A STUDY OF THE REINTEGRATION OF FEMALE FORMER CHILD SOLDIERS IN GULU DISTRICT, NORTHERN UGANDA

ANNA BERTELESEN
A Study of the Reintegration of Female Former Child Soldiers in Gulu District, northern Uganda

By
Anna Bertelsen

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Supervisor: Dr. Lyn Snodgrass
DECLARATION BY STUDENT

I, Anna Bertelsen 205067603, hereby declare that the treatise/dissertation/thesis for Students qualification to be awarded is my own work and that it has not previously been submitted for assessment or completion of any postgraduate qualification to another University or for another qualification.

Anna Bertelsen
This research explores the perceptions and experiences of female former child soldiers in regard to their reintegration within the community of Gulu District, northern Uganda. In many societies women are generally excluded due to prevailing patriarchal hegemonies, with northern Uganda being no exception. Moreover, former child soldiers are commonly marginalized and discriminated against because members of communities commonly believe that they should be punished for the perceived atrocities that they allegedly committed during times of conflict, rather than be reintegrated into society. In this regard female former child soldiers can be identified as a particularly vulnerable and marginalized group. Therefore, it can be suggested that although the distinction between traditional gender roles has been eroded during times of armed conflict, there is still widespread evidence that women are largely overlooked and disregarded in the process of peace building. In order to explore the perceptions and experiences of former female child soldiers, a qualitative case study method was utilized based on in-depth face to face interviews with women from Gulu District, northern Uganda.

The findings of this study indicate that, even though these women went through considerable hardships, all of them displayed a strong sense of resilience. Many of them had taken on the role as active change agents in their own lives and provided an array of suggestions on how their situation could be improved. The major themes constructed from the study include: challenges facing returnees; facilitating factors for returnees and suggestions on improved reintegration. Based on these findings a number of recommendations emerged. The recommendations are presented in order to assist organizations and other stakeholders involved in reintegration of child soldiers in northern Uganda and elsewhere in the world. Apart from providing information to the existing body of research, future areas of proposed research are also outlined.
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<tr>
<td>AU</td>
<td>African Union</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CRC</td>
<td>Convention on the Rights of the Child</td>
</tr>
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<td>CAR</td>
<td>Central African Republic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHA</td>
<td>Cessation of Hostilities Agreement</td>
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<tr>
<td>DDR</td>
<td>Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration</td>
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<tr>
<td>DRC</td>
<td>Democratic Republic of Congo</td>
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<tr>
<td>EH</td>
<td>Empowering Hands</td>
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<tr>
<td>FAC</td>
<td>Formerly Abducted Children</td>
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<td>FAP</td>
<td>Formerly Abducted Persons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FAO</td>
<td>Food and Agriculture Organization</td>
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<tr>
<td>GoU</td>
<td>Government of Uganda</td>
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<td>GUSCO</td>
<td>Gulu Support the Children Organisation</td>
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<td>ICC</td>
<td>International Criminal Court</td>
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<tr>
<td>INGO</td>
<td>International Non-Governmental Organization</td>
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<tr>
<td>IDMC</td>
<td>International Displacement Monitoring Centre</td>
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<tr>
<td>IDP</td>
<td>Internally Displaced Persons</td>
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<tr>
<td>IMR</td>
<td>Infant Mortality Rate</td>
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<td>LRA</td>
<td>The Lord’s Resistance Army</td>
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<td>NGO</td>
<td>Non-Governmental Organization</td>
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<tr>
<td>NRC</td>
<td>Norwegian Refugee Council</td>
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<tr>
<td>NMMU</td>
<td>Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University</td>
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<tr>
<td>PTSD</td>
<td>Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder</td>
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<td>PVP</td>
<td>People’s Voice for Peace</td>
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<td>QPSW</td>
<td>Quaker Peace &amp; Social Witness</td>
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<td>SciU</td>
<td>Save the Children in Uganda</td>
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STI: Sexually Transmitted Infection
TB: Tuberculosis
UK: United Kingdom
UN: United Nations
UNICEF: The United Nations Children's Fund
UNSC: United Nations Security Council
UPE: Universal Primary Education
WHO: World Health Organisation
WV: World Vision

KEY WORDS

Conflict
Conflict Transformation
Conflict Management
People's Voice for Peace (PVP)
Lord's Resistance Army (LRA)
Child soldier
Female child soldier
Formerly abducted children (FAC)
Social Reintegration
CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

In Graca Machel’s United Nations (UN) report on children and war she expresses the following concern:

*War violates every right of a child - the right to life, the right to be with family and community, the right to health, the right to the development of the personality and the right to be nurtured and protected.* (Machel, 1996:13).

One of the most alarming trends in contemporary armed conflicts is that children suffer the most. Children have become not just the targets but also the perpetrators of violence and atrocities. (Machel, 1996:13). In many countries children are purposely exploited as combatants both by state forces and militias. (Machel, 1996:13).

At this point in time there are an estimated 200,000-300,000 child soldiers or formerly abducted children (FAC) taking part in conflicts worldwide. (Chatterjee, 2012:1; *War Child*, 2013:1) Forty per cent of armed forces (including national armies, militias, gangs, terrorist organizations and resistance forces) in the world make use of children. (Chatterjee, 2012:1). FAC is a newly introduced term which takes into account the various roles taken on by children in the armed forces such as cooks, cleaners, minefield sweepers, wives, soldiers and general camp followers. (Obika, 2011:1-2). The terms child soldiers and formerly abducted children (FAC) are used interchangeably throughout this study.

Between January 2010 and June 2012 the use of children either by state militaries or militias has been reported in the following countries (see Appendix I) (*Child Soldier’s Global Report*, 2012:20-21):
The use of children has occurred in the context of many prolonged conflicts lasting for several years and sometimes even decades. Countless of these conflicts are accompanied by gross human rights violations. *(Child Soldier’s Global Report, 2012:18).* Machel (1996:16) comments:

*Conflicts persist, economic and social conditions suffer and educational opportunities become more limited or even non-existent. Under these circumstances, recruits tend to get younger and younger. Armies begin to exhaust the supplies of adult manpower and children may have little option but to join.*

In various regions of Africa, many children, including females, are abducted from their communities and families (Winter, 1998:26) in order to be ‘recruited’ as soldiers, cooks, forced camp wives and cleaners. Female child soldiers are taking part in conflicts in Africa in countries such as the DRC, Eritrea, Republic of South Sudan and Sudan. *(Coulter, Pressons, & Utas, 2008:8).*

In the post-conflict environment, with many of these young girls returning to their communities, they face the new struggle of how to reintegrate into their society. Approximately 30-40 per cent of all child soldiers are female. *(Chatterjee, 2012:1).* Norville (2010:4) holds that girls and young women are commonly excluded from Disarmament, Demobilisation, and Reintegration (DDR) programmes. The number of girls in international DDR programmes is only five per cent. *(Choi, 2013:1).* DDR intervention programmes are intended to bring security and stability to post-conflict zones. *(Özerdem, Podder, O’Callaghan & Pantuliano, 2008:2).*
Disarmament is the collection, control and disposal of small arms and light weapons and the development of responsible arms management programmes in a post-conflict context. Demobilization is defined as a planned process by which the armed forces are disbanded. After being demobilized and transported to their community of choice, the former combatants and their families must establish themselves in a civilian environment. Reinsertion assistance, which is intended to facilitate the DDR process, consists of material and/or financial assistance to meet immediate needs such as food, health care and educational support and, in some cases, cash allowance. Finally, reintegration is the process whereby former soldiers are integrated into the social, economic and political life of (civilian) communities. Reintegration is a long-term, social and economic process of development whilst reinsertion is short term, and can last up to one year. (Özerdem, et al., 2008:2). Due to the fact that female former child soldiers are commonly overlooked in the DDR process there is limited literature on their experiences upon returning to their communities and in the years that follow. As a result, very little is known about the process and effectiveness of short- or long-term reintegration.

1.2 Female Child Soldiers in northern Uganda

In order to explore the perceptions and experiences of reintegration interviews were conducted with former female child soldiers from northern Uganda. For this study, a sample of former female child soldiers from Gulu District was selected. The fact that there has been relative peace in Uganda for years allows for an exploration of female former child soldiers’ short- and long-term perceptions and experiences on returning to their communities. Uganda is situated in East Africa (see Appendix II).

The conflict in northern Uganda has been in a time of slowly stabilizing peace since 2006. (Kabahesi, 2009:19) when the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement (CHA) was signed between the Government of Uganda (GoU) and the Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA). (Uganda humanitarian profile, 2012:11). The conflict has taken its toll on the region for over two decades.

Many reports came out from northern Uganda of young girls abducted in large numbers. An estimated 20,000 girls and young women have been abducted by the
LRA and forced to serve as both commanders’ wives and soldiers. (Carlson & Mazurana, 2008:3). Among these reports it has been found that in Gulu District (see Appendix III), large numbers of girls, many of them underage, were coerced into joining the armed forces – either by force or persuasion. (Kisuule, Bukuluk, Schei, Bagabo, & Sundby, 2012:88). This region still faces a myriad of challenges (Uganda humanitarian profile, 2012:11) including the problem of how to reintegrate the many thousands of FAC.

The return home for female FAC was rarely an easy endeavour with many of their family units having been fragmented and their villages abandoned because of the armed conflict. (Amnesty International, 2008:37). Many have witnessed and committed atrocities which have impacted heavily on their development. Moreover, female FAC are commonly marginalized and discriminated against because many members of their community believe that they should be punished for the alleged atrocities that they were party to, rather than be reintegrated back into society. (Machel, 2001:18-19). The situation is even more difficult for the women returning with children born in captivity. The families concerned generally consider such children to be an additional burden, as there are more mouths to feed during a time of already compounded hardship. (Amnesty International, 2008:37).

