thus face far-less challenges and difficulties in reintegration. The current study however, suggests that FACM have far more challenges compared to both other girls without children and boys.

It has also been observed that small-scale externally driven interventions are unlikely to substantially alter patterns of social interaction in a community (Fearon et al., 2009). The preoccupation of development agencies and their donors with easily achievable and quantifiable targets which enhance their visibility have also been pointed out as constraining the effectiveness of the development alternative approach espoused by NGOs (Bebbington et al., 2008). Other Agencies proposed unorthodox interventions which raised concern of other stakeholders such as the cited case of an international agency recalling FACM from the community to live in its own Centre. This Agency argued that those people needed to be together in town yet it did not have adequate resources to perpetually support the FACM and their children, or meet all their socio-economic as well as psychosocial needs. The inability of the district leadership to provide effective guidance on an appropriate intervention framework did not help matters. If a framework existed, this could have significantly streamlined interventions planning and outcomes. Limitations in coordination management on the part of the district were also picked out by Baines et al. (2006) who specified challenges of limited resources' at the district level.

Earlier Agency interventions in psychosocial support and follow-up of the child mothers within the community were done using the individual Agency's approach and what each considered appropriate in reintegration programming. Opportunities for sharing experiences and learning from one another seem to be limited. Moreover, the nature of NGO politics made it difficult for partners to share experiences in totality with many Agencies reluctant to share successes and failures as elaborated in Section 10.8. In a

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<sup>76</sup> Interviews with FACM and focus groups data

study assessing the effectiveness of development coordination, Dolan and Hovil (2006) write:

What passes for coordination is largely an information sharing exercise rather than meetings in which agencies arrive at a consensus on what should happen. For instance while protection working group and district disaster management committee are now directing focus more on identifying issues than on deciding what subsequent action should be taken....with many agency staff frustrated that the monthly meetings were not taking the organisations anywhere (p.15).

Further, Dolan and Hovil (2006) point out the complexity of coordinating “protection” as a new concept in an emerging context (cluster approach).

### **Donor Rigidity in Funding Long-term Interventions**

Analysis of the PSS and quasi-PSS interventions in Northern Uganda (project proposals for Save the Children in Uganda, World Vision International, GUSCO, ACORD, CARITAS, NRC, ICRC, Care international and Concerned Parents Association) and other development agencies indicate that most of the interventions range from six months to a maximum of three years. Most of these interventions were similar in that they were aimed at supporting the FACM, other war affected children (WAC) and their communities. An approach favoured by Norwegian Development Cooperation (Abola et al., 2009) is for interventions to be planned within a one-year project framework, possibly to enable a closer follow up by donors. Review of evaluation reports for interventions carried out (e.g. Team Initiatives limited 2010; Ochen-Awich, 2009; Abola et al., 2009) also indicated that short-term interventions were a concern for both actors and target groups. While this worked well for the donors in terms of receiving reports, it did not present the best result for the target group. As a result in some cases interventions were being phased out before meaningful results could be achieved.

While note is made of the complexity of the emergency context in Northern Uganda at the height of the conflict (2001-2006), opportunities for more durable interventions were still available and recommended by several studies (see for example Abola et.al., 2009; Omona and Ochaya, 2010; Allen and Schomerus, 2006). However, the development norms seem to be in favour of planning shorter life projects with quick and achievable results and outcomes. This presented difficulties for reintegration planning and limited the options of the intervention activities. McKay et al. (2010, p.10) while analysing post-conflict support to young women in Uganda, Sierra Leone and Liberia also cite the

challenge of donors and agencies preferring preconceived programming and “an excessive focus upon predetermined outputs and immediate results” (see also Humphrey and Weinstein, 2007).

Such an approach significantly curtails opportunities for empowerment and addressing aspirations of the young women. A good example here is the vocational training which ranged from a few months to a year because donors required that all activities should be within the project lifecycle. This approach has also been criticised for failing to equip FACM with lifelong and useable skills. Many trainees indicated that skills learnt were not adequate for them to compete favourably on the labour market. For the few that managed to utilise the skills, it was due to their exceptional abilities backed up by personal agencies; however the same could not be said of all children and young people<sup>77</sup>. Short-term projects hamper the prospects of addressing the long-term reintegration needs of children affected by armed conflict including the FACM.

A number of donors have also shifted attention away from Northern Uganda to the Eastern (Karamoja) region. Studies have also indicated that the programming in the South (developing countries) is often not just dictated by the emergent challenges and needs within the community but by donor policies set in the developed world (Europe and America) where the experiences of the situation on the ground might not be fully appreciated (Thomas, 2008; Wallace et al., 2007; Allen and Schomerus, 2006). In such situations NGOs’ agenda are dictated from outside the actual cauldrons where development intervention takes places.

Suzuki (1998) discusses some of the critical challenges that field development managers’ face and demonstrates that the situation on the ground might clash with organisational issues and global strategies at the head offices of the international NGOs. He argues that NGO managers many times have to reconcile both the interests of their head offices with the development realities in their areas of work. Indeed, studies suggest that some child focused agencies in Northern Uganda have wound up their operations when the recovery situations still needed the agency (see Abola et al 2009). Moreover, many European and American donors do not allow local organisations, however viable, to apply for funds on their own without going through international agencies. For example, Comic Relief’s

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<sup>77</sup> Interviews with Key informants and former trainees (Formerly Abducted Child Mothers).

current strategy for supporting communities affected by armed conflict<sup>78</sup> identifies Northern Uganda as a priority intervention area. The organisation has set aside funds to support intervention in NU but viable local organisations with no partnership with British registered charities cannot apply as resources can only be channelled through the latter.

In Northern Uganda, one of the key agencies working with children (Save the Children in Uganda) closed down its operational offices in Lira, Pader and Gulu districts (in 2009) and shifted to a strategy which saw its team implement operational programmes from the regional office in Gulu and working with partners on the ground<sup>79</sup>. It is doubtful whether such an approach is viable on the ground in terms of generating impact in a more cost-effective way. While working with partners is a sustainably efficient approach in many ways; gradual phase-out with attendant capacity development of partners would have been more effective (Abola et al., 2009). This was also in stark contrast to the strategic choices of the Agency as indicated in its annual plans for 2008 and 2009. Could this sudden change in strategy have been indicated by forces and events beyond the operational areas of Northern Uganda?

### **Other Limitations of the Interventions**

The context of reintegration was in itself a key limitation in supporting the returning FAC including child mothers. Much of the programming has been on the emergency and therefore little consideration for reintegration, if any, was actually made. For example, whereas development agencies developed sensitisation programmes, these have not been very effective in addressing stigma (McKay et al., 2010; Allen and Schomerus, 2006). Humphrey and Weinstein's (2007) study of Sierra Leone finds little evidence of funded donor programmes facilitating reintegration programmes. They argue that their examination of DDR programmes does not provide strong evidence that it promotes reintegration, and that in situations where randomised trials cannot be carried out, it becomes difficult to identify effects. Further, Humphreys and Weinstein do not discount the contribution of DDR in establishing legitimate governance and prevention of recurrence of conflicts; however they argue that there is not much evidence in the Sierra

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<sup>78</sup> Comic Relief (2009); People Affected by Armed conflict Strategy 2009-2012, [www.comicrelief.com](http://www.comicrelief.com)

<sup>79</sup> Interviews with key informants

Leonean case where successful individual reintegration can occur. While challenges exist, it is possible that reintegration can be achieved if the interventions are right.

Another contextual challenge was that reunion of FACM took place in an unnatural context, (IDP Camp) which had other socio-economic and political challenges such as poverty (Republic of Uganda, 2010; Republic of Uganda, 2007; McKay and Mazurana, 2004). In this case therefore, the success of reintegration programme was also dependent on the context and not only the activities of the PSS agencies. There were other challenges and issues, which could not be addressed by the intervening agencies, a clear indication that achievement of sustainable, meaningful and holistic post-conflict reconstruction are at the very heart of reintegration programming success.

Moreover, supporting FACM became more difficult when communities began to perceive any direct support as a reward for participation in rebel activity. Pham et al. (2007) suggest that to address these issues, programmatic support to the FACM should also incorporate reparation interventions for their victims. The main challenge with such an approach however is the sheer magnitude of the situation in Northern Uganda where every family of an estimated two million people have been directly affected by the war. In such cases, how do you address reparation issues? While general community programme support might be feasible, supporting every household might not be possible in a post-conflict setting.

My study suggests that follow-up was a big gap. While there was recognition of the unique situations of child mothers who have been fighters and categorised in the high risk category by one agency (requiring more follow-up), these too have not received sustained follow support over a longer period of time on reunion. Indeed analysis of events in Northern Uganda suggests that with the diminished donor funding for the region, most child mothers who still requires support and post -reunion counselling have not received it. The literature also identifies the difficult experiences of social workers in carrying out follow-up activities, with Allen and Schomerus (2006) specifically noting that staff complained of limited funds, transport facilities and other pressing issues in the RRCs. It is indicated that follow-up appears not to be a priority for staff. It is further indicated that there was no clear criteria and indicators for follow-up and the exercise was not even clear to the clients themselves (Allen and Schomerus, 2006). Thus, there

was less agreement and clarity on what follow-up aimed to achieve besides collecting information. In other countries such as Sierra Leone, Liberia and Rwanda follow up and general community-based support of children was identified as a key gap in programming (McKay et al., 2010; Barenbaum et al., 2004; Wessels and Monteiro, 2001).

When designing and implementing rights-based approaches, it is crucial that the target group should not be looked at as objects of charity but empowered to lay claims on their rights, with the children and families considered as key actors (Save the Children Alliance 2007). It also adds that the concept of indivisibility of rights implies that a holistic approach is required when working with children. It should be recognised that achieving significant changes in one aspect of life requires interventions in other related areas. However, the analysis of interventions in Northern Uganda suggests otherwise. Limitations in resources (especially financial resources), management weaknesses and other contextual factors (e.g. coordination challenges) have constrained achievements of holistic development outcomes for children and young people.

Many of the interventions developed to support the FACM were fragmented and limited and did not therefore address all young people's situated challenge (Team Initiatives Limited, 2010; Abola et al., 2009; Impact Options Limited 2010; Allen and Schomerus 2006). Writing in favour of a holistic approach to support formerly abducted children, P'Olak (2005) notes that addressing therapeutic needs of the girls without equal and perhaps more attention to the contextual problems of poverty could negatively impact the reintegration process.

### **Monitoring and Evaluation of Programme Interventions**

The issue of systematic monitoring and evaluations has also come out as a limitation in programming for children affected by armed conflict. For most of these interventions, there were no standards of measurements of change at strategic points in time. Although the projects had indicators, most of the indicators developed in the log-frames were quantitative. The indicators were also Output-based with little emphasis on the deeper aspects of impacts and change in the individuals targeted (see also Allen and Schomerus, 2006).



The log frames and all the other tools of project planning and the resulting measures of success/achievements were thus more suited to requirements, interests and donor monitoring frameworks than measures of real change in the FACM's quality of life. What I mean here is that the focus of measurements (outputs and activities) is more of an accountability issue to donors than target beneficiaries. The latter would be more interested in the transformation they undergo rather than the number of activities carried out by agency staff. Evaluation reports also suggest that the indicators in many cases do not address issues, which beneficiaries would have loved to be considered (Abola et al., 2009).

Although the Sphere Project (2004) developed some good guidelines in its humanitarian charter and minimum standards on disaster response, the document is silent on psychosocial support and child protection during conflict. Besides, the Sphere Project (2004) conceptualised its minimum standards for humanitarian actors in emergency situations and does not present suggestions and ideas for transiting to recovery and development interventions after conflict.

It has also been suggested that implementing agencies often "rush" development initiatives thus constraining the process of participation of the local community and target groups in such interventions (Bebbington et al., 2008; Ochen-Awich, 2008). Experience in different parts of the developing world has attested to the importance and benefits of participation in achieving more sustainable development outcomes (Chambers, 2008; Hickey and Mohan, 2005). In the current study if tangible results such as the participation of the community in a project which combines aspects of participation with the development of a physical asset in the community can result in such challenges, what about a reintegration initiative whose main indicators should be the psychosocial functionality of the target group and their enhanced coping with socio-economic and cultural life of their communities?

Further, as Piciotto and Weaving (1994) point out in their paper on social development programming, the listening and participatory model has been applied to reintegration interventions in Northern Uganda only to a limited extent. Other salient issues which would ensure genuine community involvement and participation as well as the achievement of durable outcomes have been severely hampered by the programming

strategy (see Hickey and Mohan, 2005; Holland, et al., 2004 Long, 2001). If such are the cases, to what extent did the interventions address issues from a rights rather than a needs-based perspective?

### **Incorporation of Lesson Learning into Programmes**

Review of the interventions for FACM and other children affected by conflict suggests that there were limited efforts at generating and sharing lessons learnt during project implementation. This is not to deny that some attempts at reflections on work were done through coordination meetings. There was, however, an absence of strategic networking and strategic review of actions and programmes, sharing of lessons, good practices and experiences at a deeper depth and breadth <sup>80</sup>(Dolan and Hovil, 2007). Interviews with Agency staff and other key informants within the region indicated that lesson learning and experience sharing opportunities were not exploited for a number of reasons. These reasons include both agency specific and context specific factors as discussed in the proceeding section:

Initially, the emergency nature of the context, where the focus was on quick response, made it difficult for agencies to devote adequate time to research and sharing of good practices. The nature of the emergency work gave little room for agency staff to make strategic reflections on their practice, and also share experiences with other actors within similar fields of interventions. Unnecessary competition among agencies also reportedly affected lesson learning. Cases have been cited where intermediary agencies would even be competing with their own local partner organisations instead of supporting them. In cases where the local partner Agency made a small mistake which could be resolved, this would be taken as a grave offence which should only be resolved by termination of the partnership even if no viable organisations could be found to replace such an Agency (see also Abola et al., 2009).

In interviews many local government officials and civil society actors accused NGOs in Northern Uganda of reluctance to share evaluation reports<sup>81</sup>. The programming approaches in the context of emergency and the expectations of donors and development partners which gave little room for mistakes could also have contributed to such a

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<sup>80</sup> Interviews with civil society and key informants.

<sup>81</sup> Interviews with local government officials and civil society actors

situation. Britton (1998) discusses the importance of fostering a favourable environment for learning by giving staff the chance to venture out and explore, with support of their management. Although the alternative development approaches on which many NGOs pride themselves advocate lesson learning and sharing of experiences; it is doubtful whether opportunities for learning from experience have really been factored into the PSS programming in Northern Uganda.

Another issue affecting the dissemination of good practices in child protection interventions related to project management weaknesses. It is recognised that the goodwill for lesson learning and sharing should come from the managers themselves. In some cases however, managers can act as obstacles to organisational learning (Britton, 1998). This problem could also arise due to lack of understanding of development management theories which inform NGO intervention (Bebbington et al., 2008). In such cases therefore, the spaces that exist for learning become narrow, constricted and in some cases, they totally disappear. Such challenges also emerge when opportunities for intra-organisational learning (an environment where mistakes are tolerated) is not created for staff. Because of fear of recrimination, Agency staff might bypass a good learning opportunity so that they keep within the normal day-to-day activities and not step on unchartered territories which could have an effect on their career development (Allen and Schomerus, 2006). Learning was also further constrained by the donor preoccupation with hard results<sup>82</sup> which has made NGOs to prioritise interventions with quick results.

Lessons of development programming in other African countries suggest that for any real change and impact to emerge it requires a development intervention which positively encourages innovations and adaptation of programmes for an uninterrupted funding period of not less than 5-10 years (Mensah, 2010)<sup>83</sup>. It is also important to point out that the limitations in implementing organisational learning arise due to the inability of staff in agencies to understand and grasp the programme theory of change (Bamberger et.al., 2011; Imas and Rist, 2009). In situations where the linkages to theories of change are

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<sup>82</sup> By hard results I mean physical outputs and yet most PSS interventions are of a soft nature: we know it is there but we cannot lay our hands on it.

<sup>83</sup> Samuel Asante Mensah (2010) Increasing Productivity, Income and sustainability of small holder agriculture in Developing countries: Examples of sustainable livelihoods approaches, impacts, and lessons from two food security and poverty reduction projects in Ghana. Paper presented at an International Seminar, Applying Sustainable Livelihoods Approaches: Food security and Social Protection, School of Management, the University of Bradford, 2<sup>nd</sup> June 2010.

not well-built into programming and staff are not conversant with it then what will they strategically share with others?

### **Linkages Pertaining to Emergency, Early Recovery and Development Programming**

As earlier indicated, it has been reported that a number of NGOs are winding up their operations and activities in Northern Uganda. While the majority have been humanitarian agencies whose mandates might not cover the recovery period; there is evidence that many development agencies also wound up their activities. Commentators in the region have expressed the opinion that it seems development agencies were winding up their activities due to their fear to create real and meaningful change in the lives of the communities they have been supporting (see also Abola et al., 2009). It is important to note that the interventions during the emergency period were primarily aimed at sustaining life and promoting access to basic needs. Few of the interventions of humanitarian actors in the region went beyond sustaining life and improving accessibility to basic needs. The decision to withdraw or minimise intervention is against good practices in humanitarian responses. These decisions should be informed by significant improvement in the indicators of well being based on the thematic areas of intervention (Spheres Project, 2004).

Analysis of the current situation in the Northern Uganda indicates the dilemma of programming in relation to the changes in the context from an active and volatile emergency period to a lull in fighting also referred to as recovery by government and civil society agencies (Bailey et.al., 2009). In the current study stakeholders raised concerns that while the context had changed, development agencies were not provided with guidelines on addressing the new challenges in the recovery period. In some of the cases where programming guidance eventually came, it was more of public servants /technical staff's opinion than well-thought out local and central government's position (Abola et al., 2009). While this generally applied to all development interventions, there is no evidence that the NGOs and other actors supporting the FACM received any special support. Bailey et al (2009) recognise the programming challenges occasioned by "early recovery" interventions and observe that the concept is new with few locations where lessons can be drawn from.

There is evidence that the focus seems to be drifting away from the FACM to generally addressing child protection challenges. Interventions on livelihoods and strategic training and development initiatives for the youth appeared to have received little attention in the recovery period<sup>84</sup>. Where they exist, the interventions are limited and do not effectively respond to the needs on the ground<sup>85</sup>. Dolan and Hovil (2006) also point out limited support to protection-oriented interventions compared to “humanitarian” ones. Machel (2001) writes that there is significant inconsistency and disparity in resource allocation to support children affected by armed conflict. She notes, for example, that while donor support was only US\$ 20 per child in Sierra Leone, in Kosovo it was up to US\$ 216 (see also Machel, 2001). Could this disparity suggest that there is a lack of commitment to the plight of the African child among donors?

Machel (2001) argues that donors should use criteria designed to overcome disparities and to surmount the institutional budgetary and functional barriers between relief, rehabilitation and development cooperation. It is possible that the limited support from donors underscores the lack of prioritisation of developing countries’ issues. While this period also coincided with the slump in the global economy; a sharp decline in development aid to Northern Uganda significantly affected reintegration initiatives. This is because the novel challenges FACM were facing in the areas of return were in most cases not dealt with at all. Few donor agencies have committed resources to recovery interventions (Bailey, 2009).

Interventions in the recovery period indicate a preoccupation with blue print interventions<sup>86</sup>. This preoccupation with hardware development interventions without the process aspects leaves much to be desired. I have throughout this thesis advanced the view that most interventions and development assumptions in Northern Uganda seem to have neglected the process of transformation of *people’s choice and building on their agency*. It is therefore visible that emphasis on the process of engagement with stakeholders including direct target groups as key resources in the development activity seems to have been bypassed by current recovery programming<sup>87</sup>. My argument, however, is that if interventions aimed at building bridges between recovery and the

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<sup>84</sup> Consultation with key informants

<sup>85</sup> Key informant interviews backed up with analysis of reports and project documents.

<sup>86</sup> Those interventions whose outcomes involve the creation of a physical asset or quantifiable outputs.

<sup>87</sup> Recovery programming refers to all activities aimed at supporting the process of formerly displaced communities rebuilding their lives within their villages post IDP Camps.

development phase then there was a need to ensure that the recovery phase gets adequate funding.

The main development planning framework for Northern Uganda is the Peace, Recovery and Development Plan (PRDP) which is government's three-year recovery development strategy for the region, beginning in the year 2008. I will not go into a general critique of the whole PRDP. I however, note that psychosocial and reintegration issues have been rightly picked out as critical needs and right issues under Strategic Objective IV. Nevertheless, actual resource allocations at present (2010/2011) for implementation do not seem to provide any clear commitment of resources on the part of government for such activities<sup>88</sup>. Government has practically left reintegration issues to be addressed by NGOs and other development agencies, which in turn are facing serious resource limitations (see also Abola et al., 2009). As a result, the momentum built up in the last five years in development programming in the region has slowed down with serious repercussion for service delivery to the community (Norwegian Refugee Council, 2010).

Similarly, Government of Uganda (GOU) only contributes 30 per cent of the PRDP funding, with over 70 per cent of the \$606m programme to be funded by development partners (Norwegian Refugee Council, 2010). But progress so far indicates that even the latter are facing challenges of their own in making their contribution. Further scrutiny of the PRDP (Republic of Uganda, 2007) with regard to its strategy for support to formerly abducted persons and ex-combatants suggests that the philosophy behind PRDP interventions for the latter two groups is still within the same domain as emergency interventions. For example, while it acknowledges that vocational training plays a crucial role in the reintegration process it proposes a 3-6 months of "skills building" (Republic of Uganda 2007, p.101), an arrangement which has been critiqued earlier in this thesis.

The PRDP document also talks of reporters, a concept which usually refers to those formerly abducted persons and ex-combatants who return through the normal process and are documented. It does not refer to nor mention the unique situations of those formerly abducted persons including FACM who have returned directly to the community. The inability to recognise the possibilities of gendered difference in the experiences of formerly abducted persons overshadows the development of an effective

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<sup>88</sup> Interview with key informants

response strategy. When such omission occurs in a major policy document, it is worrying.

Furthermore, contrary to what is stipulated within the PRDP, interviews with PSS agencies in Northern Uganda do not seem to suggest that “technical standards for programme intervention” have been established (Republic of Uganda, 2007, p.102). However, this has been suggested as one of the initial actions in supporting reintegration interventions in the context of the PRDP. My analysis of the reintegration strategies within PRDP and its discourse suggest that the framers of the document are still thinking about reinsertion interventions. However, debates within the reintegration literature and the contextual changes in Northern Uganda suggest the need for a radical rethink on how PSS programming in the region is executed. In other words, the recovery and development intervention requires something different from what has been tried before and found to be inadequate. The emerging issues suggest that the government is thus practically not doing enough to proactively address genuine reintegration issues for the region, especially for children and women coming out of conflict.

### **Psychosocial Support (PSS) Interventions: Wither Social Agency?**

The extent to which the current PSS interventions are empowering for FACM in preparing them for a role in society must be questioned. In my view the interventions have been too paternalistic, with a service delivery focus. Its emphasis has been only on helping FACM to access goods and services and not on a general socio-political empowerment which would enable them to take their own advocacy for their rights and also spear-head the advocacy to support their children born in captivity. I argue that most of the current interventions fall short of generating a “*productive social activism*” in the lives of the FACM or bringing about what Hickey and Mohan (2005) call a process of social change. This is where development initiative is viewed not just as an end but a means to achieving social change within society.

Denov and Machure (2006) suggest that programming for girls affected by armed conflict should best develop their capacity to exercise independent thinking and action as well as assumption of taking up public roles to proactively influence their society. Moreover, Boas and Bjorkhaug (2010) argue for an intervention approach which shifts emphasis from tactical to strategic agency, all geared towards ensuring the involvement

of the FACM in general social cohesion and collective community security. In this case the whole society and not only the ex-combatants benefit. All these should be localised within a given context. However, many PSS Agency interventions have not achieved genuine social change for community. This is partly because the orientation of the programmes and projects developed has been within a neo-liberal development conceptualisation of NGOs as gap fillers and collaborative partners of government (Bebbington et al., 2008; Dagnino, 2008).

In such situations inherent essentialist assumptions about the development programming strategy and approaches are not questioned nor contested. Yet actual efforts in generating sustainable changes for the project target groups would come from questioning such assumptions and exploring more effective means of meeting their socio-economic and political rights. I argue that an approach building productive social activism is important for the awakening of the FACM's agencies and ensuring that they rise up to confront subtle and overt oppression prevalent in the society. These oppressive acts could be exhibited in stigmatisation, engendered marginalisation and other such discriminative practices within the FACM's communities as well as increasing their access to socio-economic resources (Dagnino, 2008; Hickey and Mohan, 2005). Considering what they have gone through, that is, the dynamic resilience which enabled them to survive the tough times in the bush; the FACM can use the same resources, with PSS agency support to champion issues that concern them and demand services which directly address their development needs and rights.

For McKay et al., (2010) participatory methods promote young mothers' empowerment and build on their resilience. Although this might be true, where catalyst processes from development agencies are non-existent, this empowerment can be derailed or hijacked by benefit captors (Ochen-Awich 2008; Truelove, 1998). Elsewhere, Maxted (2003) argues for post-conflict development approaches which ensure meaningful and useful involvement of children and young people in the political and development processes, and address poverty and social inequality.

In evaluating post conflict interventions in Liberia, Fearon et al. (2009) argue that post-conflict interventions are complex and that of the 1500 people interviewed for the study up to 25 percent still considered themselves to be potentially displaced, in a war which



ended several years earlier. One wonders whether this is a result of failure in the reintegration interventions or a demonstration of how difficult it is to change people's mindsets, and remove dependency attitude and culture of expectance. They argue that interventions aimed at creating community cohesion using community-driven development can cause changes, which last without necessarily changing the political structure or causing fundamental changes.

It also emerged that community structures including the CPCs would want the development Agencies not to use the concept child mothers as it cultivates a dependency attitude and affects full reintegration within the community/society. However, the question which comes to mind is: how do we then identify them for further support if necessary, as developing new identities of vulnerabilities also has its own challenges? While recent surveys (Annan et al., 2006; Allen and Schomerus, 2006) also suggest using other aspects of vulnerabilities to provide support to FACM that require them, this should still ensure the inclusion of the young women and their children in such a criteria, otherwise the whole intervention might not reach out to the FACM.

My argument is that long-term psychosocial wellbeing among FACM requires ensuring that opportunities for PSS support, especially within the community will be available when the FACM requires them. Otherwise, other human relations and contextual challenges could cause a relapse and resurgence of PSS difficulties among the FACM. In situations where facilities and support structures exist, these could help the FACM to cope with the emerging difficulties.

## **Summary and Conclusions**

This chapter has presented a broad reflection on the interventions for FACM. It analysed the prevailing and emerging child protection systems within the community and key issues in reintegration interventions. General limitations of the interventions included: inter-agency competition; absence of a well-thought framework for reintegration support; limitations of resources available for FACM-only interventions; lack of a unified framework for psychosocial support. Other challenges included: the rigidity of the donors in funding long term development interventions; the preference of donors for short term projects; and inability of any local organisations to procure resources on their own without going through intermediary international development agencies. Yet other

challenges relate to perceptions of support to FACM as a reward for rebellion; reunion of the FACM in a volatile context; and withdrawal of development agencies from Northern Uganda. The lack of articulation of clear standards of changes and the determination of effective M&E benchmarks constricted lesson learning and sharing of experiences within the intervention context.

The chapter has also highlighted issues pertaining to the challenges of transiting from the emergency to a recovery context in terms of planning and programming philosophies. While analysis focused mainly on Northern Uganda, lessons from elsewhere were also explored. I also made the case for ensuring that interventions into the lives of the FACM should be aimed not only at meeting their everyday needs but also at ensuring that they have equal rights to socio-economic development resources. The interventions should also awaken their social and political consciousness to ensure that their voice is heard in order to influence the socio-political and economic direction of their communities and society.

In developing an effective model to support the development programming for FACM to achieve the above, there is need to think about long-term, rigorous and phased interventions focusing on meeting development rights of the FACM, their children and their communities. Such a broader outlook would in my view be more effective in addressing among others negative social opinions about the FACM.

In the final chapter (Conclusions) I discuss more intervention options for redressing the situations for the FACM and summarise the main thesis argument and key findings. The chapter begins by presenting the key arguments of the study, followed by a summary of the major findings based on the key themes explored in the thesis: intra-bush experiences of abducted girls and child mothers; relational and other factors affecting reintegration; community structures for reintegration; and intervention analysis. A new intervention framework for supporting post-conflict development work is also made. Chapter twelve also discusses the contribution of the current study to scholarship, limitations of the study and areas for further research.

## CHAPTER TWELVE

### CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### **Main Thesis Argument**

This study has explored the intra-bush and post-bush experiences of the formerly abducted child mothers in Gulu and Amuru district in Northern Uganda. Using a child rights discourse, feminist theoretical perspective and structuration theory, a number of scenarios were unpacked regarding young women's experiences of conflict. It has been shown that despite the difficult environment in which they found themselves, the young girls and child mothers maintained some choices and control over their lives and made decisions which ensured their survival and that of their children from the dangers of bush life.

On return, a number of factors have constrained their reintegration within the community but the young women remained positive and hopeful for a better life for themselves and their children. The study also indicated that the FACM have demonstrated significant degree of agency in their reintegration efforts although this agency has also been bounded by structural factors (see El- Bushra and Sahl, 2005; Shillings 1999; Sewell, 1992; Dessler, 1989).

A number of key arguments espoused in this study are commensurate with the theoretical frames adopted in chapter three. Significant challenges have been noted in the interventions for the reintegration of the FACM. One of the key arguments in this thesis has been that the concept of relationships and agency of the FACM has not been the basis for interventions yet they are central to understanding the experiences and improving their welfare and that of their children. Most interventions have been prescriptive with a focus on weaknesses rather than strengths. When peace returned, agencies got stuck with emergency other than recovery-oriented interventions (see Bailey et.al., 2009). I argued that all this is due to the philosophy which considered the FACM as "problem beings" and "non active agents" within the process of reintegration. Because of these assumptions, reductionist and essentialists views of social structures; development agencies have not effectively utilised the traditional and indigenous

structures within the community, preferring to create their own (structure) even in a recovery context. This thesis has argued that sustainability of such interventions is uncertain.