1.3 Women and Peace Building

Female FAC did not receive adequate focus at the UN Conferences on Human Rights held throughout the 1990s. For this reason, the inability of the international community to fully acknowledge and protect women’s rights was largely criticized and subsequently, a global campaign held by feminists worldwide sought to make the voices of women heard at future major UN forums. This campaign “demonstrated how this gender bias served to deny the human rights dimension of harmful and often fatal forms of gender-based violence.” (Reilly, 2007:56).

Peace-building institutions are commonly male dominated. The United Nations Security Council (UNSC) Resolution 1325, was the first resolution to focus specifically on the effect that wars and other forms of conflict have on women, as
well as on the various roles women may play in conflict resolution. However, when this resolution was passed only four government representatives out of one hundred and forty-six delegates were women. (Sharapov, 2005:100). In recent peace negotiations, women have represented fewer than eight per cent of participants and less than three per cent of signatories, and no woman has ever been appointed chief or lead mediator in UN-sponsored peace talks. (Norville, 2012:3). Feminist scholars might see this as yet another typical instance of a ruling elite striving to maintain its power by any means. (Sharapov, 2005:100). Peace building is an inherently difficult process and women are invariably given a limited opportunity for participation. (Kabahesi, 2009:34).

Moreover, the role that women play in what is conventionally considered a ‘male’ domain is rarely acknowledged. (Mæland, 2010:3). Ironically – as pointed out by Veale (2011:1) – it was not until recently that the existence of female child soldiers was even acknowledged.

1.4 Motivation for the study

The motivation for this study is linked to the researcher’s own interest in issues pertaining to women and children in war. Female FAC suffer characteristically from marginalization and discrimination and as a result, there is limited literature available on female former child soldiers’ perceptions and experiences upon returning to their communities and in the years that follow. Very little is known about the distinct physical, emotional and spiritual long-term effects that female FAC experience. Consequently, even less is known about the process and efficacy of short- or long-term reintegration processes.

For this reason, this study has the potential to constitute a unique contribution to the literature on female FAC – not merely because of its focus on female FAC, but also because it seeks to explore the particular experiences relating to their reintegration into society. As mentioned, female FAC are often overlooked in the reintegration process and therefore to focus particularly on female FAC’s perspectives is a way of giving them a voice.
1.4.1 Problem Statement

The conflict in northern Uganda continued unabated for more than 20 years from early 1986 to late 2006. Throughout this time, it is estimated that over 60,000 Ugandan children and youth have been abducted by the LRA. A third of these are girls or young women. Thousands of abducted young women and girls from the Acholi, Lango, and Iteso peoples in northern Uganda (see Appendix IV) took part in armed battle, served as wives, cooked, carried supplies, fetched water, and cleaned for the LRA. (Carlson & Mazurana, 2008:3). Many of these abductees of varied ages were forced to commit atrocities. This took its toll on their social and personal development later in life following their demobilization. Moreover, Worthen, Onyango, Wessells, Veale and McKay (2013:145) contend that many NGOs in places such as Liberia, Sierra Leone and Uganda have documented rejections by communities of girls formerly associated with armed forces because they had been raped or married (usually by force) to a military officer. Young mothers and their children experience the highest levels of rejection and abuse upon return. (Worthen, et al., 2013:145).

According to Worthen, et al., (2013:145) many of these young women were and are excluded from DDR programmes on arrival home after being released or having escaped. There has been relative peace in northern Uganda since 2006 and the number of returnees has reduced significantly as time has passed. However, the LRA is still active currently in neighbouring countries such as the CAR, DRC and on the border of South Sudan. (Invisible children, 2013:1). Many abducted children from northern Uganda, as well as those who are now young adults, are still being held captive by the LRA.

It has been pointed out previously that reintegration is a long-term process. The women in the study had all left the reception centres and moved back to their communities of origin. Many of these young women face post-conflict challenges of uprooted communities and lack of opportunities, accompanied by the stigma and ostracism which makes female FAC a particularly vulnerable and marginalized group. In the light of these facts, the study seeks to explore these female FAC’s perspectives and experiences in relation to the reintegration process and the barriers
to reintegration they faced first upon return and then after moving back to their community and reuniting with families and relatives.

1.4.2 Research Question

This study seeks to answer the following question:

To what extent do female FAC perceive themselves to be socially integrated into their former communities in Gulu District, northern Uganda?

1.4.3 Aim and Objectives

In order to address the research question the aim and objectives of the study are as follows:

The aim of this study is to explore female FAC’s perceptions of their reintegration into the communities of Gulu District, northern Uganda.

The objectives are as follows:

1.4.3.1 To establish the extent to which these women perceive themselves as fully participating members of their communities in Gulu District, northern Uganda.

1.4.3.2 To establish the extent and the nature of the relationships these women have with their community.

1.4.3.3 To identify the potential challenges these women face when it comes to participation in the community.

1.4.3.4 To make recommendations as to how the reintegration process for female FAC can be improved in northern Uganda.

1.4.4 Context of the Study

This qualitative study uses a phenomenological approach which seeks to capture the individual’s experience. (Neuman, 2006:55). The sampling method utilized is
purposive sampling which seeks to select the most informative cases. (Barbour, 2001:1115). Hence, the non-governmental organization People’s Voice for Peace was approached as it works specifically with female FAC in Gulu District, northern Uganda. The history of People’s Voice for Peace (PVP), a non-governmental organization (NGO), and its activities in Gulu district, northern Uganda are discussed below.

1.4.5 The History of the Non-Governmental Organization People’s Voice for Peace (PVP)

This organization played an instrumental role in the study in that PVP granted access to the interviewees of the study. Mrs Rosalba Owya is the director and founder of PVP which is a NGO and non-profit organization. PVP is located in Gulu District (see Appendix III) that supports reintegration of FAC and encourages local grassroots involvement and the inclusion of women’s voices in peace building in northern Uganda. (Oywa, 2005:1). This organization served as an entry point and granted the researchers access to the former female child soldiers who took part in the study. It is believed that this organization has assisted thousands of female child soldiers but there are no exact registers available.

PVP grew out of the British Agency for Co-operation Peace and Research Development (ACCORD) in Gulu District, northern Uganda. This is an international non-governmental organization (INGO) involved in peace building in 18 African countries. ACCORD’s response to the challenges of Africa is firmly based on a belief that people themselves are the agents of change and actors in their own development (Oywa, n.d.:1).

Rosalba Owya was employed as a social worker by ACCORD in 1988. She was involved in peace-building initiatives, conflict resolution, human rights activities and development initiatives. (Oywa, 2005:2). However, she felt she needed to do more and in 1989 she mobilized women in a public demonstration demanding the end of the war in northern Uganda. (Oywa, n.d.:2). Consequently many LRA soldiers gave up the fighting and returned home. There are no available statistics to assess the
outcome of the demonstration; however, a period of calm followed which enabled the resettlement of displaced people in Gulu. (Oywa, 2012:1).

This inspired Mrs Owya to found PVP in 1994 with the aim of offering support to the most vulnerable victims of war. The focus was on particularly marginalized victims of war such as sexually abused women, victims of land mines and the maimed and mutilated. (Owya, n.d.:1). She invited the organization Panos to Gulu District. Panos consists of a network of INGOs working to ensure effective use of information to foster public debate and democracy. Panos works with media and other information providers to enable developing countries to shape and communicate their own development agendas through informed public debate. It focuses particularly on poor and marginalized people. (*Mission Statement Panos*, 2013:1). A Testimony Research and Documentation Centre was established at the PVP premises, where oral testimonies of women were tape-recorded verbatim, transcribed and stored. Consequently, Panos published *Arms to Fight, Arms to Protect* about women’s testimonies about their traumatic situation and hardships they had faced.

PVP is a part of the coalition against torture which is under the leadership of the Foundation for Human Rights Initiative. Human rights abuses are documented and incorporated in cases from other parts of Uganda and this information is used to inform the Ugandan Government and the Ugandan Human Rights Commission about human rights abuses in the country. (Owya, 2005:3).

Moreover, PVP started psycho-social programmes, especially for returnees, rape victims and amputees. (Lawino, 2012:2; Owya, 2012:25). Counselling is provided for individuals as well as in group settings. PVP brings people together and they share their experiences in order to break the isolation and suffering they have experienced. This then leads to the creation of collective support groups. (Oywa, 2005:3). In addition PVP organizes village discussions and works to raise awareness about child abduction through musical and dramatic performances performed by the members themselves. Profits from these performances are put into a revolving fund that enables group members to start income-generating projects. (Oywa, 2012:25).

Empowering Hands (EH) has encouraged community members to take part in income generating self-help projects. (Oywa, 2005:3). Over a thousand women and
men have organized themselves into solidarity groups engaged in viable economic activities such as cultivating and farming, buying and selling fish, vegetables and second-hand clothes. People who take part in these groups are able to pool their resources which enable them to feed their families. This kind of investment has helped many to meet their basic financial requirements and support their children in school. (Oywa, 2005:3).

Due to the adverse effects of conflict and the displacement of large parts of the population, tradition and social support in Gulu have been undermined. Women’s groups from PVP are committed to restoring cultural institutions and to preparing the community for reconciliation and reintegration. (Oywa, 2005:3). There is also a focus on traditional Acholi systems of restorative justice, which had largely been lost due to the prolonged conflict. These women’s groups are working through local cultural institutions with activities such as prayer groups, songs, proverbs, poetry and storytelling in order to build community support and respect. (Oywa, 2012:25).

The issues faced by women in the aftermath of war, such as discrimination and stigma, as well as lack of resources, education and skills, were addressed in various workshops and radio talk-shows. These workshops and talk-shows aimed to create awareness, understanding and acceptance of returnees and to involve the entire community in post-conflict reconstruction. (Oywa, 2005:3).

In addition PVP provides training and workshops in conflict management. The aim is to inform the community in the Acholi region about conflict and its consequences. (Oywa, 2005:3). They employ a participatory research approach to document people’s experiences and this process has equipped community and group members with an understanding of the nature, patterns and dynamic of conflicts. The ultimate purpose is to provide community members with the tools for peaceful transition. (Oywa, 2012:25). Victims are encouraged to take part in peace building themselves using the knowledge imparted to them. (Oywa, 2005:3). As postulated by Mrs Oywa herself, “the aim is to turn victims into peace agents.” (Oywa, n.d:1).