The complexity and experiences of reintegration implies that the programmes in place are still not effectively addressing its challenges. The thesis has also discussed the relationship between the FACM, their children and other significant persons within the reunion communities and pointed out how the nature of the reintegration affected reintegration outcomes. The thesis has argued that the quality of the relationship is critical to the effectiveness of the reintegration process.

I discussed and problematised the issue of agency of the FACM and showed that it is a complex one determined by many contextual factors rather than the will-power of the young women alone. While the FACM exercise agency, this agency is contextualised, situated, buoyed and bounded by structural factors. In other words, the strong will of the FACM was necessary but not adequate for the effective demonstration of agency as the latter is significantly bound by structure (see Sewell, 1992; Dessler, 1989; Wendt, 1987).

I have utilised structuration theory to explain the agential experiences of the girls, indicates how forces within and outside an individual can have significant effect on such a person's quality of life. Thus, any effort in improving young women's agential efforts should also consider addressing structural issues, if it has to be effective. Further, I also critically explored the intra-bush experiences where the situation of the girls is analysed against the background of personal agency and resilience. Here I showed that while the FACM's agency and resilience came out, in many situations the girls were simply powerless to prevent their rights from being violated: a predominance of structural issues against their agential powers (see Dessler, 1989). I also showed that the girls have taken on multiple identities from the time of abduction up to their return and reinsertion in the community, identities which have had significant bearing on their wellbeing and reintegration.

The study suggests that girls who returned home directly and those who passed through reception centres have different reintegration experiences (see also Allen and Schomerus). There is some evidence to suggest that centre-based PSS work does make

important contribution to the reintegration process. While the issue is a contested one (e.g. Humphreys and Weinstein 2007), available evidence from the study suggests that girls and young women who passed through reception centres (RRCs) were often better supported: psychosocially, socio-economically and even physically.

Although reintegration is a long-term issue, it is possible that this support was significant in enabling the FACM to make transition from captivity to community life. RRCs thus opened the doors for more possibilities and made it easier for the FACM to adapt to life within the community. This is due to accessibility to agency resources, referral pathways and other support. In the post-bush period, I have argued that even the initiative of the young women to pursue romantic relationships with their suitors is an agential decision. But in this relationship as in others there were still structural constraints which prevailed upon it, for example, the opposition and social rejection that the FACM experienced at the hands of suitors and potential in-laws (see also Angucia, 2010; Maina, 2010). The moralist expectation put on the young women who experienced abduction is hypocritical at best since young women who were not abducted have also had multiple relationships. Socially ostracizing the young women on account of their experiences (see also Burman and McKay 2007; Honwana, 2006) violates their right to self-actualisation and enjoyment of family life as anybody else.

In the thesis, I have also questioned the widely reported view that African (Acholi) culture puts children and women in disadvantaged position, and that patriarchy is generally oppressive to the African female. While oppression and subjugation as well as rights violation do exist in Acholi society (Berge and Milson, 2010; El-Bushra and Sahl, 2005), patriarchy alone might not constitute oppression for women and children. Factors giving rise to oppression could be complex and perpetuated by both male and female agents and other social situations, conflict being one.

This study, however, also suggests that the aberration and misinterpretation of established social institutions as well as diminishing socio-cultural authority and practices seem to heighten the violations of children rights as culturally and legally defined (see also Angucia, 2010; Frerk et al, 2005; De Berry, 2004). Other social situations such as poverty and social oppression breed and abet negative culture. Cultural aberrations can easily be interpreted by outside researchers as the “real” culture,

whereas not. The aberration of culture, in the Northern Ugandan case brought about by the war, has constrained the effective protection of children and promotion of social institutions which acted as safety nets for children in difficult circumstances.

In Northern Uganda, the advent of the war broke down the socio-cultural values and made it difficult to ensure children's protection, a situation which saw unprecedented level of violence and aggression against children (McKay and Mazurana, 2004; Mawson,2004). I argued that some African (Acholi) socio-cultural norms and practices before the war complement and fulfil some aspects of the UNCRC and the ACRWC, although there were some differences in its social construction of childhood. This is because the pre-conflict Acholi society was seemingly more accommodative and protective of children compared to the inter war situation. The drastic effects of the war in the Acholi social organisation has also significantly affected the community/family capacity to support children within the region due to emergent socio-cultural and political economic changes (see also Berge and Milsom, 2010; Ochen et al 2010; El Bushra and Sahl, 2005; El-Bushra, 2003).

### **Summary of the Main Findings**

This study set out to investigate and address the following aims:

- To examine FACM's bush experiences and explores the ramifications for rehabilitation, resettlement and reintegration (RRR) as they negotiate the transition from life in the bush to life in their communities
- Investigate the social and interpersonal factors that impact the process of rehabilitation, resettlement and reintegration (RRR) of FACM.
- Document and analyse the community resources and structures supporting the RRR of the FACM.
- Explore stakeholder perceptions and views on the effectiveness of the RRR programming for FACM in Northern Uganda.

## **Intra-bush Experiences of Abducted Girls and Child Mothers**

In this thesis, I have argued that the abduction of children happened as a result of the inability of the community child protection structures (traditional and modern) to ensure safety of children. War exposes a society and incapacitates its protective structures due to collapse in governance, law and order systems which make it difficult for the security of children and other members of society to be assured (see Keen 2008; Francis, 2007). I have demonstrated that the girls were subjected to significant critical events while in the bush, a situation which can be termed as subjugation. They were acculturated into a system which had a different social organisation, norms and rules to the ones they were used to. To compound their exploitation, they were made to do things well beyond their physical, social and moral convictions.

Children were therefore subjected to extreme brutalities including sexual exploitation, physical torture, made to become “wives” and mothers to children as well as performing many “marital” roles and duties. All these happened within an environment of violence, degradation of their humanity and exposure to battles (see Angucia 2010; Allen 2006). Faced with these brutalities, many of the girls tried to resist these oppressive treatments but were not successful, a demonstration of the weakening of their agency by structural forces (Sewell, 1992; Dessler, 1989). The subjugation and mal-treatment of the girls was carried out by both male and female combatants. However, the self-belief of the girls which their difficult experience did not break was also instrumental to their identifying escape opportunities much as some of the child mothers were rescued by the army during battles.

In the bush the initial reaction of the child mothers to motherhood was that of denial and outright hostility towards their children. This happened because the girls were not psychologically and emotionally ready for motherhood. With time, however, the girls came to love their children and developed attachment with them. The study also suggested that it was the love for children and desires to give them a better future that made many child mothers to consider leaving the bush. The abduction, subjugation and sexual exploitation of the girls including emotional abuse did not destroy their humanity and hope for a better life.

While opportunities for escape were limited, the girls marshalled personal agential resources and outright intuitiveness to identify the smallest of escape opportunities. This represents what Honwana (2006) refers to as retention of agency in situations of limited choices. However, this agency was not equally distributed among all the girls and was shaped by their differential experiences and circumstances (Bjorkhaug, 2010). The girls were thus not mere docile victims but active agents in their captivity experiences and played loyal soldier, wife, mother and assumed many other identities to negotiate the captive experience in a bid to return alive. This resilience mentality gave them more resolve to continue negotiating the equally difficult post-bush context on returning home (see Angucia, 2010; Maina, 2010; McKay et al. 2010, Okeny, 2009). The bush experiences nevertheless significantly affected the reintegration efforts of the girls, with many being discriminated on account of the children they returned with let alone other effects of sexual violence and exploitation which in some cases ostracised them.

### **Relational and Other Factors affecting Reintegration**

The thesis also critically explored the factors within the community affecting reintegration of the FACM. Such factors include the nature and quality of the relationships between the FACM and other people within the community, including their children, family and peers; how the FACM returned to the community (through either an RRC or directly); effects on the FACM reintegration of the nature of return and significance of group in the reintegration process. Others included the role of child mother agency in the resettlement phase and gender issues in the reintegration process.

The study also indicated that despite the public show of love of the FACM towards their children, many struggled in the private sphere, blaming their children for their difficulties. It is, however, possible that such a challenge was a result of the lack of preparation into their motherhood roles, having been sexually abused and forced into motherhood at an early age. It has also been noted in this thesis that most of the interventions aimed at supporting the FACM (for example RRC support and follow up support) did not integrate motherhood roles and child rearing.

On the whole, the relationships between FACM and their immediate/extended family was good with community members and the FACM confirming that FACM who returned and found their immediate family members alive were more supported.



However, some parents had difficulties relating to their daughters who returned “different” changed by their captivity experiences. Some stigma and verbal emotional abuse, however, also came from the child mother’s relatives, especially sisters-in-law who were mentioned as more likely to engage the FACM in verbal abuse and altercation. This I have argued could be related to the competition for resources within the home. In the general community, stigmatisation and verbal abuse were also reported although it appeared to be more subtle than overt.

One of the major sticking points in the reintegration of the FACM is the post-bush love relationship with men in the community. The study showed that the bush experiences of the girls have significantly affected their opportunities in holding down a love relationship. This arose from perceived and reported aggression from the young women; and also due to the fact that these young women had children they had to look after (see Blattman and Annan, 2008; McKay 2004). The study suggests that there is no evidence to show that the girls who were abducted are more aggressive than other non-abducted girls (see also Annan et al., 2010). The dominant views among the young women were that their suitors were only interested in “their bodies” and not caring for them or their children. It was revealed that the young women would try out several relationships, one after the other hoping it would work out each time. Perceptions of worth and dignity of the FACM has seemingly been affected by the perceived social rejections.

Findings also suggest that other family members (especially mothers of the suitors) seemed to have a very significant input into the relationships between the young women and their suitors. Considering that in this case women as well as men have been significant obstacles to the advancement and fulfilment of the young women, this raises some questions for feminist scholarship. Could this tendency be attributed to a strong cultural acquiescence by the actors or a demonstration of narrow family interest against the wider issue of social liberations for the oppressed young women? Are all these issues linked to power and deeply entrenched patriarchal arrangements?

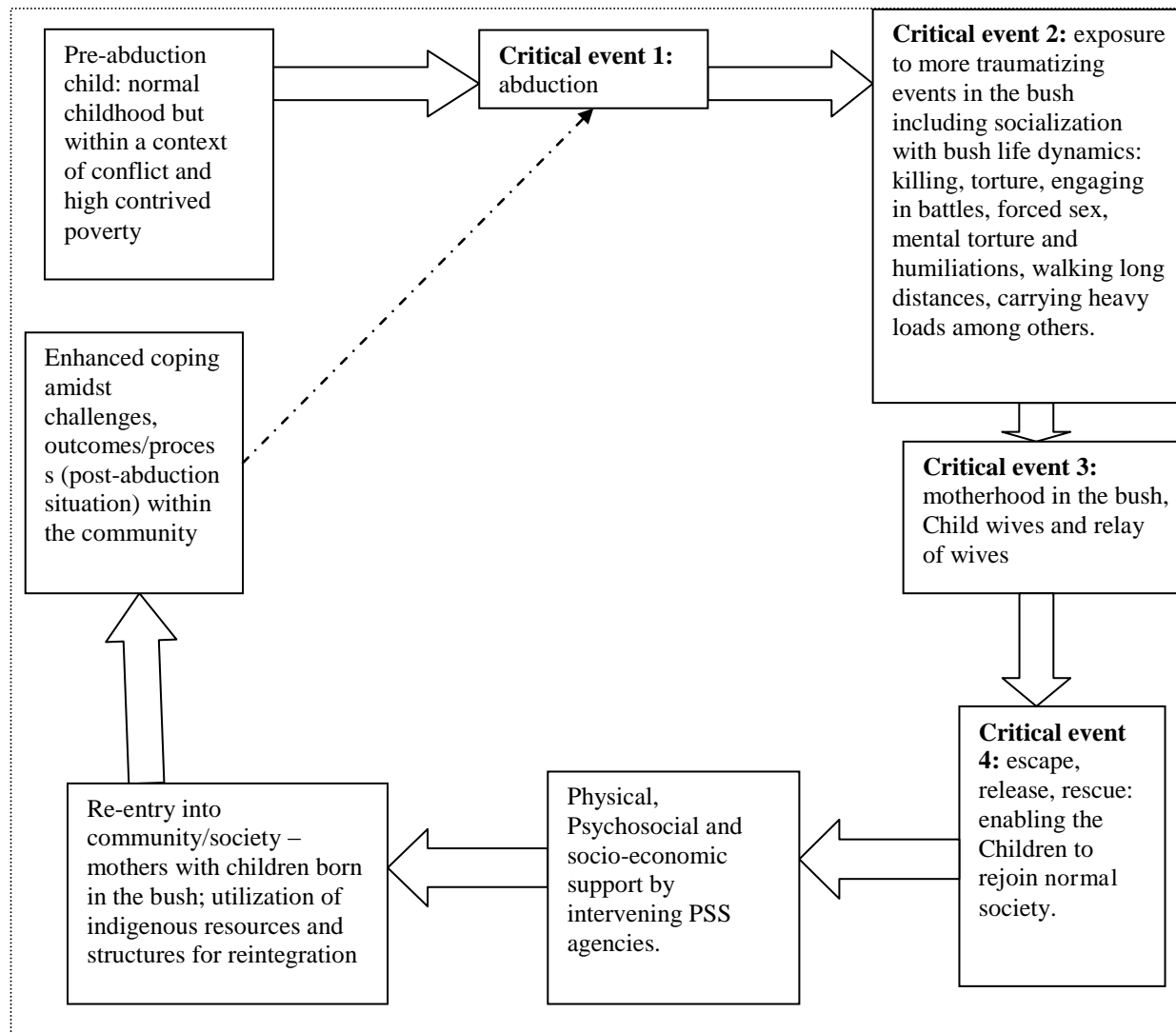
Among their peers, the FACM have transformed the network arising from their bush experience into social capital that they have positively utilised. This was reflected in mutual social support and sharing of other socio-economic resources (see also Boas and Bjorkhaug, 2010; Karame, 2009).

The study suggests that the nature of the return process affected reintegration. Two processes of return were identified: direct return to the community and return through PSS agencies (RRCs). The study suggests that the nature of the return is influenced by whether the FACM escaped or were rescued by the army. For the latter, they had to pass through army units and later RRCs whereas for those escaping on their own, they had a choice whether to go to the RRCs or directly home. Indoctrination by the rebels in the bush greatly influenced the decision not to pass through the RRCs. Other factors constraining returning through RRCs were limited knowledge and awareness of family, and the desire of the girls to avoid extended separation from their families.

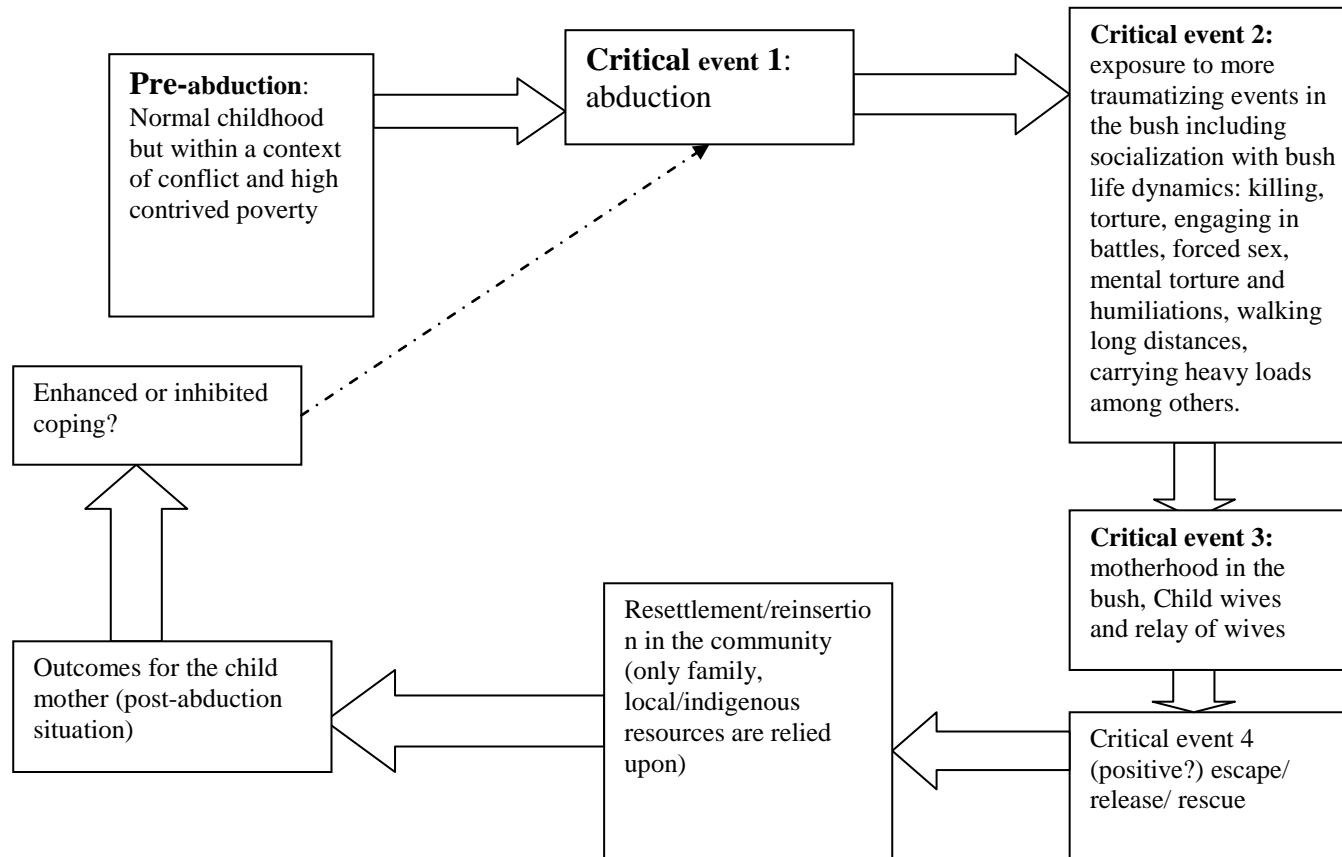
The fear of the unknown at the RRCs was also contrasted with the FACM's perceived safety and security in her family. While this analysis is by no means comprehensive, the study suggests that inability to pass through RRC had significant ramifications for the reintegration of the girls. This includes among others, slow PSS recovery, with the girls going directly to the community experiencing more signs of PTSD symptoms (Allen and Schomerus, 2006). The level of socio-economic support in the community was also mainly predicated on whether the FACM passed through RRCs or not. Even vocational training was reportedly made more available to those who passed through the RRCs. The lack of documentation of those FACM that went directly to the community also reportedly narrowed down support opportunities from other organisations.

Figures 12.1 and 12.2 presents a model of the life course transitions of the FACM as they go through their bush life experience from abduction. While this was not a comparative analysis, the study provided insights into whether FACM who received support through Reception Centres were coping better in the community compared to those who did not. It is apparent from the data analysed that those FACM who passed through the Reception Centres (RRCs) are perceived to be coping much better in the community, with testimonies of the FACM attesting to the same. It is the well considered view of the researcher that agency based PSS support has been crucial to the reintegration outcomes. I note, however, that reintegration is a long term issue influenced by a multiplicity of other factors. For example, while the FACM as well as other FAC returned to the community, there was always a risk of re-abduction. Accessibility to other resources is thus significant for the reintegration process and my analysis has indicated that the contacts developed by FACM at the RRCs were important in accessing the former.

**Figure 12. 1: Formerly abducted girl children who passed through a Reception Centre (RRC)**



**Figure 12.2 Formerly Abducted Child Mother who has returned directly into the community**



On gendering the post-reunion support, mothers were seen as being more supportive of and closer to the FACM than male family members. The behaviour of men and women is culturally contextualised: there are different expectations of men and women in supporting girls and boys (see Ochen, 2011; Berge and Milson, 2010; El-Bushra and Sahl, 2005). The social practices among the Acholi made it possible for girls to be closer to their mothers and not so much their fathers in terms of certain behavioural orientations. The study further indicated that the acceptability of children born in captivity (CBC) was dependent on whether such a child was a girl or a boy with the former more easily accepted compared to the latter.

In Acholi society, wealth, land and other productive resources pass through male heritage although women's accessibility and utilisation of such facilities was allowed (see Angucia, 2010). The non-acceptability of boy children though subtle differs markedly from the pre-war socio-cultural practices where children in similar situations were fully accepted and protected within the family. Could this be attributed to cultural changes or response of the community to the dwindling resource base, including land, food and livestock? On the other hand as the acceptability of girl children was premised on their potential to bring money and wealth to the home, could it be that this acceptance is also dependent on narrow individuated objectives rather than the fulfilment of the rights of such a girl-child?

### **Community Structures for Reintegration: Towards a New Model for Community-based Child Protection**

The study showed that at the height of the war, and as a result of the weakening social support system and increase in the number of children returning from rebel captivity, varied child protection structures were envisaged and initiated. These were developed to respond to the emergent challenges of reintegration within the community. A multiplicity of agencies pursued individual child protection systems whose remit were to target mainly formerly abducted children resettled within the community. Traditional child protection systems were largely ignored. In the last half decade, however, there have been little efforts from agencies in supporting the individual child protection structures. This has been partly attributed to changing donor thinking on child protection and diminishing donor interests in supporting such structures (see Kaliballa and Elson, 2010; Save the Children, 2010; Machel, 2007).

As indicated in chapter ten, the workability of the Child Protection Committee (CPC) structures might have been appropriate in conflict settings where communities were close to each other (such as in a displacement camp). In the current post-conflict period where most people have left the IDPCs and returned to their original homes, a new approach is needed. I have argued that under the current arrangements the prospects of sustainability for the prevailing CPC structures are remote. There is need for a new child protection model: one that integrates human rights, social protection and psychosocial support issues. Such an approach in my view will be more effective in ensuring the wellbeing of children and young people exposed to violence and traumatic situations.

The necessity to rethink child protection in Northern Uganda is particularly necessary given that the socio-political context under which the current child protection system and structures were conceived has changed (Bailey et al 2009; Abola et al 2009). As displaced persons return to their original homes they encounter challenges, and new realities appear. These realities must be reflected within the evolving framework for child protection. What is required is a thorough review and revision of current structures to address emerging issues within the political, economic and social context (Wessels, 2009).

Further, the new model must address the needs and development challenges of FACM, and their children, with mechanisms for ensuring socio-economic and livelihood support at the district and the community levels. I argued that when reviewing ideas on the most appropriate structure for child protection and provision of support to FACM, it is imperative to consider using structures which have a more permanent presence within the community. This could best be achieved with structures that are self-sustaining and socially-embedded within the community. These structures may be both traditional and modern but they should be an integral part of the community. It is in this way that their independence and longevity is more likely to be sustained.

Lessons of experience from other post-conflict countries such as Liberia, Sierra Leone and the Sudan reveals significant difficulties in creating new structures for child protection without taking into account local situational dynamics (Wessels, 2009; Fairbanks et al, 2003). The literature has also captured the possibility of traditional structures being effectively utilized in child protection and reintegration initiatives

(Omona and Ocaya, 2010; Baines et al., 2006; Liu Institute for Global Issues, 2005; Fairbank et al, 2003; Bernard et al 2003; Wessels and Monteiro, 2001). The involvement of local council (LC) structures should also be re-evaluated as they are self-renewing structures that are already established within the law (Republic of Uganda, 2000).

### **Interventions for Formerly Abducted Child Mothers**

This study also aimed at exploring the perceptions of stakeholders and communities on the effectiveness of the interventions implemented for FACM. A number of issues have emerged with regard to the interventions. While initiatives have been carried out to enable the FACM resettle within the community, there are challenges pertaining to the context of intervention (Kaliballa and Elson, 2010; Abola et al., 2009). Most of the children were reunited into an environment which did not allow them to fully exploit these potentials (IDPCs).

I have also indicated that most of the interventions were emergency-oriented with minimal efforts for significant change in strategy in the current recovery and development context (Abola et al 2009; Dolan and Hovil, 2006). The reported presence of stigma and reluctance on the part of the community to fully accept the FACM and their children could also point to limitations in interventions, although entrenched socio-cultural institutions and practices could also be a key factor (Maina, 2010; Fearon et al., 2009).

Follow-up of children reunited within the community seemed to have been constrained by lack of criteria of how the support should be provided. The relocation of children to different places, high agency workload, and in some cases a virtual lack of prioritisation of follow-up issues seemed to have been significant obstacles. Absence of indicators measuring psychosocial progress of the FACM made it difficult to conclusively say that a child has been fully reintegrated. These challenges have been well captured in the literature and confirmed by the current study (e.g. Allan and Schomerus, 2006; Barenbaum et al., 2004). It is also clear that the follow-up strategy was not designed to address situation of CBC whose needs are of a different nature compared to that of their mothers.

Issues around vocational training of the FACM as a strategy for community reintegration have also posed challenges. The short time frame as well as few training programmes all made it problematic, with little real impact on the livelihoods of the FACM. Importantly, the choices were made for the girls who had little real power to determine what they wanted and thus their aspirations and agency did not inform such choices. It is also the view of stakeholders that training of FACM should have been done after reunion allowing for a grace period of adjustment and self-determination of their own interests. As a result of the inadequacy of the vocational training programme, many FACM never put the skills learnt to effective use to derive livelihoods. While targeting FACM in groups gave opportunity for mutual social support, the group approach also excluded some FACM who were not members of such groups.

Overall, the general limitations of the interventions demonstrated the lack of a well-thought-out framework for reintegration support, with approaches and interventions oscillating between child protection and psychosocial support. Many agencies were using their own PSS approach, with some proving quite contradictory. This situation could have been avoided with a strong coordination framework, which unfortunately was not the case (Dolan and Hovil, 2006).

PSS interventions have also been constrained by donor rigidity in funding long-term interventions. This could perhaps explain the design of short-term vocational training programme. The inability of donors in not effectively supporting child protection programmes has also been cited in the literature (Machel, 2001; 2007; Baines et al., 2006; Dolan and Hovil, 2006). These observations raise question as to whether donor intervention in such situations is for the wellbeing of the children or meeting other hidden donor agendas.

This study has suggested that there were limited opportunities to incorporate lessons of experience in programme implementations into further interventions, a view shared by an earlier study (Allen and Schomerus, 2006). Coordination meetings were reactive and did not provide a clear forum for lesson learning (see also Dolan and Hovil, 2006). While some support for recovery-oriented interventions existed, these were not as conspicuous as during the active emergency period. There is reduced donor funding for the recovery



period despite reported challenges in resettling and reintegrating formerly displaced communities including FACM (see Abola et al., 2009).

### **Towards a New Intervention Model for Supporting FACM**

Based on the analysis of current interventions, I suggest that interventions for FACM should be integrated and address socio-economic recovery for the region, not just targeting only the FACM in isolation. This is important if the potentials of the young women and their development rights as well as interests of their children (CBCs) are to be fully addressed. It is also important to note that further integration might be dependent on FACM accessing socio-economic, psychosocial and politico-cultural services in the programming context. If facilities for providing such services are non-existent, where do the FACM and other war-affected children go?

The argument therefore is that effective reintegration of FACM will be dependent on strategic, well-thought, positive and significant changes in the intervention context. These changes should focus on the rehabilitation and reconstruction or development of socio-economic infrastructures. This could include the development of physical assets in areas where they have been destroyed. This as Harris (1999) also notes might not happen in the medium term, but the investment and actions need to be implemented outright. While the PRDP (Republic of Uganda 2007) presents some steps in the right direction, it falls short of arguing out a clear intervention over both medium and long term periods.

A vision thus needs to be charted and efforts made towards achieving the desired outcome and impact position. Some reflections need to be made before such actions are initiated: Is there a political will for the effective implementation of such interventions? Are donors ready and willing to commit considerable resources towards such noble but potentially expensive and protracted undertaking? The kind of interventions I advocate here go beyond the current Northern Uganda Peace Recovery and Development Plan (PRDP) which is limited to a three-year period (see also Mensah, 2010).

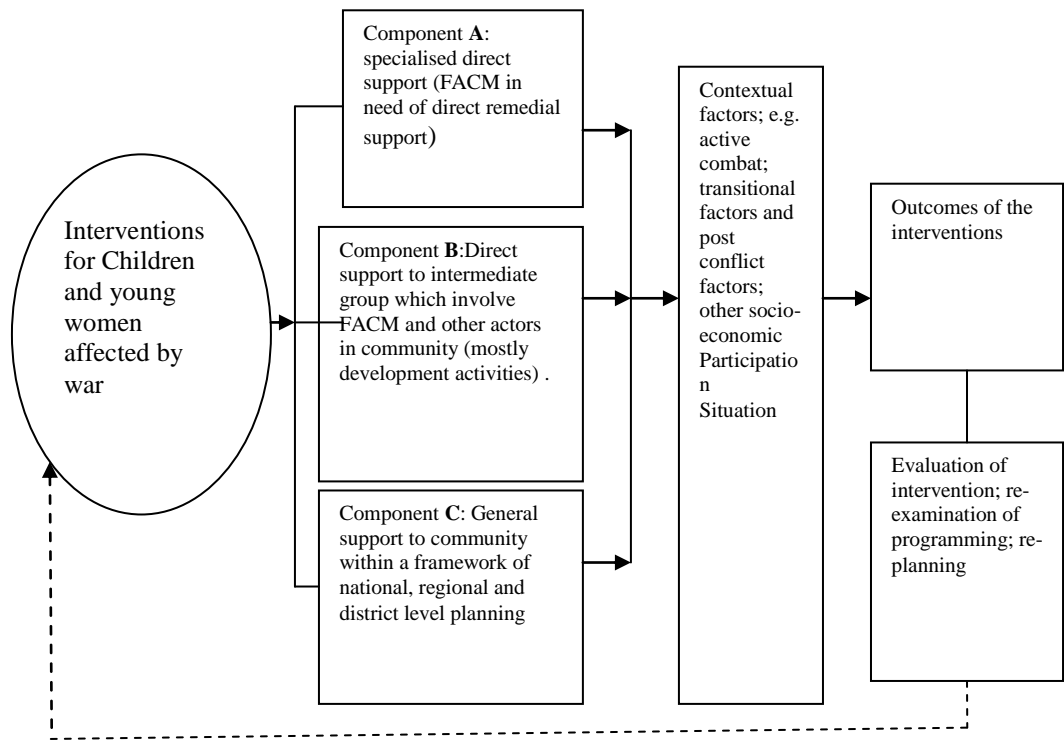
The approach being proposed conceptualises future positions and outcomes and then chart a way forward based on several intervention phases (immediate, medium and long-term) with clear commitment of resources and efforts across sectors and involving a multiplicity of organisations (multi-sectoral). But within this, efforts to address

particular needs and situations for FACM and other formerly abducted children should be prioritised. Therefore as efforts are being made at addressing human rights violations, concomitant efforts to prevent war and address poverty need to be initiated (see also Bardin, 2005; Blattman and Annan, 2008).