PVP works closely with its sister organization EH. EH is an NGO founded in 2004 by a group of 36 female former abductees. The aim of this organization is to facilitate the return and reintegration of Formerly Abducted Persons (FAP) in northern Uganda
through active participation in peace-building and livelihoods. (Akello, 2007:1). The three main activities of EH are as follows:

*Economic Empowerment and Livelihoods Programme*: EH offers community groups resources and training in agriculture, management skills for small business, and programmes for microloans. With a focus on economic development, EH assists each group to construct a development plan that makes the best use of the group’s resources. Some groups provide microloans for their members; others are provided with oxen and ploughs, many groups have small businesses selling food and the like. (*Uganda Fund*, 2013:1).

*Peace-building and Dialogue*: EH have created conflict dialogue groups in response to facilitate dialogue between FAP and community members. EH conducts training and information about conflict and mediation, peace-building and managing dialogues. It reported that stigma against FAP has decreased significantly because of the on-going work of these groups. (*Uganda Fund*, 2013:1).

*Counselling*: EH conducts counselling with a primary focus on reintegration, and makes necessary referrals for trauma counselling. EH collaborates with Gulu Hospital to assist in counselling services, and identifies and monitors on-going counselling needs in the community. (*Uganda Fund*, 2013:1).

The various projects and activities of PVP and EH have been supported and funded by organizations such as:

- Quaker Peace and Social Witness (QPSW), United Kingdom
- The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)
- The Uganda Fund for War-Affected Children and Youth

PVP and EH work in close collaboration with NGOs in the area such as World Vision (WV) and Gulu Support the Children Organization (GUSCO) to name a few. GUSCO is a local NGO facilitated by Save the Children in Uganda (SciU) which bases reintegration programmes on traditional Acholi ways, such as involving clan leaders and traditional cleansing ceremonies. WV, on the other hand, is an international Christian relief and development organization. (Akello, Richters & Reis, 2006:230).
These NGOs provide reception centres and rehabilitation programmes for returnees. Such programmes offer psycho-social support upon return, vocational skills training, medical attention, family re-unification and development of life skills. This is discussed in detail in Chapter Two. All the participants in the study arrived at the reception centres provided by Gulu Support the Children Organization (GUSCO) or World Vision (WV) and underwent reintegration programmes provided by GUSCO, WV, Empowering Hands (EH) and People's Voice for Peace (PVP).

1.4.6 Ethical Considerations

The research was carried out in adherence to the ethical procedures of human research in accordance with the requirements provided by the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University (NMMU). The University's Ethics Committee granted clearance.

As previously mentioned, the researcher approached Mrs Rosalba Owya, the Director of PVP, who facilitated her access to the interviewees. In addition, the interviewees’ consent was obtained before the interviews took place. The purpose of the research was explained and each interviewee was asked to sign a consent form prior to the interview. They were informed about their rights and participation was voluntary. The research ethics will be discussed in more depth in Chapter Three.

1.4.7 Dissemination of Results

The findings of this research study will be available at the NMMU library and webpage. The research findings will be disseminated to PVP and will be made available to female FAC within the Gulu District.

The research adheres to ethical obligations outlined by the NMMU Research and Ethics Committee. The potential benefits of the research are to deepen understanding of issues and challenges facing female FAC when it comes to reintegration.
The results of this study can be utilized for further research in areas relating to reintegration and female child soldiers. The recommendations can assist NGOs and other actors involved in reintegration of female FAC in northern Uganda and elsewhere in the world.

1.4.8 Chapter Organization

The research is covered in five chapters:

Chapter One: Introduction

This chapter introduces the research topic under investigation. It explains the structure of the proposed research; that is, the problem statement, the background of the study, the aim, the objectives, the research question and the significance of the study.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

In the second chapter an outline of the literature pertaining to the research is provided. It focuses firstly on the conflicts in Africa, the use of child soldiers in the LRA and the reasons why children become soldiers, the role of female FAC in the LRA, empowerment, DDR initiatives and then on the subsequent post-conflict social reintegration processes.

Chapter Three: Research Design and Methodology

This chapter discusses the research design and methodology of the study, with supporting references to relevant research literature. The researcher discusses the ethical considerations, as well as issues involving reliability and validity.
Chapter Four: Discussion of Findings

The researcher presents, analyzes and interprets the data obtained from the study.

Chapter Five: Recommendations and Conclusion

The final chapter outlines recommendations and provides a summary of the findings, and the contributions of the study.
CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Many child victims of war are not only left traumatized and physically disabled but more often than not they may also lack access to education, health care and other necessary facilities. (International Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE), 2007:3). In wartime children commonly experience the most serious consequences of conflict. Many child victims of war are not only left traumatized and physically disabled but more often than not they may also lack access to education, health care and other necessary facilities. (INEE, 2007:3). In many parts of post-colonial Africa children are recruited in armed conflicts despite Article 38 of the 1989 UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) which declares that “Parties should take all feasible measures to ensure that persons who have not attained the age of fifteen years do not take a direct part in hostilities.”

In 2000, the UN CRC was ratified by 191 states. This convention includes a clause which holds that a person under the age of 15 should not carry a gun, be exposed to violence, or wear a uniform associated with any military or political conflict. However, this clause has failed to actualize as there are currently an estimated 300,000 FAC under the age of 18 participating in violent conflicts worldwide. (Falkenberg, 2013:1).

2.1 Conflicts in Africa

Many violent conflicts have taken or are currently taking place on the African continent, most with atrocities and aftermaths unparalleled with conflicts found on other continents. (Osaghae & Robinson, 2005:1). According to Osaghae and Robinson (2005:1), “Africa has the uncanny reputation of being the world’s leading theatre of conflict, war, poverty, disease and instability.” After gaining independence, very few African states have been without violence and conflict. War and armed conflict have most probably become the biggest challenges to sustainable development. (Brunnschweiler & Erwin, 2009:5).
The Great Lakes Region of Africa which consists of Rwanda, the DRC and Uganda has been the theatre of one of the most destructive conflicts in the world. (Wedde, 2010:10). Probably the most infamous was the genocide and ethnic cleansing in Rwanda in 1994. While each of these country’s conflicts vary in magnitude and scope, all nevertheless share deep historical roots from the colonial era and they comprise of some of the most vicious wars following the Cold War. (Osaghae & Robinson, 2005:1). In these conflicts children constitute one of the most vulnerable groups.

2.1.1 Child Soldiers in Africa

An estimated half of all child soldiers worldwide are found in Africa. (Groof, 2013:1). Due to lack of records and registers there is no data available when it comes to the exact number of children involved. However, according to the Child Soldiers’ Global Report (2012:21) between 2010 and 2012 child soldiers were actively participating in armed conflict in the following regions: Central African Republic (CAR), Chad, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Eritrea, Somalia, Republic of Sudan, Ivory Coast, Rwanda, Sudan and Yemen. Most child soldiers come from impoverished and marginalized sectors of society or from the area of conflict itself. (Machel, 1996:119).

Some claim that the use of child soldiers has increased following the end of the Cold War era, due to the contemporary nature of war where intra-state civil conflicts significantly outnumbered inter-state conflicts. (Allen, 2000:168). Most armed conflicts occur in failed states on the African continent. (Bowd & Chikwanha, 2010:106).

A failed state is unable to “guarantee democracy, good governance and effective social expenditure to deliver social service goods.” (Kondlo & Ejiogu, 2011:xviii). Jackson (1998:3-6) points out that failed states lack the capability or will to uphold peace, order, protection and security for its people. Rotberg (2003:1) holds that failed states are characterized by temporary territories that are tormented by dangerous and deeply rooted internal conflict between contesting warring parties. Bowd and Chikwanha (2010:xii) describe the ‘failed state’ as a state where the authority of a national government has deteriorated and armed struggle has broken
out between contesting ethnic paramilitaries, local warlords and criminal organizations seeking to control the state and take over power.

These wars are referred to as wars of a third kind or new wars. In these new wars guerrilla tactics and violence are employed by warring factions, including paramilitary units, warlords, criminal gangs, mercenary groups and regular armies. They compete for power based on identity such as clan, kinship, language or religion. (Snodgrass & Mwanika, 2013:4). This is applicable to northern Uganda and the atrocities and the extreme violence carried out by the LRA.

In addition, the technological advancements in cheap and expendable small arms make wholesale killing more inexpensive and achievable. (Allen & Thomas, 2000:8). The increased recruitment in the past 20 years of child soldiers can be linked to the development of light weaponry such as the lightweight AK47 which can easily be fired by a child. (Thompson, 1999:191). Another salient feature of these civil wars is that civilian communities become battlegrounds and targets for conflict. (Ramsden, 2011:243). Due to the prolonged exposure to war, violence is becoming a ‘normalised’ part of everyday life for children in these communities, which in turn make them vulnerable to recruitment. (Dallaire, 2010: 114).

Military recruitment is not only harmful to the affected children and the wider community but also to the society that they inherit – as a generation which lacks education reduces the human capacity and economic potential in the affected society. (Child soldiers global report, 2004:4).

In addition many children are scarred by the atrocities they have been exposed to, which in turn may make them more prone to violence. This increases the risk of future repetitive cycles of violence which may hamper the transformation to a peaceful and stable society. (Child soldiers global report, 2004:4). Bearing in mind that today’s children constitute the future of a society, it is crucial to protect them from being abducted or recruited into armed forces. As postulated by one of the iconic leaders of our time, Nelson Mandela:

We owe our children – the most vulnerable citizens in any society – a life free from violence and fear. Only then will we transform the past century’s legacy from a crushing burden into a cautionary lesson. (Murungi, 2011:53).
In this regard, painful lessons from the past can provide useful insights for the future in preventing further atrocities and abuses against children. Moreover, history provides the opportunity to learn from the hardships of child soldiers how reintegration can be improved.