I believe that if opportunities are provided for programme adjustments based on emergent context and development changes, a massive intervention of such a nature will produce an acceptable outcome. However, this requires adopting a programming approach where the intervention continually allows for adjustment in strategies and planned outcomes and indicators based on the emerging issues within the context. Another justification for a programming intervention of such proportion is with regard to the international development targets. My argument is that if the overall strategic development framework for such an intervention falls within national and international development targets such as the MDGs, then the investment of resources will be justified.

Moreover, in modelling reintegration programming for war affected children, there is need to positively consider the most vulnerable and worse-off among them (Kalibala and Elson, 2010). Figure 12.3 presents a simplified model of a proposed intervention approach which can be applied at the project, community and district level. This is further developed in Figure 12.4 to broaden the scope of coverage and nature of programming.

**Figure: 12.3: Interventions Framework for Young People Affected by War**



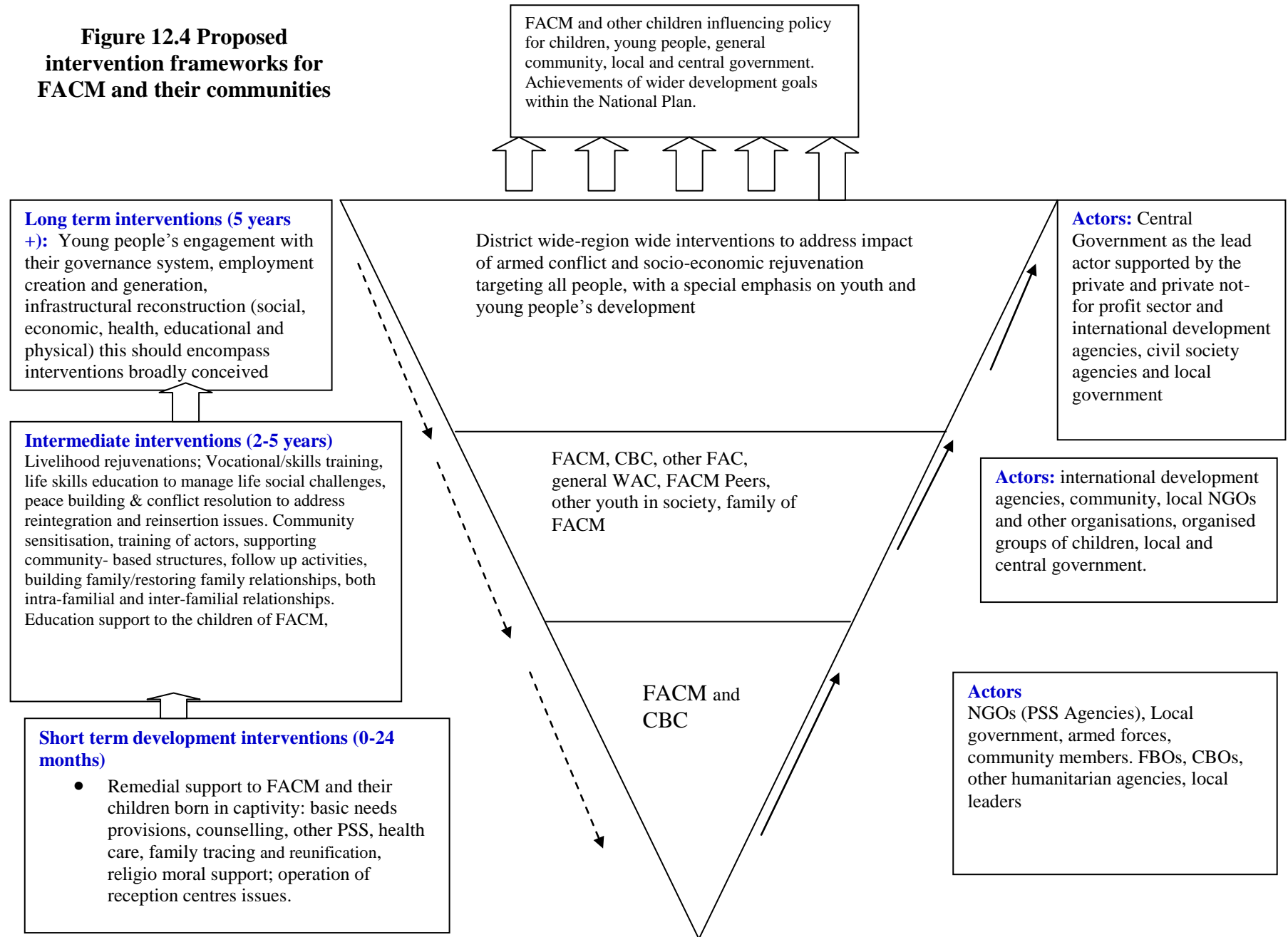
Under Component **A**, the issues to consider include those children and young people who require direct support; support to the school where they study; and general relationships and other aspects which affect social wellbeing. The main focus will be on the FACM themselves, the children and other people living with them. Component **A** could also include support to community where they live. In the design of the intervention, considering that most of the FACM are already youth, and no longer children at the time of return, the interventions developed should critically consider this phase of their lives as it is important for effective reintegration.

**Under Component B**, the support would be directed towards the intermediate associational networks where the FACM interact. These would be targeted with support to strengthen the group functioning and also provide better means of livelihoods in addition to meeting the emotional and social needs of the FACM within such groups. Lessons of experience (Team Initiatives Limited 2010 and Ochen-Awich 2009) have indicated that groups are very important motivators for individual development plans and also provide added benefits of positively mentoring and challenging group members to pursue their dreams and plans.

**Component C** involves directing development interventions at the community and ensuring that social services that might be required by the target group are provided. In this case, the FACM and their children would benefit like other members of the community. The main limitation with this approach is the expensive nature of the interventions. Again, there is also a fear that the target group might not benefit from the proposed interventions. Cases have been cited in development programming where interventions developed for a particular target group has been hijacked by some other people-benefit captors (see for example Ochen-Awich 2008; Truelove 1998). Component C will also open out into the wider development programming to address human rights issues and building social agency of the young women, as well as targeting socio-economic development issues within planning frameworks.

Based on the information from analysis of the interventions, I propose a multi-level response to the problems/development challenges of communities affected by armed conflict (Figure 12.4).

**Figure 12.4 Proposed intervention frameworks for FACM and their communities**



In Figure 12.4 above, I propose a three-pronged approach by different groups of actors to address holistically the challenges of reintegration for the FACM:

- a) Interventions addressing direct vulnerabilities among severely constrained and needy FACM incorporating mainly short term remedial/emergency support;
- b) Intermediate interventions targeting income support and socio-economic empowerment, livelihood providing marketable skills, accessibility to income generation activities and training to build other capacities; and
- c) Long-term interventions aimed at raising political consciousness among the young women and child mothers. This objective is intended to build what I have called social agency in the FACM so that they can initiate social actions and influence social changes at the local and national levels. This could have the added benefit of positively influencing social situations for the children. This will involve engagement with the FACM's communities, cultural institutions, local government at sub-county levels, district government and even central government (see also Wessels, 2009). It is also possible that the FACM can be supported to influence global policies and practice on child protection.

Intermediate and short term interventions should all look at the situation, needs and rights of both the FACM and their children, a gap in current interventions. It should also be aimed at building elaborate community support system to ensure that the FACM and their children are well supported. Both long-term and intermediate intervention should also aim at targeting the overall age group to which the FACM belong so that opportunities for networking and mutual social support are enhanced. When there is general community regeneration then opportunities for the application of the skills learnt, marketing of products and development of new socio-economic development activities increase. The interventions should all link together from remedial, medium-term and long-term. While some broad development interventions such as the PRDP and NUSAF II exist, they do not effectively address the intervention situations for the FACM as has been elaborated in chapter ten.

In the long-term development phase while focus will be on the broader community both for general and developmental interventions, specific attention could be paid to developing the “activism” and “social agency” of the FACM, their peers and other actors

within the community. The aim would be to equip them with the skills to advocate an inclusive development programming to address needs situations and meet developmental rights of the vulnerable children and young people. I advocate a staged and well-phased approach where different levels of interventions target the same individual (Figure 11.4) or groups of individual offering support at different levels or phases of interventions. Some of the interventions target the community where they live and others target them directly and the same group, young people/children will be targeted for developmental interventions. Some interventions will have to be sustained until the FACM are able to be self-reliant or the wider developmental programming can address their situation. However, contextual challenges and changes will also have to be factored in. In this situation where the situation reverts back from early recovery/development to active conflict, then the earlier remedial intervention applies.

## **Deepening Understanding and Ideas**

### **Feminist Scholarship:**

This study makes important contribution to feminist scholarship. The methodological contribution of this study has been in combining a feminist theoretical perspective with that of rights and culture (structures) and utilising them to illustrate the young women's experiences of conflict. The study has adapted two feminist theoretical perspectives: the African feminist theory and theory of intersection. Regarding the latter, the young girls experiences of conflict has been situated within their socio-cultural expectations and the varied manifestations and trajectory of identities in the course of their abduction, bush life, return and resettlement within the community. The young women's identities as children, women, child mothers, wives (in the bush), fighter or ex-combatants have had significant ramifications for their post-conflict reintegration.

It is thus not farfetched to suggest that their womanhood and gender intersected with their personal circumstances and socio-cultural expectations to in many cases deny them an opportunity to be fully socially reintegrated (Jones, 2009; Crenshaw, 1994). These varied and multiple experiences and perspectives which have been unravelled by this study deepens the understanding of women's complex experiences of conflict, which need not only be presented in the light of victimhood (see also Haeri and Puechguirbal,

2010). A consideration for these issues in the interventions will enable interventions which more readily address young women's concerns and experiences.

The study has contributed to a greater appreciation of indigenous cultural positions and its unique ways of enhancing children welfare. This study demonstrates that African culture and patriarchy does not necessarily imply oppression to women and children, borrowing from Bakare Yusuf, 2003 and Oyewumi (2000, 1997). Evidence of social institutions which enhance women's protection were mainly unreported or ignored due to essentialist approaches and generalisation of the Acholi culture as being patriarchal and therefore intimidating and oppressive towards women and children. However, a nuanced analysis of these cultural aspects and social institutions might show the presence of space for rights fulfilment for both women and children.

It is possible that patriarchy itself therefore, might not necessarily be oppressive towards women since avenues (created space) for the participation of women in society exists (see also Oyewumi, 2000, Mikell, 1995). I recognise, however, that my views as a man, and an Acholi might be contested by other scholars as being overly subjective. Considering that many development scholars in both child protection and feminist research have recognised the positive contribution and potential of culture (e.g. Bisell et al forthcoming; Wessells, 2009; Shepler 2005; Oyewumi 2000, Mikell,1995) , it is possible that it is the abuse of culture and its aberrations which generate women and children's oppression, exploitation and subjugation. I recognise therefore the capacity of culture to both meet rights and needs of community members and also violate that of others in certain circumstances.

The study contributes to a new understanding of the patriarchal and matriarchal power and dynamics in social life, showing that the issues are much more complex than just pitting men against women and children. Regarding matriarchal power in gender equations, this study also unravelled a new phenomenon of female on female violence and aggression. This is contrary to the widely held view that perpetration of violence on the abducted girls is by men, as portrayed in the literature on child soldiers in Africa and Uganda (e.g. Mazurana et al., 2008; Frerks et al., 2005; McKay and Mazurana, 2004; McKay, 2004).



Similarly, in the post bush period significant oppositions on relationships between the young women and suitors seemed to have been harboured by the female relatives including mothers. My study therefore questions the position of some feminist scholars who portray the oppressors of girls and children as predominantly male, without clearly articulating alternative scenarios (see for example Saul, 2003; Nicholson, 1990; Kourany et al, 1992; Kemp and Squires; 1997). This reported divergence raises interesting insights for feminist scholarship.

### **Insights on Intra-bush Experiences and Coping of the Girls and Child Mothers**

The study revealed the agency of the child mothers in resisting rebel sexual advances in the bush; even at the expense of their life. A significant contribution has been the revelation that the development of motherly love happened gradually and not instantaneously for the first pregnancy. This varies with known mother child attachment as advanced by biological and human reproduction theory. In this case the circumstances surrounding the conception could have dampened the excitement of motherhood (see also Allen, 2005, 2006; Angucia, 2010). Moreover many of them had their first child at 14, an aged socially considered unsuitable for giving birth, outside the bush.

The study suggests that the FACM adopted unique coping strategies while in the bush to ensure that they return alive, together with their children, showing significant demonstration of agency amidst a very difficult context. Relay of the girls as wives among different rebels, constituted repeated violations of their rights, lives and dignity. This study suggests that this could have sown the seeds of later difficulties in sustaining long-term relationships among some of the returning young women. It is also important to point out that while wife inheritance exists in the normal Acholi society (see for example, EL-Bushra and Sahl, 2005) women's participation in such a decision was paramount. This situation differs from what obtained in the bush, where the onus was on the senior rebel commander to allocate and re-allocate women without being questioned.

### **Discourses on Children's Rights**

This study suggests that certain aspects of children rights as known and practised were present and recognised in the Acholi traditional society (see El-Bushra and Sahl, 2005). The only difference is that it was not called 'rights' since there were no equivalent

expressions in the local languages. However, social institutions embedded rights into the everyday life and relationship among the Acholi, with child protection an important role of society. The CRC and the rights discourse and the Acholi cultural tradition and social institutions are thus not antithetical to each other, except for differences in conceptualisation of childhood. Violations of children rights happened as a default and where in most cases not normative, although conflict heightened the level of child abuse. These revelations thus raise the necessity of planning interventions which build upon the local conceptualisation and understanding of children's rights so that socio-cultural harmony is maintained and potential challenges proactively addressed (see also Wessels, 2009; Shepler, 2005; Bisell et al., forthcoming).

Furthermore, the importance of traditional or indigenous knowledge in the reintegration process becomes even more paramount. There is an emerging perspective that over focus on and universalising the implementation of the CRC actually constrains its achievement when presented as different from local situational factors. Indeed some scholars have noted that culture can be a strong vehicle for the achievement of a protective environment for children and young people (Bisell et al., forthcoming). A new model of community-level child protection thus emerges from the current research: building child protection interventions around locally occurring structures serving other but relevant functions, for the purpose of sustainability and community ownership (see also Ochen et al., 2011; Wessels, 2009, Shepler 2005).

### **Reintegration Programming and Literature**

The study lends credence to the reintegration debate by proposing an intervention approach building primarily on the agency and strengths of the FACM, but not losing track of the limitations occasioned on the exercise of such agency by structural constraints. It is my view that rights-based interventions are those that consider strengths and not weaknesses in developing interventions, although socio-economic vulnerability is recognised. In developing reintegration interventions therefore, there is need to consider the limitations imposed on human agency by structural forces, be it social, economic or political factors (see Archer, 2003; Dessler, 1989; Sewell, 1992).

This study also uncovered an important issue in supporting reintegration processes of the young women. It suggests that actors need not only develop and support individual agency but social agency which comprises empowerment-driven interventions to enable the FACM to influence events and development within their communities (see Okello and Hovil, 2007). This can be done by acting collectively and utilising social networks and other forums to build a bigger child protection constituency to assure a better future for their children and create a force where their voices can be heard.

This study contributes further to the reintegration programming by recognising that many young people in the community are not being effectively reached inspite of several years of programme interventions. This challenge has also been recognised in other similar studies (e.g. Abola et al, 2009; Okello and Hovil, 2007; Allen and Schomerus, 2006). It thus recommends a change in approach to consider broad targeting of the community of resettlement; addressing poverty and other social development issues as well as expanding opportunities for the young people. The study also raises the need for specific targeting. This involves seeking out FACM in greater needs for direct remedial support on a longer-term engagement while building their self-reliance capacity. Such approaches (see figure 11.4) have not been effectively applied in Northern Uganda, nor has it been elaborately marketed in the reintegration literature.

The current study further highlights new insights into how quality of the FACM's personal relationship is crucial for reintegration. Here the focus is on the personal and not just the general relationship. In designing reintegration programmes, considerable attention should be aimed at addressing relationship issues as the quality of relationship the FACM develop will eventually be crucial in how effective their reintegration works out, and whether it will be sustained. In Northern Uganda as well as elsewhere as depicted within the literature past interventions have focused at psychosocial support, socio-economic reintegration and wider community issues without devoting adequate resources on the personal relationships of the FACM (see for example Frerks et al 2005; Maina 2010; Angucia 2010; Ochen and Okeny, 2011).

### **Other Contributions and Findings**

Although varied reasons including their presumed aggressiveness and history had been cited as stumbling blocks, this study raises new perspectives on the social rejection of the

formerly abducted young women. There is a strong indication that rejection is not only based on perceived failure to comply with cultural expectations but specific family interests and attempts to preserve family honours. This preservation of family honours is however also traceable to deeply entrenched cultural factors and behavioural expectations, the latter of which owe its origin to social ordering of society.

This study suggests that the tendencies of the girls to change men are reaction to society's rejection, desertion and mockery of their genuine efforts to attain a meaningful relationship with suitors. There is no evidence that the returning young women are any different from their contemporaries who were not abducted (see Annan et al 2010) but some isolated cases of difficult girls can be found. In my view, however, even this could be explained by the girls reaction to their past, adopting negative coping as a result of the sexual, physical and emotional violations they were subjected to, without much and effective psychosocial support on return (see Ochen and Okeny, 2011).

### **Limitations of the Study**

A key limitation of this study is that the design of the study did not allow me legally to have discussion with the children born in captivity who were in most cases young. I could not find out from them how they relate with their mothers and other children within the community. Sampling techniques could have also left out some people as I considered two districts within Northern Uganda out of a possible 15. This could have thus had an effect on the diversity of the participants and perhaps the richness of the individual experiences of the FACM. However, the study was not intended to be representative but to generate a rich account of the experiences of a few targeted research participants. It was hoped that this information would provide deep insights into the lived experiences of the FACM.

Another limitation could have been due to my own personal characteristics as a male researcher studying women participants. Perhaps there were instances where the women were not totally free to reveal everything to me? Would a female researcher have got more information than me? These are issues that could be answered if the study is replicated by a female researcher. However, as indicated earlier, it is not always obvious whether gender, race or ethnicity might always be the barrier it is assumed to be in the research relationship between the researcher and the researched.

While this study has provided considerable insights into the worlds and the experiences of young girls who eventually became mothers during the period of their captivity with the rebels, the study does not lay any claim to universalising the experiences of the child mothers. While the experiences of the child mothers talked to in the two districts of Gulu and Amuru seem similar, there was still a great divergence in the response to the critical events and the process of negotiating resettlement in the original homes from the IDP camps.

This study was about describing and analysing the experiences of the young women interviewed and how they negotiate the reintegration process but not about generalising these experiences to the whole of Acholi sub-region or Uganda for that matter. It is the view of the researcher, however, that the current study presents important pointers to how young women affected by war respond to critical events and negotiate their intra-conflict survival and post-conflict reintegration. The methodology used in the study allowed the young women to tell their stories in their own words, in their own ways.

### **Suggestions for Further Research**

The current study raise the need for carrying out further research to expand knowledge on the situations of children affected by armed conflict within Northern Uganda. Further research could therefore be carried out in the following areas:

1. A comparative case study on reintegration dynamics and experiences among boy returnees and young women who returned with children could shed more light on their different experiences of the reintegration process. Another category of girls who returned without children could also be added to the comparative perspective. Phenomenological and grounded theory-oriented methodology could help tease out rich experiences, complemented with, if needed, survey studies;
2. Another study on a bigger scale with a larger sample could also be carried out to confirm or shed more light on the dynamics and experiences of girls returning through the RRCs and those returning directly to the community;

3. There is also need to find out more about the post-reinsertion experiences and support to children born in captivity. A study aimed primarily at shedding more light on issues surrounding the CBC would be timely;
4. There is also need to research the experiences of disabled returnees and how they are coping in the original villages after disbandment of IDPCs. It is important to note that the process of returning to the original homes could have significant ramifications for the welfare of this category of formerly abducted young people. This category includes those that were maimed and wounded in captivity.

### **Recommendations: Implications of the Research to Practice of Reintegration**

Interventions and programming for FACM and all other children affected by conflict should consider their strengths, agency and aspirations rather than problems and limitations. Context plays a critical part in such programme design and implementation. Relationship building seems to be the missing link in current reintegration programming. I have argued that successful social reintegration starts with the quality of the relationship between the FACM and significant others within their environment.

Besides, there is need for a consideration of culturally-relevant and sensitive interventions which identify and harness local support system. There is also need to put emphasis on intervention which does not increase dependency but address elements and factors which seem to hijack programmes intended for FACM and CBC. Furthermore, development agencies should provide an intervention framework that “individualises” and “contextualises” support to the psycho-social and socio-economic circumstances of the FACM.

Importantly, it would be imperative to develop and operationalise a coordination framework that specifies clearly the role of government, civil society, community, other interest groups, and the FACM themselves. I suggest that FACM need to be targeted both as a special category and also as a general category where they benefit from general community programming. At more analytical levels, the study suggests new perspectives of looking at culture, structure, agency and social relations in a post-conflict situation.

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## APPENDICES

**APPENDIX 1: Table of Pseudonyms of names for formerly abducted child mothers (young women) interviewed in the study (21 of them)**

<b>S No.</b>	<b>Pseudonyms</b>	<b>Whether through RRC or not</b>	<b>Age at interview</b>	<b>No of children returned with</b>	<b>Some biographical information(age at abduction, education level, etc)</b>
1	Adero Flo	Through Reception Centre	24	Three children (Two girls and a boy)	Abducted in 1996 at the age of 11 by 1999 at 14 had her first child. She returned in 2004, went through reception centre and currently lives alone with her children and her paternal family.
2	Apiyo Brenda	Through RRC	26 years	1 child	Abducted together with nine other relatives in the home, and by the second day five had been killed with her witnessing all that. She was 11 years old at abduction and immediately taken over as a wife. She escaped in May 2001 after five years in the bush. She went into a relationship on return and got another child but has separated from the father of the child.
3	Anena Jackie	Through RRC	25 years	Three children ( 1 boy and tow girls)	Abducted when she was only 10 years old in P.3. spent several years in the bush. She trained in tailoring after coming through reception centre, now working with a project being run by another Ngo to support disadvantaged child mothers as a tailoring assistant. She has not remarried but stay with an aunt.
4	Evas Amono	Though RRC	23 years old	1 child	Abducted at age 10 in 1996, given to a man at age 14 years. She was released by the rebel on

					their own volition in 2003 after staying in the bush for 8 years, dint escape. She spent 3 months at the GUSCO reception Centre. She too entered into a relationship on return but has separated from the man after having two additional children with him. Currently works with a project sewing dolls for exports to the US and stays with her three children.
5	Abalo Harriet	Not through reception centre		Two children all boys	Harriet was abducted in 1996 at Guru Guru in Amuru District; given to a man at 14 and later conceived at same age. Returned home in 2001 when she was pregnant with the second child whom she delivered at home. Harriet didn't go through RRC as she feared she would be killed by soldiers. Currently works as a child protection committee member in the sub county and farms.
6	Ladira Maggie	Through reception Centre	27 years	Three children (two boys and a girl)	Abducted at aged 11 in the year 1992 and by aged 13 she was already allocated to a man. She returned in September 2003 after 11 years in captivity. Maggie currently stays alone and does small scale business complemented with tailoring to eke out a living.
7	Lamaro Patricia	Not through RRC	22	One child (girl)	Abducted in 1998 at aged 12 on her way to the Gulu town to buy household items. At the age of 13 one year later she was given to a man as a wife. She escaped on her own after four years of captivity and went directly to the community.
8	Lalar Florence	through Reception centre	21	One baby girl	Abducted at age 12 and taken to Sudan and trained as a soldier, later came back to Uganda, was given out to a man.  Florence returned (escaped) in 2004 when pregnant and delivered from home. She has not been able to remarry
9					

	Aloyo Maria	Through RRC	20	One child (a boy)	Conceived at age 14 in the bush and managed to escape in 2004 after two years in the bush. Returned home with one child, tried to remarry but was later rejected by the father of the child when she was still pregnant due to pressure from the latter's other wife. Currently lives alone looking after her two children.
10	Eunice Acora	Not Through RRC	24	2 children (all boys)	Abducted at age 10 in 1994 Eunice was taken to Sudan where she was attached to an older woman and stayed with her for three years before she was made a wife of the commander. She was in the meantime trained as a soldier and participated in several fights in both Uganda and with SPLA in the Sudan. Eunice came back with three children when she was released together with other child mothers in 2006. She currently lives in her parents' home and take care of her children using petty businesses.
11	Amollo Jovina	Through RRC	22 years	1 child a boy	Abducted aged 11 with three other siblings all of the same woman. Her brother was killed while in the bush and the other two remains in the bush. Her first pregnancy was a miscarriage, but. Has one child from the bush but is remained and is comfortable with her man..whom she has two children now despite initial opposition by other family members and the community. Jovina returned when she was 19 years old after spending 8 years in captivity
12	Anena Mary	Not through Reception Centre	27 years	Three children ( a boy and two girls)	Stayed in the bush for ten years having been abducted in 1990 and returned in August 2000. She was 14 years old when she was given to a man, refused and was beaten seriously and had to comply. Participated in war fights even with her child, behind her back, and was forced to kill many innocent civilians. Made several trips



					between Uganda and the Sudan as a rebel soldier and child mother.
13	Laloyo Caroline	Not Through RRC	24 years	1 child a boy aged eight at the time of the interview.	She was abducted at age 14 in December 1998. She returned in September 2001 after three years in captivity. Still experiencing significant night mares and bush recalling of difficult bush experiences
14	Laker Susan	Through RRC	24 years	2 children (a boy and a girl)	Abducted beaten and left for dead but somehow managed to survived after regaining consciousness. Susan was trained as a soldier, taken to Sudan and given to one of the senior most rebel commanders as a wife when still aged 13, later that commander was killed and Susan was given to another one. Beaten even when heavily pregnant due to rumour she wanted to escape. Susan trained in tailoring but is not sing her skills at the moment. She stays alone looking after her children.
15	Acii Lorna	Through RRC	26 years	4 children (two girls and two boys)	Abducted in 1996 with several siblings who were all killed on the same day. Later given to a man..lost the first child in 1998. First rebel commander husband allocated was executed by the overall rebel commander, and then given to another person. When se questioning rebel authority caned 190 strokes, just a week after delivery. Currently a member of a self-help community group and also engaged in framing, staying alone with her children and other paternal relatives.
16	Laburu Harriet	Through RRC	22 years	1 child	Laburu returned with one child who is now 7 years old. She had a post bush relationship which ended in another child but she is separated from the father of the child, ostensibly due to negative public opinion.
	Hellen Lawidi	Through RRC	27 years	One daughter	Escaped from Sudan, after her child was rescued separately. Through referral by GUSCO..is now

17					working as a tailoring assistant at the Tera renaissance foundation. Currently lives alone, has not married after the bush.
18	Oroma Nancy	Through RRC	22 years	2 Children (a boy and a girl)	Nancy was abducted at the age of 12; spent several years in captivity and returned in 2005. She gave birth to three children in the bush but during escape in a battle, one of her children got separated from her. She has not seen the child, since. She also took home another un-accompanied child from the GUSCO centre and is fostering her at the moment. She spent 5 months at the GUSCO RRRC. Trained in tailoring but does not consider the skills adequate to her
19.	Ladwara Maureen	Through RRC	20 years	1 child ( a girl)	Was abducted at age 11. Spent seven months at the GUSCO RRRC as she was injured when she returned, shot in battle. Currently surviving selling cassava chips and fish at a local market and use proceeds for feeding family. Her child currently goes to primary school.
20.	Adyere Marjorie	Through RRC	27	1 child (boy)	Abducted at 13 years in 1995 and returned in the year 2004. Returned with one child but currently married to an understanding man who has ignored all public opinion and stays well with his wife and supports her child born in the bush.
21	<b>Akera Damali</b>	Not Through RRC	23	1 child	She was abducted for about only 6 months. Damali returned home (escaped) when she was heavily pregnant, didn't pass through any reception centre but went straight home and delivered from home as well.