2.1.2 Why Children become Soldiers

The process of becoming a child soldier is comprised of a myriad of different factors. Some children are abducted and forcefully recruited, while others join for ideological reasons or for survival strategy. (Coulter, Perssons & Utas, 2008:10).

Many still-developing African nations fail to bolster education and employment amongst a majority population that had until recent decades been kept systematically disadvantaged in terms of education and quality of life by the former colonial powers. Children who have not been sufficiently integrated but largely overlooked within these fledgling societies are at the greatest risk of becoming soldiers. Children situated within conflict zones are particularly vulnerable to recruitment by rebel movements, and are offered protection and rewards by becoming members of armed militias. (Honwana, 1999:46). Zack-Williams (2001:79) explains how military life frequently provides a surrogate family unit for such children and that it may “initially appear to offer a safe haven with protection … in turn, they have been willing to kill for these protectors and patrons.” The rebels become the primary (and only) caregivers. (cruel and vengeful parents who may turn on them at any time, but are their only hope for survival.” (Badenoch, 2006:6).

Some children are recruited or coerced into joining militias at a very young age, whilst others are recruited in late adolescence. (Badenoch, 2006:7). In both situations, these children are stepping into an adult world prematurely and are engaging in what can be considered as ‘age inappropriate’ behaviour and exposure. They are being robbed of their childhood, which inevitably has a major negative impact on their development. Because the scars of trauma are borne by these children for the rest of their lives, it is argued that these children become part of a so-called ‘lost generation’. (Bower, 2008:5).
Children recruited or abducted as child soldiers are uprooted from their communities and families, and as previously mentioned, FAC are frequently ordered to lead attacks against their own villages as part of their indoctrination. They are commanded to select their victims which may often be their own siblings or parents. (Badenoch, 2006:6). This is a very insidious and yet effective way of ensuring allegiance to a militia.

A child’s need for self-esteem and establishing a sense of belonging, together with a susceptibility to peer pressure and ultimately the need to survive, may shed a measure of light on why some children join armed conflicts. (Machel, 1996:10). The need for social relationships and recognition has been identified as fundamental for human beings. (Anstey, 1999:1). The universal basic human needs such as security and identity and the fulfilment of these needs are vital to our existence. As Burton (1989:37) explains, when an individual is unable to fulfil these basic needs, he or she is likely to move outside societal norms in order to satisfy them and this may involve indulging in aggressive and violent behaviour; this explanation could largely account for why children join armed forces. (Anstey, 1999:17). Many children thus recruited are not able to fulfil basic needs such as the procurement of food, shelter, water, identity, recognition, religion, autonomy, security, and dignity. (Burton, 1989:37).

For this reason, any claim that children ‘volunteer’ to become child soldiers is flawed: an action by a child cannot be perceived as entirely ‘voluntary’, because the word ‘voluntary’ implies that there are other viable options available. Children commonly join the armed forces as a result of poverty, alienation, propaganda and safety reasons. (Rosen, 2005:17).

### 2.1.3 The Indoctrination Process of Child Soldiers

Military leaders expose new child recruits to severe abuse and deliberately destroy all familial identities and any attachment to their communities. They often demand that the children commit atrocities such as torturing and murdering family and community members. (Wessells, 2006:59).

The indoctrination process in the LRA starts with an initiation ritual when new recruits arrive. This is the testimony of a female child soldier who was abducted by the LRA:
When a recruit arrives, he or she is made to eat alone. He or she is taken to the river [...] he prayed to God to purify me with power of water and camouflage. He poured water on my head, mixed with camouflage. For three days a recruit is initiated immediately by smearing shea nut oil on the forehead, heart and back. He or she can then eat with other people immediately. I had to stay for four days without eating with others. After that I became a full member. (Anderson, Sewankambo & Vandergrift, 2005:13).

Andvig and Gates (2011:4) suggest that, because child soldiers lack family ties or other forms of social support, they tend to be more loyal to a group than adults, and therefore more willing to sacrifice for the group. Mistrust, fear, isolation and the breakdown of personal identity of newly recruited children are achieved by force and deliberate manipulation, thereby reducing the distinction between ‘us’ and ‘them’. These atrocities committed upon them and their family members may certainly exert excessive psychological harm, making them particularly vulnerable to further indoctrination.

At this stage of life the child is normally expected to start developing further an array of complex emotions such as shame and pride as well as ways to express and justify these within a particular situation. (Santrock, 2006:381). According to Coleman, emotional intelligence is comprised of emotional self-awareness, managing emotions, reading emotions and handling interpersonal relationships. (Santrock, 2006:389). This is also a phase where the intimacy of friendship starts to play an increasingly important developmental role. If children are rejected it may cause considerable anxiety and emotional distress and further alienation from structured society. (Santrock, 2006:286).

Moreover, Mary Ainsworth’s (1978) theory of attachment and need for belonging may be linked to self-esteem and dignity needs. By virtue of being human we need to establish, maintain and protect a sense of self, meaning, predictability and purpose. This plays an important role in conflict as it is closely related to a sense that one is safe. Hence, events that are threatening to the individual’s identity may lead to defensive responses in order to protect oneself from mental or physical harm. (Santrock, 2006:281).

Prolonged deprivation of socio-affectionate needs may lead to the development of an ambivalent or avoidant attachment style. An individual may become socially isolated or obsessively seek approval and affection from others. (Santrock, 2006:286).
Children are highly susceptible to forms of suggestion such as propaganda and so are far more easily indoctrinated, primarily because their moral values are still relatively undeveloped. They can therefore be influenced to withhold moral judgments far more easily than an adult. According to Machel (1996:16) officers report that children are “obedient, do not question orders and are easier to manipulate than adult soldiers.” Fox (2004:419) points out that children are “easier to intimidate and control” and that commanders may prefer recruiting children because they are easy to indoctrinate.

These children learn that “if you value your own life you have to be willing to take the life of others. They learn that the strong can steal from the weak. If you have a gun, an older person will fear you.” (Badenoch, 2006:8). Howana (2011:105) explains that child soldiers are trained to kill and harm and are rewarded for doing so whilst refusal may potentially be fatal. Some have killed countless times. In this regard child soldiers are both agents and victims of violence. A quote from a child soldier illustrates this: “When you have stayed in the bush for a long time and had two, three, four or even five years away, killing can become a hobby, but few people will admit it.” (Badenoch, 2006:7).

The line between victim and perpetrator becomes blurred when the abducted becomes the abductee: “If there is anything worse for those who are abducted than being tortured and killed, or dying from disease and hunger, perhaps it is this. The final degradation is that children who have been abducted start to turn into the people who abducted them.” (Badenoch, 2006:24). They are children but robbed of their childhood and no longer innocent. A gun and a license to kill removed them from childhood. (Howana, 2011:29). A testimony provided in Badenoch (2006:25) illustrates this:

*Whenever they killed somebody they called us to watch. I saw eleven people killed this way. One of them was a boy who escaped. They found him in his home. They made him lie on the ground, and pierced him with a bayonet. They chipped him with the bayonet until he was dead. Seeing this at times, I felt like I was a dead person – not feeling anything. And then sometimes I would feel like it was happening to me, and I would feel the pain.*

Adolescence is a fundamental period for identity formation. This is a stage characterized by experimenting with different roles and identities. Children recruited
by the armed forces are likely to radically alter their identity, as they are forced to
look to the commanders for survival, and no longer to their community or clan.
(Thompson, 1999:198). This means that these children are more likely to identify
with fellow child soldiers and military commanders and thus develop the identity of a
soldier and executioner, rather than that of a civilian. (Veal & Stavrou, 2003:2). If this
identity crisis is not resolved, these youths will suffer from what is referred to as
‘identity confusion’. The result is that these teens lose their identity within a larger
group, becoming absolute automatons. (Santrock, 2006:399).

This becomes evident when looking at the role of de-individuation that takes place
amongst child soldiers while on the battlefield. De-individuation can be described as
“the situation where anti-normative behaviour is released in groups in which
individuals are not seen or paid attention to as individuals”. (Foster & Durrheim,
1998, as cited in Ratele, 2004:13). De-individuation into a group results in a loss of
individual identity and a gaining of the social identity of the group. De-individuation
hinders reflection about the consequences of one’s actions, rendering social norms
ineffective while increasing any suggestibility to random outside influences. The fact
that one feels anonymous leads to a sense of safety and exoneration from any
responsibility, which in turn, can encourage collective acts of violence. Many acts of
violence by child soldiers would be very unlikely to occur with individuals who had
not been members of a group. Hence, these children will function as “vehicles for
violence rather than citizens that can build peace.” (Wessells, 2006:3).

Moreover, the disrupted community and the fact that these children have committed
atrocities in their own community makes reintegratioback into that community very
difficult. This lack of integration discourages FAC from attempting to escape from the
rebel camps, since they have nowhere to go. (Thompson, 1999:198).

Nordström (1997:114) lucidly illustrates this point by quoting the words of a child
soldier: “They have not just killed my family and taken my home; they have killed my
soul.” The atrocities children witness disrupt them developmentally in these
emotionally significant and formative years. As their families are uprooted and larger
social institutions are disrupted, children are denied affectionate relationships and a
stable ground upon which to develop physically, intellectually, and morally. Under
such conditions, Garbarino, Kostelny and Dubrow (1991:16) state that: “Children
may be socialized into a model of fear, violence and hatred." The indoctrination strategy is to entrap the children and turn their love of their communities into hatred. A quote that illustrates the intense indoctrination process that these young children go through is provided by Badenoch (2006:7):

*Instead of receiving education that opens up their minds through learning, they receive an education that closes their minds through fear. Instead of learning community respect, they learn to survive through brutality and savagery. Instead of learning how to make seeds grow, and cattle thrive, they learn how to handle a gun or plant a mine. Instead of being taught how to nurture family and community, they are taught to breakup families and destroy communities.*

### 2.2 The Conflict in northern Uganda

The conflict in northern Uganda has been one of Africa’s most brutal wars which resulted in devastating consequences for the Acholi sub-region and neighbouring districts. The war has displaced 95 per cent of the Acholi people, who have been forced to dwell in provisional camps for internally displaced persons (IDP) over a period of decades. (Harlacher, 2009:1).