## APPENDIX 2: Lists of Key Informants Interviewed

SNO:	Name	Position of Responsibility	Organisation
1	Obol Andrew	Probation and Social Welfare Officer/Focal Point Person Child Protection	Gulu District Local Government
2	Olwedo Nicholas	Manager Community Services Department	Gulu District Local Government
3	Omara Amos	Programme Director	ACORD Uganda, Gulu Office
4	Okumu David	Project Manager	Uganda Children of War Rehabilitation Programme, Gulu (World Vision Uganda)
5	Aneno Jacinta	Programme Coordinator	Uganda Children of War Rehabilitation Programme, Gulu (World Vision Uganda)
6	Aboda Mathew	Programme Manager	Ker Kwaro Acholi Cultural Institution
7	Betty Ayaa	Social Worker	Gulu Support the Children Organization
8	Lakareber Hellen	Social Worker	Gulu Support the Children Organization
9	Muno Lillian	Social Worker	Gulu Support the Children Organization
10	Ocira Patrick	Community Development Officer	Amuru Distract Local Government
11	Odoki Biribiri	Programme Officer	Concerned Parents Association
12	Aleme Grace	District Gender Officer	Gulu District Local Government
13	Okiya Wilbur	District Planner	Gulu District Local Government
14	His Highness Rwot David Achana II	The Paramount Chief of the Acholi	Ker Kwaro Acholi Cultural Institution
15.	Agweng Ida	Programme Officer	Ker Kwaro Acholi Cultural Institution
16.	Olobo Basil	Director of Programme	ACORD Uganda
17.	Sera Amuna	Child Protection Advisor	Trans cultural Psychosocial Officer

**APPENDIX 3: Final Template Emerging from Field Data (key emerging themes)**

<p>1. Intra-bush Experience of Formerly Abducted Girls and Child Mothers</p>	<p>1. The abduction process</p>	<p>1. Age at abduction 2. circumstances predisposing abduction 3. Failure of child protection policy and practice? 4. Other key issues</p>		
	<p>2. Critical Event in the bush</p>	<p>1. Sexual coercion  2. Physically gruelling activities</p>	<p>1. Power and dominance vs helplessness 2. Loss of virginity and innocence 3. Pregnancy and delivery of children 4. Physical and psychological torture due to failure to comply to sexual demands of rebels  1. Walking long distance 2. Carrying very heavy luggage</p>	

		<p>3. Exposure to battles, death and killings</p> <p>4. Death of child, husband and emergent responses</p> <p>5. Responses of child mothers to critical events in their lives.</p>		
	3. Subjugation and exploitation of the girls	<p>1. Relay and inheritance of wives</p> <p>2. Wifely expectations in the bush</p> <p>3. general humiliation as a result of deviance</p> <p>4. Oppression by Senior wives</p>		
	4. Escape from captivity: defining factors	<p>1. Motivation for Escape</p> <p>2. Circumstances predisposing escape</p> <p>3. Risk management in the return process</p> <p>4. Other</p>		
	5. Perceived loss of childhood by the			

	girls			
2. Relationship s and Reintegratio n: Interactions between Formerly Abducted Child Mothers (FACM) and their Communitie s	1. Nature of the relationship between child mothers and their children	1. Description of the relationship (post-bush) 2. What explains positive relationships and love 3. What explains negative relationships 4. Effects of the relationship		
	2. Interactions and relationships between the FACM and parents/ extended family	1. Dilemmas of the family in receiving the FACM 2. Fear of the FACM 3. Influence of in laws 4. Factors explaining emerging relationships.		
	3. Relationships between Child Mothers, peers and other community members	1. dynamics and perception of the nature of the relationship by the FACM 2. Community perception of the behaviour and of FACM 3.		
	4. Peer to Peer support	1. Circumstances determining peer		

	among child mothers (mutual social capital)	to peer support 2. Benefits/outcomes of peer to peer support  3. implications for reintegration	1. Positive outcomes 2. negative outcomes 3. unintended outcomes	
3. Influence of Contextual Factors on Programming for Formerly Abducted child Mothers (FACM)	1. Community and FACM perception of what constitute effective reintegration			
	2. Community Structures and systems for child protection and reintegration	1. Analysis of current community child protection structures and systems	1. Description of current child protection regimes 2. Impact analysis of the current child protection regimes 3. Sustainability prospects of the child protection structures and systems 4. What new child protection models are required? 5. Roles and support to the FACM	

		2. The legal and policy framework		
	1. Social capital and FACM	<p>1. Nature of social capital resources</p> <p>2. Social capital in pre-war situations</p> <p>3. Influence of the war on community social capital</p> <p>4. Current challenges to developing community social capital</p>		
	2. Cultural predicament and initiatives for reintegration.	<p>1. Roles of traditional leaders in the reintegration process</p> <p>2. Cultural</p>		



		dilemmas and issues pertaining to the CBCs. 3. Issues of non acceptance of child mothers, especially those with girl children		
4. Factors Affecting Reintegration of Formerly Abducted Child Mothers	1. Nature of the return process from the bush	1. Direct Return to the community	1. Factors explaining direct return  2. Effects of direct return	1. Limited knowledge and awareness of the community 2. Fear of recrimination by UPDF 3. Need to avoid any more separation with the family 4. Indoctrination by the rebels that will be infected with AIDS or killed 5. Perceived safety and security in their family

		2. Return through PSS agencies	<p>1. little opportunities for agency based PSS support</p> <p>2. higher levels of psychosocial problems (delayed PSS recovery)</p> <p>3. limited opportunities to get involved in vocational training and access other economic opportunities</p> <p>4. lack of documentation of return, which affect further support</p> <p>5. limited evidence to utilise FACM network</p> <p>6. Reliance on mainly own resources for coping (psycho-emotional and</p>
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				physical)
	2. Preparation of the community to receive FACM	1. PSS agencies interventions regarding reinsertion	<p>1. Roles played by reception centres</p> <p>2. Focus of the interventions and strategy for reinsertion</p> <p>3. Targeting and selection of individuals (preparation of family and community)</p> <p>3. Knowledge penetration</p> <p>4. Effects of interventions on stigma</p> <p>5. Community response to the message</p> <p>6. Efforts of the community in deepening knowledge</p> <p>7. Limitation of the model: analysis of effectiveness in preparing the children and the community</p> <p>1. Socio-legal framework</p> <p>2. Role of SCAs</p>	
		2. Roles and		

		commitment of other stakeholders in the preparation of the community	3. Complementary role of the lower local government, 4. Limitations and way forward 5. Other	
	3. Follow-up support	1. Frequency of follow-up 2. socio-economic support 3. Continued PSS support in the community 4. continued medical support 5. Continued provision of basic needs, especially food 6. What factors explain negative coping mechanisms, e.g. prostitution		
	4. Community Acceptance	1. Acceptance and support by relatives  2. social support by families  3. Issues of community expectation: responsibility of the FACM for		

		<p>their actions?</p> <p>4. Participation of FACM in community activities</p> <p>5. Acceptance of the children of FACM</p> <p>6. Perception of community towards support and progress of FACM</p> <p>7. Interventions on development needs and rights of children born in captivity (CBCs)</p> <p>8. circumstances making FACM return to their bush husbands/men hopping phenomenon</p>	<p>1. Negative public opinion of FACM as not being able to make good wives</p> <p>2. inability of the child mothers to be patient with the men</p> <p>3. Failure of cultural submission of the women? Does it really violate the rights of women?</p> <p>4. Abandonment of the women by the young men</p>	
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		<p>9. Effects of the scenario</p>	<p>5. Is it a way of society passing judgment and making them pay for the supposed crimes against their own communities?</p> <p>1. Social exclusion 2. isolation by community breeding suicidal thoughts in some of the child mothers 3. constrained social reintegration</p>	
	5. Significance of external support	<p>1. Role of agency support in effective reintegration 2. comparability with FACM receiving less or no external support 3. Roles of the organisations e.g. churches, FBOs, CBOs in supporting FACM</p>		
	6. Integration	1. Role of positive		

	and Involvement of FACM in Community Life	integration 2. Accessibility to Markets/Income generating Activities (IGAs) 3. Significance of groups and its roles 4. opportunities and constraints 5. Effects on PSS wellbeing		
	7. Presence of real biological parents	1. Effects on readjustments in the community 2. implications for PSS recovery		
	8. Modalities of how FACM manages the issues associated with their abduction experience	1. Nature of attitudes and post-reunion adjustment and coping 2. psycho- emotional resources, levels of versatility in managing the bush experience 3. What factors determine the management of such emotions and aftermath of exposure to critical events?		
	9. Role of child	1. Explanation of		

	mother agency in the resettlement phase	agency 2. What defines agency/ origin of agency 3. Dynamics of the Agency 4. What factors facilitate the exercise of agency 5. What factors limit the exercise of agency? 6. Implications for reintegration, e.g. building on child mother strengths		
	10. Gender Issues in Post- Reunion support	1. Roles of mothers and other female relatives 2. Roles of fathers and other male relatives 3. Issues of power (patriarchal power) and its manifestations in the reintegration phase 4. Influence of societal gender situations (in built gender ideologies) on acceptance of the FACM and their children		
5.	1. Description	1. Nature of the		



Interventions and Programming Analysis for Formerly Abducted Child Mothers and Young Women Affected by Armed Conflict	of current interventions for FACM	interventions 2. Targeting and selections of beneficiaries 3. Intervention strategies 4. Key assumptions of the interventions 5. Indicator description and means of verifications	1. Nature of the indicators 2. Limitations in the choice/whose parameters of change are considered?	
	2. Design and implementation of vocational training	1. Key aspects and design 2. Limitations	1 Poorly conceived 2. Limited market analyses 3. Adhoc nature of the training programmes, durations 4. Lack of consideration for the long term interest of the FACM 5. Timing of training enrolment: where the FACM ready at the time of being enrolled? 6. Why are the FACM not fully utilising the skills learnt through vocational training? 7. Gender issues and	

			skill mix in the support	
	3. Framework for addressing Reintegration	<p>1. non-existence of a well thought out framework</p> <p>2. limited guidance from Government and IASC on what to focus on, especially in the return period</p> <p>3. limited commitment of NGOs to national PSS working group</p> <p>4. Donor rigidity in funding long term interventions</p> <p>5. limitations and synergistic challenges</p> <p>with current programmes, initiatives and frameworks e.g PRDPs, NUSAF,</p>		

		<p>NAADs</p> <p>6. Lack of clear framework for coordinating intervention for child mothers(adhocism)</p>		
	<p>4. General limitations of the Interventions</p>	<p>1. lack of attention to long term reintegration needs of formerly abducted Child mothers</p> <p>2. lack of consideration for the changed context</p> <p>3. limitations in donor monitoring</p> <p>4. high operating costs (vs what goes down to communities)</p> <p>5. Failure to protect FACM from unfair media coverage</p> <p>6. why do agencies leave when needs seems greatest and opportunities more favourable for laying a solid foundation for</p>		

		development?		
	5. Issues pertaining to Monitoring and Evaluation	<p>1. Description of the M and E framework for reintegration programmes</p> <p>2. Issues of lesson learning and incorporation into programmes</p> <p>3. Inadequate measurements of standards of change</p> <p>4. Unsystematic follow up of FACM</p>		
	6. Unintended consequences of the Interventions			
	7. Income Generating Activity (IGA) and socio economic support	<p>1. Key challenges</p> <p>2. overall effects and contribution of IGAs</p>	<p>1. Lack of systematic training for child mother groups</p> <p>2. Key areas such as self-esteem training missing in the training programme</p>	
	8. Linkages pertaining to	1. Donor conditionality,		

	Emergency, Early Recovery and Development Programming	interests and priority areas 2. Financing of current activities 3. the politics of NGOs interventions 4. Other programming issues		

## APPENDIX 4: Sample Transcripts

### PSEUDONYM: EVAS AMONO

I would like you to tell me like a story, tell me how you were abducted, what class were you, how you walked, how you started staying in the bush, how you were given to a man, how you gave birth, just tell me all and how you returned home here. Just tell me like a story.

When these people [rebels] came to our home they arrived at around 4am then they went and opened the room where my father was and asked for me because there was a girl who was already abducted and she reported where I was. So they tried to ask my father about my whereabouts but he denied knowing where I was. So they went to my sister-in-law's room who had just delivered and threatened her with sugarcane and beat her as well that she should tell them where I was. So with fear my sister-in-law showed them where I was sleeping. When they reached my room and saw me lying down they called me with my name that Evelyn come outside so I got out and they said that I would like you to take us to your father's brother who is an LC here.

How old were you at the time?

I was ten years old

Where was that?

Alero

So I told them that my Uncle's home was after the river and they told me that if you accept to take us there then we shall release you. So there was another group that remained at my father's home because I was at a different home, so they said since my father had refused to tell them where I was they would now go with me and see what my father will do. Then they picked glowing firewood from the fire place and burnt my father on his side and said Mzee go back inside and close the door, so my father did what they said and they started walking with me to the direction of my Uncle's place. When we reached my Uncle's place they refused to stop but instead told me to show them where other girls were so I refused and they told me that if I am refusing then they would not release me I should show them so that they release me.

*Where was that, from the bush or...?*

No we were still at home, sleeping at home. So I showed them where one of the girls were and when they picked her, they said that, that girl was not worth going with so I should show them another girl. I showed another home where another girl was and they picked her. We walked and crossed some river close to home and they said they were tired so we should first rest. So we slept there till morning and that morning we left and reached up to some place at around 1pm. They called us and told us that they wanted to smear us with shear oil so that we become like them so they smeared us with shear oil and cooked and gave us food and said that anybody who refuses to eat should be killed. So there were three boys who were also abducted and one of them tried to cry so they wanted to kill the boy but the commander said no so he was not killed. We continued walking up to Anaka by 4pm and they stayed close to the roadside and continued abducting many children, we continued walking through Apar and then to Sudan. From Apar they started distributing the boys and later the girls.

So among the girls two of us were picked including me that we should go to Otii's home. We went there and stayed and one of the girls we went with together was given to be Otii's wife so they told me to wait and I waited for about a week and one of Otii's escorts was brought that he was the one going to be my husband. So they asked me that where my home was and I told them that my home is in Alero and they asked me that if you are to choose between going back home and taking this boy to be your husband which one would you choose? So I had already been told that if you accept to go home you would be killed if you refuse then you stay so I told them I don't know the way back home then they asked if I have accepted to stay with that person and I told them I had accepted and I stayed with that person.

How old were you?

I was fourteen years old

So we stayed but not for long and that person was killed when they came to fight in Uganda. I was taken to another commander's home and later I was another man that I should stay with as my husband. So they asked me that do you accept to stay with this person and I said yes then they said if you had refused you would have seen what we would have done to you. So I was given to that captain and I stayed with him until I got gave birth to one child boy. So we continued staying up to the time this child grew up and I had stopped breastfeeding. So the government army went and started fighting in Sudan so we left for Uganda and when we reached Omel they started saying that mothers with older children should be released because their children are now heavy and they will not be able to run if there is anything bad, that we should be released.

They wanted to release you to come back home?

Yes so my child's father was not around he was in Lango so two of us were chosen one lady comes from Ajulu and she had two children and I had one to be released. So they gave us ten escorts to bring us up to town.

How many mothers were you?

We were two mothers and those ten escorts were sent to go and loot food. We were only two child mothers other mothers had remained. So we walked and reached Pece at around 1am and they left at some woman's home and they started asking her where the LC of that area was and the woman told them that his home was a bit far from where we were. So they told her that these are our women and we would like you to take them to Mega, we want to hear them talking over Mega tomorrow and we shall come back to check. That night we slept at that woman's home and the following day we were taken to Mega and we were asked how we walked and we narrated it all and even how we were released.

After Mega we were taken to Division and we spent a week there and then we were brought to the centre and when we reached the centre we found many colleagues who were looking good and GUSCO started educating us telling us how we should stay with people when we get back to the community. I stayed in GUSCO for three months and we were getting counselling and we were given some assistance that we went with back home. They also gave us money to go and start with our lives, in addition to that Madam Else came and registered our children and they are paying them in school and we are very grateful and happy for the assistance rendered to us. And now we are back at home but that fact that we are home people talk a lot about us. I reached home and got all my parents still alive but my father and mother had separated and my father is not interested in my mother anymore; so right now they are back at home and I am staying here alone,

they are not helping me with anything, no advice ever since I returned they never gave me any advice, they just look at me like a person that is all.

Where are you staying currently?

I am staying at Olayo-olong

When you were in GUSCO for three months did your parents come to see you?

They came

How many times?

My father and mother came once when they heard that I was back but most times my sisters were the ones coming to visit me.

Where were they staying?

I came and found them staying at Olayo-olong

They were in Olayo-olong and they came only once to see you

Yes they came only once

You said that you father and mother have separated but are they still staying at the same home?

They are still at the same home

Does your father have another wife?

Yes my stepmother is there

So he is only staying with your stepmother?

Yes

*How many are you from your mother's side?*

We are four girls and three boys

Why do you think your mother and father came only once to visit you, how did you feel? Since you were saying that they did not advice you when you came back?

I don't know what they thought but I think it could have been our stay at the Division because when they heard my name over the radio they kept on going to the Division to ask for me and those people denied that I was not there so they went back and fro got about the whole thing and they thought that the same thin might happen when they come to the centre that it could be that the name is the one which is similar. So they stayed for a long time and one day my father came after I had even stayed in GUSCO for two months only to find that it was me. So he told me that they were not aware that it was me since they went to the division and they were told that there was no one, so they knew that names can be similar that was why they did not come so I thought that it was because they were not aware.....

Which year was that, that you were you released?

In 2003; when I reached home the only good thing they did was they prayed and I entered home and started staying with them. They even stayed very well with me and they did not say anything bad about me but to find time and tell me that our child you are now back this is how you should stay has not been there up to now; so I think that they



are no longer interested in seeing me because most times I have seen some parents do not like their children who came back from captivity but with me they have never said anything bad face to face but I imagine they do that in their heart that is why they are behaving the way they are doing and do not want to give me any kind of advice.

Did you say there are many parents who do not like their children who were in captivity?

Yes

Does it also imply to the girls who returned with children?

Yes

Then what makes them not like their children and is it still happening to date?

I always hear, it is happening

First tell me, why do you think it is happening?

The reason as to why I said it happening is that for example when I am passing someone could say do you see that lady passing she is former abductee and it is hard to understand her. So even if you were annoyed by someone and you remained calm they will still tell you that you are use to funny things, you are used to killing people that is why those things disturb you so it makes our lives difficult. Sometime something could have gone wrong between your mother and yourself, even if you remain calm about it she may even tell you that you indisciplin because of the character you learnt from the bush. You might have lived in the bush for a long time and people imagine if you have been there you were killing others but at times you might have stayed like any other person at home but from home people think differently. There were others who were made to do those things several times.

You were talking about taking long in captivity; do you think that has created distance between you and your parents when you came back? Because I know that you could have been very close to them before abduction, do you think it has broken any relationship?

It has broken the relationship because when I recall I was so much loved but I think it has reduced.

Do you think that has happened to many of your colleagues?

Yes it has because it also happened to one of my colleagues that I was with in captivity, this girl is staying at Akurukwer and her mother insults her all the time that they cannot even share a seat in one house, she doesn't like her daughter and yet there is nothing wrong. That is why I said that it has created that distance because before captivity they were living well with us. So our return could have brought confusion to them that is why I said so.

Now from the community who assisted you most in giving you words of encouragement by saying you stay and remain strong? How many children do you have?

I have three children but came back from captivity with one. When I went back home my sister-in-law and one of my sisters were the ones encouraging me and advising me on how I should conduct myself. They are the ones I interact with and that made my life easy that is why I have lived up to now.

Other than that do you have any other person?

Other than that there is no one with the exception of my friends whom we stayed with, we try to encourage ourselves.

Are you in any group like Village Savings and Loans Association? Are you not in any group?

I am not in any

How do your friends that you interact with treat you?

They treat me well

*Don't they say anything bad about you?*

No

.....

How old are you Evas?

I am 23years old .....[INTERVIEW CONTINUES]

### **Focus group Youth - Patiko Sub County**

So I would like you to tell me I know there are some formerly abducted child mothers form Ajulu. So I would like you to tell me, I know there are some children who were abducted and they came back, there are girls who came back with children and others who came back without children, I know boys are also there but I would like you to tell me about the girls first especially women who came back with children only. I know you live with them and most of you are age mates with them. I would like to hear from the girls first then we go to the boys. You can tell me everything that concerns those children. Who wants to begin?

The challenges that child mothers who returned from captivity are facing is food shortage, there is no food that they should eat. Secondly paying children in school, these former abductees do not have capacity to pay their children to school.

I know the problems that we who came back from captivity with children are facing are taking care of medical bills. Sometimes you have to take the children to the hospital but there is no money. There is also no money for school, food and there is a lot of stigmatization because they say look this child was born in captivity, look the child has no father. So thank you.

You talked about stigmatization, I understand there has been a lot of sensitization in the community and it is no more. Is pointing fingers still there and if they do it what do they say?

If they point fingers they may say look at this child they came back with him/her from captivity. That is how they say so you may not feel good hearing this where you are staying.

I am going to talk about the challenges that formerly abducted child mothers are facing for example those who came back and did not find their parents and they do not have a proper place to live in say if you came back with children maybe two or even on without a father and you are supposed to take care of the child alone. For example here if you do not always meet the leaders or NGOs, there is no support that you will get and even when the child grows up he/she will not go to school. Even you might have gone to school but you did not finish and there is no way you can continue with studies. That is what I have seen with them.

You said when they come back they do not have where to stay, why does it happen like that because in the past Acholi used to take care of relatives.

I observed that with one person who came back from captivity but the family she went to were not cooperative. Since her relatives were not cooperative she decided not to stay with them she started staying alone.

I think those girls who came back from captivity with children are not getting any support

Especially those who came back and did not get their parents, even when they find their uncles they may not take good care of them at least if you get your mother she will take care of you better, so you have to stay like an orphan.

I think I will talk about those who returned from captivity with children, for example we who came back without children now that we came back we do not have any of our parents to take care of us, we do not have any relatives who can help with the children and there is no way to earn money. That is all I can say.

I think there is nothing much I can say, I also came back from captivity with a child and my parents are dead. I came back with one child and that child there is no one who can give me support I have to struggle on my own. Since when I was abducted, I had not gone to school so there is no Organization that can help me take care of the child, the child's father also died. So there is nothing much I can say.

How old are you?

I am eighteen years old

Where is your child and how old is the child?

She has remained home, she is six years old

I think I will talk to you later

I think the major problems that former abducted mothers are faced with is that you might have returned and you did not get your parents and back in the bush you were being tortured. So you come back home and there is no energy to dig, you could all suffer from hunger including your children.

Let me give to the boys to talk, what problems do you see our sisters facing? Just talk without any fear, tell me what is happening in their lives both good and bad ones. You know before I respond to your question how about us like boys we also have children that we came back with from captivity.

Like I told you I know such cases are there both boys and girls were abducted, so what I was sent for is to first ask for the girls who came back with children from captivity, in English we are looking at the gender perspective that majorly concerns girls but gender is for both boys and girls. So like you are here tell me about how you see them not about yourself. Have you understood?

I will talk about young youth called child mothers who had children from captivity. What I see nowadays and at the time they came back is that life is very difficult for them; life pertaining health is not very good for them. And secondly there is no education because sometimes they came back with children and their number have increased to maybe two or three and they may not have their parents like my colleagues said; since their parents have been killed in the war and their relatives may not also be there. On the other hand

land issue is also very serious. These girls cannot go home and dig on their land once their parents are not there because of their uncles who refuse for them to use the land. They tell these children that this is not your land you father already died. So they get worried because they know that the fact that they were abducted, it was not their own making. That is one thing that is going on. Secondly the trainings that were given to these girls, it happened NGOs did it but it goes for only six months and theta may not be enough time for them to be empowered. If possible they should be empowered deeply for about one year so that they come home fully empowered that is how I look at it. Then an association or group should be established and let them be involved.

You talked very well but we are going to talk about how to support them later, wait a little bit. Let me ask, you said that land issues is causing a lot of conflict in that if these girls decide to go back home their uncles deny them access to land or chase them away, is that still happening a lot here?

It is happening and you find that the portion given to the girl is very small and they even begin to insult her that you go to your home, take your children from the bush away; that is happening.

Issues related to land conflict let me say something a little is going on in many places. Because some people were abducted when they were young at thirteen fourteen years old and they came back with children so their uncles end up showing for them a different portion of land and tell them that you take your child where his father is from. This is making life very difficult for children who came back from captivity. There are some who have their younger brothers and sisters to take care of but you find that they are not given land to dig and get food to feed such children. That is all I can say.

I would like to talk about land issues for my sisters. My sisters are facing a lot of challenges because you might come back from captivity and you don't find your father, you only find your uncle who might be a drunkard and even if you try to stay close to him he will say you are a girl so you are not supposed to own land and you have no rights to own land. So that is the problem my sisters from captivity are facing.....

[FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION CONTINUES.....]

## **APPENDIX 5: Data Collection tools**

### **In-depth-Interview Guide for the Formerly Abducted Child Mothers (FACM)**

#### **Preamble and introduction, study objectives**

1. I am interested in listening to your story, from the time you were abducted, your experiences in the bush and events, circumstances leading to your return (rescue/escape/release).

#### **Probing Questions:**

- a. Tell me about your experiences as a child mother in the bush and immediately on return and currently.
    - i. How were you supported in how to care for your child (ren) while still in the bush?
    - ii. What support did you receive on childcare on return?
  - b. What issues were important for your “keeping hope alive” while with the rebels? How did you cope?
  - c. What support have you received from NGOs/government department and other development agencies?
- 
2. Culturally has there been any problem about you or your children? Did you undergo any cultural/traditional ceremonies? Would you say you agreed to them and were comfortable with them?
  3. Which people have been the most supportive to you since your return and what support have they provided?
    - a. Immediate family
    - b. Extended family
    - c. Community members
    - d. Community care givers
    - e. Local government
    - f. Others

4. How would you explain your relationship with your children? What support have you received for the children? Where has most support come from?
5. How does the community look at you? How would you describe your relationship with the following categories of people?
  - g. Your parents(immediate family)
  - h. Your extended family members
  - i. Your peers (age mates) who were not abducted
  - j. Other people within the community that you live in
6. What main problems/challenges have you experienced since your return? What kinds of events/circumstances/situations **predicated** the problems?
7. What do you think are the current gaps in services to formerly abducted child mothers? How can FACM be best supported?
8. Is there any difference between girls who returned without children and those with children in terms of how you are treated/ perceived?
9. As a formerly abducted young person, what is your perception of the legal framework? What is it capable of doing and in your opinion what do you think the law should do for people in your situation?
10. What do you perceive to be the attitude of community members towards you or your fellow FACM getting married to young men within the community? (Probe: attitudes of young men, elders, other community members about potential love relationships with FACM).
11. Conflicts and issues of continuation of relationships between the child mothers and their returning “husbands” rebel officers and men; what Acholi cultural positions and elders opinions regarding the subject are.

12. What more can you tell me about your whole abduction experience and how you have been able to cope?



## Key informant interview Guide

1. What is the magnitude of abduction of children in this community (village/parish/sub county/district)? Probe: for girls abduction as well.
2. What is the current situation like for Formerly Abducted Child Mothers (FACM)?
3. What kinds of resources (social, economic, cultural) are available in the community for the FACM to draw from?
4. What role has social capital played in the reintegration process? How has this (social capital resources) been affected by the war?
5. What do you consider to be the main problems faced by FACM on their return?
6. Would you say the support provided is empowering or disempowering to the formerly abducted child mothers?
7. Which of the people have been most supportive to the FACM and why?
  - a. Immediate family members
  - b. Extended family and relatives
  - c. Other community people
  - d. Community resource persons
8. What role has culture played in the reintegration of the FACM?
9. Generally, what is the attitude of the community towards the formerly abducted child mothers **and their children**?
10. What community **structures** are in place to support the reintegration process of the formerly abducted child mothers and their children?
11. How effective are these structures in providing support to the child mothers?

- a. Specifically how have the Community Care Givers (CCGs) and Community Volunteer Counsellors (CVCs) supported the FACM?
  - b. What about the local leadership structures, sub county local governments?
  - c. What about FBOs and CBOs?
  - d. How prepared is the community to receive the returnees? (Probe: has the community been effectively prepared for the FACM?)
  - e. What other community structures exist and are these structures prepared to deal with children and returnee fighters who are still experiencing trauma?
12. What is your comment on current policies for children in situation of armed conflict? (Probe: effectiveness of the current polices and legislations with regard to the situation of the FACM).
  13. Is *“right talk”* translating into *“right walk”* for children affected by armed conflict?
  14. What are the main obstacles affecting the reintegration of FACM? How can these issues be addressed?
  15. Marriage: attitudes of community members towards having relationships with formerly abducted girl child mothers (peers-fellow young people of marriageable age; elders in the community and other community members).
  16. Current community perception and reception of formerly abducted children.
  17. Roles of different stakeholders in the reintegration process
  18. Children knowledge about their rights and responsibility in war situation
  19. Community knowledge and attitudes towards children rights in war situation and challenges to meeting rights of children

20. How “natural” is the camp environment in which the formerly abducted child mothers have been reunited with their families? What effects have the nature of the current camp settlement had on reintegration? **Probe:** How well will these children be supported by their communities, which are themselves vulnerable and not self-sustaining?
21. What potential conflicts are likely to be experienced between the FACM and members of the community and what might be the main areas of conflict (contention)? What measures have been established to address the potential conflict?

## Focused Group Discussion Guide

1. How big has been the problem of child-abduction in this community?  
(village/parish/sub county)? Probe: for girls abduction as well.
2. What is the current situation like for Formerly Abducted Child Mothers (FACM)?
3. What do you consider to be the main problems faced by FACM on their return?
4. What kinds of resources (social, economic, cultural) are available in the community for the FACM to draw from?
5. Which of the following people have been most supportive to the FACM and why?
  - a. Immediate family members
  - b. Extended family and relatives
  - c. Other community people
  - d. Community resource persons
6. What role has culture played in the reintegration of the FACM?
7. Of what use has been the support provided by NGOs and Other Development agencies to the FACM? Is the support empowering or disempowering to the formerly abducted child mothers?
8. Generally what is the attitude of the community towards the formerly abducted child mothers **and their children**?
9. What community **structures** are in place to support the reintegration process of the formerly abducted child mothers and their children?
10. How effective are these structures in providing support to the child mothers?

- a. Specifically how have the Community Care Givers (CCGs) and Community Volunteer Counsellors (CVCs) supported the FACM?
  - b. What about the local leadership structures, sub county local governments?
  - c. What about FBOs and CBOs?
  - d. How prepared is the community to receive the returnees? (Probe: has the community been effectively prepared for the FACM?)
  - e. What other community structures exist and are these structures prepared to deal with children and returnee fighters who are still experiencing trauma?
11. What are the main obstacles affecting the reintegration of FACM? How can these issues be addressed?
12. Marriage: what is the attitude of community members towards relationships between formerly abducted girl child mothers and fellow young people of marriageable age?
13. Roles of different stakeholders in the reintegration process
14. Community knowledge and attitudes towards children rights in war situation and challenges to meeting rights of children
15. How “natural” is the camp environment in which the formerly abducted child mothers have been reunited with their families? What effects have the nature of the current camp settlement had on reintegration? **Probe:** How well will these children be supported by their communities, which are themselves vulnerable and not self-sustaining?
16. What conflicts have occurred between the FACM and members of the community and what are the main areas of conflict (contention)? Have any measures been established to address the conflict?