The underlying reasons for the conflict can be traced back to the end of colonialism in that country in 1962. The development of Uganda as an independent state was unbalanced as the United Kingdom (UK), the formerly presiding colonial power, favoured the southern parts of Uganda and neglected northern Uganda. Consequently, southern and northern Uganda are characterized by a marked discrepancy between rich and poor and as a result, many of the Acholi people living in the north joined the LRA as a means to possibly provide for themselves and their families. (*Invisible children*, 2010:1).

When Yoweri Museveni became president in 1986, many armed rebel groups surfaced with various ideological and ethnic affiliations, one of these being Alice Lakwena’s Holy Spirit Movement. The aim was to seize power in Uganda, ‘free’ the Acholi people from their ‘sins’ and enforce the Ten Commandments. The contemporary LRA led by Joseph Kony is a successor of the Holy Spirit Movement (International Crisis Group, 2008:20). Initially the LRA army was comprised exclusively of Acholi military personnel as did the Holy Spirit Movement.
An estimated 90 per cent of the LRA’s troops were abducted as children. (Invisible children, 2010:1). It is claimed that the rebels specifically focused on abducting children between the ages of 9 and 16 as older children were at greater risk of escaping. (International Crisis Group, 2008:20). These children were being exploited in armed conflict to perform roles such as combatants, spies, carriers, porters, cooks, human shields, spotters, minefield sweepers, participants in suicide missions, wives, lookouts, messengers, gathering of fruit vegetables and looting food from gardens. (Machel, 1996:18; Bower, 2008:5). Some children were even exchanged for weapons. Many child soldiers die, during the one to three month period of harsh military training. (Fox, 2004:472).

There has been stability in northern Uganda following the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement (CHA) signed by the government and the LRA on 26 August 2006 during the peace talks in Juba in Southern Sudan. These peace talks ended in April 2008 when Joseph Kony refused to sign the final peace agreement. (UNPRAP, 2009:9). Unfortunately, the Juba Peace talks in 2008 failed to put an end to LRA operations in other areas and the LRA are presently involved in hostilities within the DRC, South Sudan and the CAR. (International Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC), 2012:4). In May 2010 the Government of the United States (US) passed the Lord’s Resistance Army Disarmament and Northern Uganda Act, in order to protect civilians, enable humanitarian relief, enhance reconciliation, reconstruction and transitional justice. In December 2010 a strategy to clamp down on LRA hostile activities was put into place. (IDMC, 2012:4).

In March 2012, Uganda, CAR, DRC and South Sudan, with the support of the UN and the African Union (AU), sent 5,000 soldiers to put an end to LRA atrocities and to capture its leaders. It was reported that as of May 2012 prominent leaders within the LRA were either killed or had become fugitives but Joseph Kony had yet not been found. (IDMC, 2012:4).

2.3 LRA and the use of Child Soldiers

It was when the LRA no longer had a sustainable fighting force that they started to forcefully recruit and abduct civilian villagers, specifically children. (McKay & Mazurana 2006:28; Invisible children, 2010:1). A typical day for abductees began
with training early every morning with hours of forced singing and frantic dancing. In the midst of the day the children were forced to run either up and down hills or in wide circles. This continued until the afternoon. A quote provided by an interviewee in McKay and Mazurana (2004:74) illustrate the cruel and inhuman treatment of these children: “The weak ones would fall and die from thirst and hunger.” After completing the running, a meagre meal of one plate of beans and one cup of water was divided between seven to ten children. This was the only meal given to the children and in order to survive they had to search for whatever they could find to eat in the bush such as berries, leaves and grass. (McKay & Mazurana, 2004:74). During this training the majority of child soldiers died. (Fox, 2004:472). Later, many more children died at the frontline or from the harsh conditions within the military camp.

Harlacher (2009:12-13) refers to a study by Annan, Blattman and Horton (2006) of male FAC, reporting that “91% of the abductees had witnessed beatings or torture of other people, 63% had received severe beatings themselves, 78% witnessed at least one killing, 20% were forced to kill a civilian and 8% were forced to kill a family member or friend.” Another study by Derluyn, Brockaert, Schuyten and De Temmerman (2004:862) indicates that 39 per cent were forced to kill another person.

In addition, some have permanent physical deformities caused by carrying ammunition and other heavy equipment. (Howana, 2006:5). Furthermore, these abductions have had devastating effects on the family structure and in turn on the future of northern Uganda. (McKay & Mazurana, 2006:28).

2.4 Female Child Soldiers in northern Uganda

As previously mentioned, an estimated one-third of FAC world-wide are females. (War Child, 2013:1). Approximately a third of the child soldiers that serve or have served within the LRA forces are females. (Falkenberg, 2013:2). Annan et al (2008:vii) suggest that abduction in northern Uganda has been under-reported: they believe that an estimated 66 000 youth have been abducted. It is believed that 80 per cent of male abductees and 95 per cent of female abductees have returned from captivity. (Annan et al., 2008:vii).
McKay and Mazurana (2004:11) report that female FAC’s roles and experiences within the African context are inherently different from those of their male counterparts. Research indicates that these young women’s experiences are more brutal because of sexism (discrimination based on gender) and misogyny (hatred against women). (McKay & Mazurana, 2004:16). Female FAC within these armed forces carry out traditional gender roles such as household chores including cooking, cleaning and serving men as well as nursing fellow soldiers. (Child soldiers global report, 2004:14). Hence, they seem to be expected to replicate the traditional gender roles of the larger Ugandan society (McKay & Mazurana, 2006:28) while simultaneously being forced to carry guns and fight side by side with their fellow male combatants. (Child soldiers global report, 2004:14).

Female FAC are routinely exposed to sexual abuse as well as many other forms of maltreatment. The International Criminal Court (ICC) 2006 found that the majority of abducted women were subjected to rape and sexual violence as a matter of course. Some of these girls are given to commanding officers as slaves, becoming known as ting ting and later being forced to become the commanding officer’s wives upon reaching puberty. (Child soldiers global report, 2004:107; Bower, 2008:5; Murungi, 2011:11). These girls are taken by force, by men that they have never met before, who are old enough to be their fathers or grandfathers. (Badenoch, 2006:6). Annan et al. (2008:44) report that nearly half of the forced wives who took part in their study gave birth to children from these relationships. It is also reported that half of the LRA commanders had five or more forced wives, with lower level fighters having two wives on average.

Nearly all participants in this study, including those who were pregnant or had small children were trained and used as fighters in the rebel LRA. (Bower, 2008:5). A quote provided by McKay and Mazurana (2004:75) cites a girl named Ester: “I fought with my baby on my back.”

The fact that many girls are taken by force and impregnated by their abductors many times over at a very early age, inevitably resulted in a range of debilitating health problems. (Murungi, 2011:11). Many female FAC suffer from sexually transmitted infections (STIs), HIV/Aids and the effects of prolonged sexual, physical and emotional abuse. Added to this plight are squalid living conditions, malnutrition and
poverty. Many former female FAC still have wounds from the war such as physical deformities from carrying heavy loads and constant beatings. One young woman was reported to have a bullet still lodged within her body and to be in need of surgery to which she had no access. (Murungi, 2011:12).

McKay and Mazurana (2006:35) suggest that reintegration is far more problematic for female FAC than males due to the fact that, as a result of traditional gender roles, far more abuse and violence is projected towards them during the period of their abduction. Returnees from the war are likely to display inherently anti-social behavioural characteristics, anger-management issues and violent outbursts. However, behaviour such as belligerence, coarse language, smoking and drug abuse stands in stark contrast to what is expected of a woman in traditional Ugandan society. Violent and aggressive women are perceived as unnatural deviations from the accepted gender norms and roles. (Stout, 2013:52). Research conducted in Sierra Leone also indicated that it was easier for the villages to accept troublesome boys because boys will be boys. Troublesome girls are much harder to reintegrate. (McKay & Mazurana, 2006:36).

Following the aftermath of war, female FAC are usually pressurized by organizations and community leaders to resume traditional gender roles (marriage, family and home). (Mckay & Mazurana, 2004:16). However, McKay and Mazurana (2004:36) draw attention to a study conducted in northern Uganda, observing that female abductees who return home are perceived as “willing wives of the rebel commanders [which] makes them untouchable as if they have been used up.” Their loss of virginity is referred to as ‘defilement’ in northern Uganda, preventing them from finding husbands. The fact these women have been sexually violated may result in their being unmarriageable, in a social context that places a high value on traditional gender norms, including ideals of female chastity and virginity. The ability to marry may be perceived as critical in northern Uganda, where marriage is commonly viewed as providing the best means of obtaining economic security and protection for girls and women (Stout, 2013:28). There were many reports of how parents commonly urged their daughters to stay with their husbands from the battlefield, and so the girls were often compelled to stay with the same men that raped and abused them. In light of this it is evident how gender discrimination strongly affects how
women live their lives in northern Uganda. (McKay & Mazurana, 2004:17). In addition, the children born to rebels also suffer additional social stigma and lack of a sense of belonging. (Badenoch, 2006:7).

A quote in Murungi (2011:38) provided by a returnee illustrates this: “I was not welcomed because I had brought back children. They said the children were a curse and evil.” Due to the fact that Acholi society is, by and large, a patriarchal society, the profound sense of a lack of belonging becomes especially difficult in cases where the young mother does not know the identity of the father, over and above the fact of having given birth to her children while in some form of captivity. (Murungi, 2011:37). Moreover, in Acholi society land is traditionally inherited by way of paternal rites and so, for a ‘fatherless’ child it is very hard, if not impossible, to own land.

Given this information it is evident that the needs and vulnerabilities of female child soldiers differ from their male counterparts. Sadly, little attention has been paid to these girls and young women post conflict and their voices have commonly remained silent. The unique gender experiences must be taken into account when designing effective reintegration strategies. (Stout, 2013:23).

A gender-based approach recognizes the differences between women and men when it comes to reintegration. It seeks to identify the ways in which experiences and needs of women and men are different. Worthy of note is that gender is socially constructed and dictated by cultures but it also varies within cultures. Sex, on the other hand, is biologically determined. Human beings are born female or male but are conditioned into being girls and boys who later grow into women and men. This conditioned behaviour makes up gender identity and gender roles. Gender roles and gender identity differentiate what women and men, and girls and boys, are expected to be and do in terms of their roles, responsibilities, rights and obligations. (World Health Organization (WHO), 2013:1).

2.5 Stigma, Stereotyping and Ostracism

Many former female child soldiers face stigma on their return to their communities of origin. Stigma occurs when prejudice, labelling, negative stereotyping, ostracism, discrimination, and low status coexist. Prejudice is a negative attitude towards a
member of a specific group. Prejudice may result in discrimination which implies treating members of a specific group unfairly. (Weiten, 2007:681). Stereotyping is a widely held belief that members of a specific group possess certain characteristics. (Weiten, 2007:682). To ostracize somebody is defined by the Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary, as “to avoid someone intentionally or to prevent them from taking part in the activities of a group.” (Walter, 2008:892). Even though each of these terms is commonly used interchangeably with stigma, stigma is a broader and more all-encompassing concept than any one of these processes. (Major & O’Brien, 2005:395).

Crocker, Major and Steel (1998:504) suggest that stigmatization takes place when a person possesses (or is perceived to possess) “some attribute or characteristic that conveys a social identity that is devalued in a particular social context.” In Gulu District many of the returnees “return to their villages with children forcibly fathered by LRA commanders and delivered in the bush.” They are often rejected by their families upon return and stigmatized as ‘women from the bush’ by the wider community. (Uganda Fund, 2013:1). This is due to the fact that they are perceived as sexually defiled due to their loss of virginity and for those impregnated the situation is even more difficult. Moreover, due to their former role in combat and the atrocities that may have committed towards their own community they may face stigma due to community perceptions that they are immoral or dangerous. (Betancourt, Agnew-Blais, Gilman, Williams & Ellis, 2010:17). In addition, traditional views hold that the spirits of those you killed reside with you. Hence, a widely-held belief is that returnees are possessed by the spirits of those they killed. (Roberts, Odong, Browne, Ocaka, Geissler, & Sondorp, 2009:ii).

Given this information it is important to realise that stigma has a social origin that is relationship- and context-specific; it does not reside in the person but in the specific social context. (Major & O’Brien, 2005:394-395). When someone is being stigmatized distinguishing characteristics are associated with negative stereotypes and evaluations. These stereotypes and evaluations are commonly widely shared and well known amongst members of a specific culture, and they form the basis for exclusion and avoidance of stereotyped individuals. (Croker et al., 1998:509).
Crocker et al., (1998:504) state that when a woman is being stigmatized, her humanity is questioned “devalued and […] or flawed in other people's eyes.”

In northern Uganda for instance, Blattman and Annan (2007:883) observed issues with community acceptance with nearly 25 per cent of the participants in their study reporting initial community stigma (usually expressed in the form of insults) upon return home. These findings were also replicated in this study as most of the returnees reported the highest levels of community stigma when returning from captivity. Stigma may also contribute to fewer positive opportunities and less access to protective resources such as community and family support. (Link & Phelan, 2006:528-529).

In this regard the prevalence of stigma has a major impact on the overall success of the reintegration process. Below is an adaptation of a model that derives from social stress theory. The diagram illustrates that the experience of war, the social status of the individual, the level of discrimination as well as available resources (internal and external) are linked to the success of reintegration and social adjustment. (Aneshensel & Phelan, 1999:3). Many former female child soldiers have suffered traumatic war experiences as well as the adverse effects of sexual exploitation which may result in feelings of internal guilt, shame and extreme anxiety. Upon return to their communities of origin, child soldiers then experience low social status as a result of prejudice and fear on the part of the community members. This stigma may exacerbate the experience of stress (due to discrimination) and lack of access to protective resources (such as accumulation of capital or a social support system), which may in combination with lack of internal resources (self-esteem, coping skills and life skills) have a negative impact on the overall success of the social adjustment and reintegration process.
This diagram is adapted from Betancourt, et al., (2010:19):

**Figure 1. The Social adjustment and reintegration process**

Link and Phelan (2006:258-259) build on social stress theory and suggest that stigma leads to experiencing “less of the good things and more of the bad.” In this way, not only does stigma intensify stress, it may also impede a person’s access to coping resources. (Aneshensel, 1992:18). Social responses to the stigmatized individual in the post-conflict environment, as well as the past war-related experiences, play a major role in the integration process of the former child soldier. Indeed, stigma may be an important aspect of understanding how past conflict experiences continue to exert influence on the adjustment for former child soldiers long after the end of war.

**2.6 Demobilization, Disarmament and Reintegration Initiatives**

Over sixty Demobilization, Disarmament and Reintegration (DDR) initiatives have occurred worldwide since the early 1990s. (Muggah, 2010:1). DDR seeks to contribute to security and stability in post-conflict situations in order for recovery and development to commence. (United Nations, 2000:1). Most of these initiatives were started as a result of violent conflict following the defeat of one of the parties or as part of a peace-supporting operation. Some were mandated by a peace agreement, a UN Security Council (UNSC) resolution or by a country’s government. (Muggah,
The UNSC is one of the principal organs of the UN and it deals with the maintenance of international peace and security. The UNSC executes peace-keeping missions, and sanctions and military action are exercised through UNSC resolutions.

The majority of these DDR initiatives have taken place in Africa, but also in Latin America and the Caribbean, South and Eastern Europe, Central and South Asia and the South Pacific. (Muggah, 2010:4). DDR seeks to create an enabling environment for political and peace processes by dealing with security problem that arises when former combatants are trying to adjust to normal life, during the important transition period from conflict to peace and development. (United Nations, 2013:1). DDR is becoming more inclusive involving a larger number of former combatants and has started to focus on vulnerable groups such as female FAC. The aforementioned initiatives have started to take into account that peaceful transition is a complex and ongoing process, hence the need to allocate more time and resources in the development of DDR. (Muggah, 2010:4).

Disarmament refers to collecting, documenting, controlling the “disposal of small arms, ammunition, explosives and light and heavy weapons” of soldiers and civilians. Disarmament also entails the development of responsible arms management programmes. (United Nations Peace-Keeping, 2013:4; United Nations, 2013:1).

“Demobilization is the formal and controlled discharge of active combatants.” (United Nations Peace-Keeping, 2013:4; United Nations, 2013:1). Firstly demobilization may involve the stay in temporary reception centres such as the ones set up by WV and GUSCO. Secondly, demobilization consists of reinsertion into the community of choice. A support package provides short-term assistance for former combatants. (United Nations Peace-Keeping , 2013:4; United Nations, 2013:1). Reinsertion is a form of transitional assistance to cover the basic needs of former combatants and their families and can include transitional safety allowances, food, clothes, shelter, medical services, short-term education, training, employment and tools. It is a short-term process which can last up to one year. (United Nations Peace-Keeping, 2013:4).
Reintegration is a continuous social and economic process by which ex-combatants transform from soldiers to civilians. Becoming self-sufficient in terms of employment and income is important in this process. Reintegration is a process with an open time frame "primarily taking place in communities at the local level." (United Nations, 2013:4). Nevertheless it is also a vital part of the general development of a country and a national responsibility, and often calls for long-term external assistance.

According to the United Nations document *Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration* (2013:4), DDR assists former combatants to become active participants in the peace building process by:

- removing weapons from the hands of soldiers
- taking the soldiers out of military structures
- integrating combatants socially and economically into society.

In northern Uganda the DDR initiatives were provided by various NGOs such as Gulu Support the Children Organization and World Vision in conjunction with other organizations such as Empowering Hands and People’s Voice for Peace. Only one-third of girls and young women are believed to have passed through reception centres upon return from life in captivity. (Stout, 2013:37). The programmes provided by these NGOs will be discussed in the next section.

2.7 Social Integration

According to the theory of social integration, ‘integration’ refers to a sense of belonging to a group or society: an attachment and the resultant social bonds that keep people grounded in emotional reality. In this regard social integration can be summed up as the existence of social ties. (Abbot, 2009:1). For FAC social integration can be defined as the transition from soldiering to a sustainable role in civilian life which includes economic and social readjustment. (Veal & Stavrou, 2003:1; Wessells, 2006:157).
Wessells (2006:154-155) holds that many children who escape from the military camps and go back to their communities feel joy upon returning but often develop feelings of anger and fear because they have lost confidence in being able to live their former lives. Reintegration is an on-going and complex process.

However, it is important to realize that reintegration is a long-term process which extends beyond merely centre-based, transitional reintegration. It is generally believed that the majority of returnees in Gulu District have attended reception centres such as GUSCO and WV after escaping or being released from captivity. Moreover, the children were provided with medical treatment while their basic needs such as clothing and food were also catered for. These centres provided psycho-social rehabilitation such as counselling, family tracing and reunification, socialization, and education or skills training. (Fritzen, 2007:4). The vocational training was usually tailoring for girls and carpentry for boys.

At these centres the children were offered training in cooking, preparing for school and other such skills. The children were equipped with social skills in order to assist them to be integrated into school, their families and the wider communities. They were also assisted to take on a positive attitude and role in their community. The psycho-social assistance provided is reported by Fritzen (2007:4) to focus on social cultural interventions, in order to reduce psychological (trauma) and enhance community reintegration.

The time spent at these reception centres would depend on the needs of the FAC but it was essentially a short-term process, following which the children would move back into their communities of origin. At this stage NGOs such as EH and PVP would provide their reintegration programmes which were designed to address the long-term needs of reintegration such as skills training, community dialogue and setting up self-help groups for income generating activities and psycho-social support. (Uganda Fund, 2013:1).

Wessells (2006:157) adds that reintegration is a process that takes place over an extended period of time. Moreover, it should be viewed as “a part of the general development of a country and […] a national responsibility.” (Pugel, 2007:7). Social reintegration provides an alternative to involvement in conflict and helps children to
resume their lives in the community again. Aspects of reintegration include family reunification or alternatives, education, skills development, employability and psycho-social support. (*Child soldiers global report*, 2004:356). Perhaps one of the most important indicators of successful integration is whether or not the FAC’s families are able to be located. There is a great possibility that a child’s parents may have died during the course of the conflict and so a returnee might very likely need to rely on other immediate family. With so many children becoming orphans following conflict, family ties may become disproportionately stretched. (Badenoch, 2006:8).

According to Malan (2000:44) the process of reintegrating FAC presents a two-fold challenge: it must seek to reverse the use of violence and aggression as means of dealing with conflict; it must also provide material and physiological support, such as nutrition, access to health care, instruction and development in decision making and education.

One of the most successful ways of getting former child soldiers reintegrated into society is by way of employment. Wessells (2006:155) holds that this is because of “economic reasons and because having a job enables FAC to fulfil culturally defined roles as helpers [and providers] of their families.” Additionally, a job may serve to fulfil family duties, thereby helping female FAC to avoid stigmatization and gain acceptance within the community.

Reintegration of FAC is essential as it seeks to equip these children and young adults to live among peers, families and communities. In accordance with the theory of social integration, secure attachment and social bonds constitute a base from which an individual can explore the world. In order for an individual to develop fully in a healthy manner, it is imperative that the individual is included and participating within society. (Abbot, 2009:1). As discussed earlier, since FAC experience a process of ‘socialisation’ through armed conflict it is during the reintegration process that the child soldier needs to transform from being a soldier to a civilian.

When developing reintegration programmes, it is imperative that one takes into account the importance of creating a trusting, positive, and stable relationship with adults and peers. (UNICEF, 2002:3). When FAC return to their homes they “will have developed in difficult circumstances away from the support of family and community.
The children who return will be different to the children who left.” This change may be hard for both their families and communities to accept. (Guyot, 2007:11).

Firstly, in order to break the cycle of violence and equip these children with constructive ways of dealing with conflict, it is essential that their confidence be rebuilt. Therefore it is crucial that these children establish new lives based on their individual capabilities. There is a need to develop a functional system to monitor and evaluate psycho-social rehabilitation in order to determine their effectiveness. Again this highlights the importance of dealing with the reintegration of FAC from a conflict management and transformation perspective, with the long-term objective of achieving sustainability.

In a report by the World Bank, it is postulated that reintegration programmes that take psychological as well as sociological factors into account are more successful than Western trauma-based interventions. (UNICEF, 2002:3). This acknowledges that reintegration programmes ought to take place in the social context of family and the wider community.

Many times, outsiders intervene and utilize a so-called ‘top-down’ approach, where they ask all the questions and then design the reintegration programmes accordingly. It is argued that many of these programmes view local people as helpless, passive ‘victims’. This approach is fundamentally flawed and may actually have a counterproductive effect as it impoverishes and victimizes rather than empowers the target population. (Worthen, Veale, McKay & Wessells, 2010:17).

Local institutions and individuals such as diviners, traditional healers and the elderly possess a body of knowledge and expertise that is tied to a specific social, cultural and religious pluralistic understanding. This approach encompasses empowerment, mobilizes resources available within the community and is a very useful psycho-social support because it helps to restore the sense of control following overwhelming traumatic experiences. (Worthen et al., 2010:18).
2.8 Empowerment

The level of empowerment plays an important role in the success of social reintegration. Empowerment is the primary goal in transformational politics. (Schwerin, 1995:45). Yuval-Davis (1994:193) suggests that the ultimate goal of empowerment is social change.

In most of the literature empowerment is associated with personal control. According to Rappaport (1987:119) the aim of empowerment is to enhance the “possibilities for people to control of their own lives.” An empowered individual is “acquiring the power to think and act freely, exercise choice, and to fulfil their potential as full and equal members of society.” (Smyth, 2007:584 as cited in Mæland, 2010:154). People understand their own needs far better than anyone else and by virtue of this they have the power to describe, define and act on those needs (Mæland, 2010:289). Rowland’s (1997:111-113) definition of empowerment focuses on the psychological process of change and the development of self-confidence and self-esteem, sense of agency, dignity, meaning, self-respect and self-worth. A truly empowered individual feels worthy of respect from others and is also aware that he or she has the right to be respected. (Rowlands, 1997:129-130).

The World Bank (2002:10) states that the empowerment “is the expansion of freedom of choice and action.” This implies increasing one’s power and control over the resources and decisions that affect one’s life. Alsop and Heinsohn, (2005:4) define empowerment as an individual’s capability to make "effective choices." The degree of empowerment are measured by:

- the existence of choice
- if the choice is being exercised
- if the desired outcome is achieved.

The extent to which a person is empowered is influenced by personal agency (the capacity to make purposive choice) and is embedded in the opportunity structure (the institutional context in which choice is made). (Alsop & Heinsohn, 2005:4).
Figure 2: Extent of Empowerment

The personal agency depends on the opportunities provided by the surrounding structure. Personal agency depends on the individual available assets and capabilities. Assets and capabilities can be individual or collective. (World Bank, 2002:11). Assets refer to material assets, both physical and financial, such as land, housing, livestock, and capital. Lack of access to these constrains an individual's capability to withstand hardships and to plan for the future which increases vulnerability. (World Bank 2002:11).

Capabilities enable one to make use of his or her assets and to increase wellbeing. Human capabilities are, for instance, health and education. One is able to cultivate land (asset) if you have the health and the skills to do so (capabilities). Social capabilities include a sense of belonging, leadership, relations of trust, identity, values that give meaning and purpose to life, and the capacity to organize. Political capability entails the capacity to “represent oneself or others, to have access to information, form associations, and participate in the political life of a community or country.” (World Bank, 2002:11).

There is a two-way relationship between individual assets and capabilities and the capability to act collectively. On the one hand, if you are educated and healthy you can contribute more successfully to collective action; on the other hand collective
action can improve poor people’s access to education or health facilities. As postulated by Rowlands (1997:115) “participation in the group may feed the process of personal empowerment and vice versa.” In other words individual empowerment cannot be separated from being part of a collective (Mæland, 2010:155).

The reciprocal relationship between people’s freedom of choice, action can be extended in various ways and is influenced by accessibility of resources. To enable access to health facilities, education, land and to promote life skills are of inherent value and may also have the potential to increase economic returns to the individual. (World Bank, 2002:12).

The presence of informal and formal institutions determines the opportunity structure. (Alsop & Heinsohn, 2005:4). Informal institutions are, for example, norms of inferiority (such as the lower status of women), kin networks, friends, neighbours and informal traditional restrictions placed on women inheriting property. (World Bank, 2002:12). Formal institutions include the laws and rules entrenched in state, private sector, and civil society organizations at the local, national, and global levels, as well as international organizations. (World Bank, 2002:12).

The culture of state institutions and policies influences the actions of other actors such as marginalized groups (for example women, female FAC), the private sector, civil society (such as unions and faith-based organizations), and international agencies. (World Bank, 2010:13). The opportunity structure determines the extent to which individuals are able to participate in state institutions and take part in decisions about the resources that affect their lives. Putting rules and laws – such as the 1995 Constitutional protection of women right’s to inherit land in Uganda – in place has the potential to strengthen marginalized groups’ agency. (World Bank, 2002:13). However, “rights may be recognized institutionally, but power imbalances often mean that actors are not able to actually enjoy them.” (Luttrell, Quiroz, Scrutton & Bird, 2009:19) In traditional patriarchal societies such as northern Uganda empowerment of women (access to land) is a controversial issue and stands in stark contrast to patriarchal cultural norms of female exclusion.

Given this information, the social and cultural context cannot be overlooked when it comes to empowerment. “Therefore both state reform and efforts to build poor
people’s assets and organizational capability must take forms that reflect local norms, values, and behaviours.” (World Bank, 2010:13).

2.9 Culture and Reintegration

The importance of taking the cultural context into account when rehabilitating FAC should not be underestimated. (Green & Honwana, 1999:2; Guyot, 2007:5). The traditional approach to reintegration stands in contrast to the Western perspective; where the focus is entirely on the individual with the collective body that the individual belongs to being largely overlooked. (Green & Honwana, 1999:2).

Guyot (2007:5) expresses the opinion that approaches to healing and reintegration should utilize community-identified interests as a point of departure, and make use of local resources so as to “facilitate rather than impose models of healing.” For this reason, Bower (2008:6) argues that the reintegration process ought to blend with the individual’s cultural background. For example, it is crucial to stress the role of ancestral spirits and spiritual forces. The practices that people have used to survive and heal through history should be utilized in the reintegration process.

The cultural practices for cleansing and purification are believed by local people to be essential for the well-being of former child soldiers who have been 'spiritually contaminated', as well as for their families and communities. It is crucial not to focus solely on the child but also on the wider community and the aspects of cultural understanding within reintegration. It is crucial to adopt a holistic standpoint and assist the child as well as the community in embracing the lost child. (Guyot, 2007:11).

Many times the Western intra-individual medical model lacks applicability when applied to other cultures, especially African cultures where the sense of self is socially defined. Bracken, Giller and Summerfield (1995:1081) postulate: “If we are not aware of the biomedical emphasis which is at the heart of much of modern psychiatry and the assumptions underlying such an approach, we can all too easily end up imposing an inappropriate understanding of trauma which cannot deal with important social and political dimensions.”
To reiterate, FAC often exhibit symptoms which are commonly diagnosed in accordance with Western psychiatry. As mentioned, symptoms of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) are “avoidance/numbing, as in cutting off of feelings and avoidance of situations that provide reminders of traumatic events, insomnia, inability to concentrate, intrusive re-experiencing, nightmares and flashbacks; lethargy, confusion, fear, aggressive behaviour, social isolation, and hopelessness in relation to the future, and hyper-arousal, hyper-vigilance and exaggerated startled response.” (Green & Honwana, 1999:43).

Bracken et al., (1995:1084) point out that it may be fundamentally flawed to focus on the individual in cultures where symptoms and signs of trauma may have different meanings. Homogenization of the symptoms of distress may overlook local forms of responding to PTSD. (Dawes, 2000 as cited in Barenbaum, et al., 2004:45). “Western mental health workers risk imposing culturally alien diagnostic assumptions.” (Barenbaum, et al., 2004:45) Kirmayer and Young (1999) point out those dysfunctional responses are different from normal ones in accordance with the socio-cultural context. (Barenbaum, et al., 2004:45). As mentioned, the traditional African view on what in the Western world is referred to as trauma and PTSD explains the symptoms as being due to the fact that individuals become possessed with the spirits of the dead and become mentally disturbed. In this regard a complex healing process takes place and a specialist needs to deal with the issues. Guyot (2007:9) holds that indigenous rituals ensure that the child gains acceptance by the local community. In this regard culturally appropriate cleansing rituals practised by local spiritual leaders can enhance individual as well as community healing. (Howana, 1999:2).

The World Bank stresses the importance of culturally appropriate practices when it comes to the reintegration of female FAC in Uganda. The children are willing to participate in cleansing ceremonies “so that their communities do not view them as cen (contaminated).” (Guyot, 2007:10-11). Cen is believed to be the revenge by a spirit that has been wronged. Cen is seen not only as harmful to the individual but many believe that the spirit can contaminate families and neighbours. (Annan et al., 2008:51).
In addition, it is stated that these cultural practices are especially valuable to the girls who have been forced to serve as ‘wives’ to combatants. (UNICEF, 2002:3). The expertise for these practices is found within the community. Utilising skills available within the community is also a cost-effective approach. (Guyot, 2007:12).

Honwana (1998:35) points out that even though cleansing or purification procedures vary from one cultural group to another, they all seem to rest upon the same assumptions that symbolize a breakaway from the life as a soldier to becoming a civilian and to cleansing them of evil spirits so as to welcome them back into the community. (Chrobok & Akutu, 2008:13).

In northern Uganda, communal cleansing rituals for FAC are commonly adapted from the stepping on an egg, nyono tong weno, to welcome the individual back into the community. This ritual is traditionally held for a family member who has been away for an extensive period of time. It takes place to reconcile any problems arising from the absence and to ensure that the person feels like a full member of the family. The ceremony includes stepping on an egg, tong weno, placed on a slippery branch, opobo, and a stick with a fork, layebi, traditionally used to pen granaries. (Chrobok & Akutu, 2008:13).

The egg symbolizes purity: the egg has no mouth and cannot speak ill of others. The egg is also soft and fragile which suggests restoring innocence. Opobo is a soapy slippery branch that helps cleanse the individual from the experiences during captivity (such as the belief that he or she is possessed by the spirits of the people he or she has killed). The layebi is a symbol for welcoming a person into the home where family members will be able to share food together. (Roberts et al., 2009:9).

Sexual violence and rape against girls are understood in Acholi culture as an attack on culture. In a sense this attack of a girl is not solely an attack on the girl but on her family and her culture. (Shanahan, 2008:8). It is believed that after rape spirit possession takes place of the girl. The physical power of the spirit over the girl is manifested in control over behaviour, such as dancing, eating and reproduction. These traditional beliefs are related to prejudice and stigma which make it particularly difficult for these women to get married. In these cases ritual cleansing is
believed to be able to restore the girl’s ability to reproduce, which is a strong
traditional expectation of women in Acholi culture. (Shanahan, 2008:12).

This social ritual deals with identity, shame and guilt issues. The ritual to reclaim the
girl's role is performed publicly thereby involving the community this restores a
strong sense of community. The spirit is viewed as a shared enemy and the
community is called upon to come “together to save the girl, to expel the danger to
the clan.” (Shanahan, 2008:12). A traditional healer describes a ritual preformed
after the rape of a girl while within the LRA:

*The bush there where that girl has been raped there are also some bad spirits there which can graft on to her in the process of the rape. That’s why they do those things to chase those bad spirits away. So that chicken which they move four times around the girl it is to move the bad spirit which is within that girl. So that bad spirit will go into that chicken […] That blood is a blessing that that girl should also get a kid, that blood wash away those bad spirits, those bad heart, everything so that girl will be clean, that heart will be clean, she will go on and produce. (Shanahan, 2008:12).*

Howana (2006:7) suggests that traditional institutions are deemed to provide a vital
and comprehensive role in carrying out traditional cleansing rituals. This is also
highlights the fact that traditional healers need to be willing to accept FACs back into
the community. Moreover, the traditional leaders should be given a prominent role
when it comes to reconciling and reintegrating returnees.

However, it is also important to realize that in pluralistic societies such as Angola,
Uganda, Sierra Leone, Liberia and many other African countries, not all treatments
are performed by traditional healers. Leaders and prophets of churches and religious
denominations may also organize religious services and special rituals in order to
reintegrate FAC. In Sierra Leone, for example, some FAC say they need spiritual
cleansing to rid themselves of the evil spirits that have entered them during conflict.
However, other FAC see themselves as Christians and do not want to participate in
local spiritual rituals. It is important, then, to avoid a ‘one size fits all’ approach based
on simplistic portrayals of local culture. It is particularly important to avoid static
conceptions of culture, because culture is fluid, dynamic, and constantly changing.
(Shanahan, 2008:3-5).
Honwana (1998:38) cites the example of Gil, a boy from Huambo in Angola, who was in the Angola Armed Forces (government army) and went to the hospital because he fell ill but could not be cured. Subsequently he went to see a prophet. The prophet cooked rice with oil and salt and offered it to the gods and dished it up on a plate that was kept inside the church overnight. If the food was untouched the next morning it would be perceived as a rejection of the offering by the gods and thus the impossibility to cure Gil. Gil was fortunate his offerings were accepted and the prophet began the treatment. He was administered medicine to drink and for bathing. The prophet held regular prayer sessions by putting her hands on his head and chest and uttering prayers. While no payment for these services was required, Gil nevertheless had to become a member of the church and stop smoking and drinking in order to maintain his health.

Such healing rituals are often perceived as having a pluralistic strategy; in other words FAC are perceived to undergo simultaneous healing methods such as 'traditional' rituals, church rituals and going to a hospital for treatment. In Angola the proliferation of independent churches, such as the Universal Church of God, the Assembly of God, and other churches which address healing in a more systematic way, contributes to the plurality with which people approach healing in the aftermath of war. (Honwana, 1998:90).

It is evident that culture and tradition play a pivotal role when it comes to reintegration of FAC. In this regard mental health professionals from diverse cultural backgrounds must help local people and traditional healers in dealing with distress and trauma in the community. (Barenbaum, et al., 2004:46). In order to provide culturally sensitive assessments and treatment, it is essential to understand cultural practices and to have local knowledge of the community. Mental health interventions in non-Western settings need to be combined with cultural norms, including spiritual or religious involvement, basic ontological beliefs and related issues such as personhood and social connectedness, community and illness. (Barenbaum, et al., 2004:46). A benefit of utilizing indigenous rituals in the reintegration process of FAC is that these are more readily available in the aftermath of war. In post-war situations health-care networks and facilities are normally broken down or limited, especially in
rural areas. Hence, traditional healing is often the most accessible and affordable

Indigenous practice is sustainable as the expertise is rooted within the community.
(Guyot, 2007:11) Indigenous rituals have the added benefit of being culturally
acceptable and familiar. It is also important to acknowledge traditional healers as key
community members, as they play a vital role in assisting the family and the
community to forgive and embrace the FAC. (Guyot, 2007:9).

However, Dyregrov, Gjestad and Raundalen (2002:138) point out that one should
nevertheless be cautious in becoming overly culture-relative. Some critics present
the limited extent of Western trauma understandings and highlight the fact that
cultures have their own healing mechanisms and further state that by introducing
Western approaches, healing mechanisms of the indigenous society may be at risk
of weakening. However, this respect for the culture overlooks some vital facts –
culture is not always right.

Traditional approaches may also be in need of modification. Some groups may
support traditional healing as well as other cultural practices in an uncritical manner,
ignoring the harm that may be done by engaging in particular kinds of cultural
practices. Dyregrov et al. (2002:138) hold that if negative aspects of cultural
institutions had not been challenged in the past, sexual and physical abuse and
exploitation of children would still have been practised worldwide. Women would
have no voting rights and trauma in children would still be denied. In the light of this it
can be suggested that the reintegration process of female abductees needs to
challenge cultural and traditional practices that oppress and discriminate women.

As postulated by McKay and Mazurana (2004:16), females are usually urged by
organizations and community leaders to resume traditional gender roles. Many times
the atrocities that they been exposed to pose a hindrance to marriage, family and
home life in accordance with the traditions of the Acholi society. In order to improve
the reintegration process for women in northern Uganda it can be suggested that the
status of girls needs to be improved in order to reduce gender discrimination which
still strongly dictates how women are expected to live their lives. (McKay &
Mazurana, 2004:19).
2.10 Conclusion

Chapter Two has provided an overview of conflict in Africa and its destructive and debilitating effects with the specific focus on the use of child soldiers. The conflict in northern Uganda between the LRA and the GoU has been discussed. The plight of female abductees and how their gendered experience differs from their male counterparts has been thoroughly explored. Moreover, the reasons for children becoming soldiers have been presented. The issues of stigma and ostracism have been outlined. The concept of empowerment and its importance to reintegration and post-conflict development have been explored. Furthermore, the reintegration process for former FAC has been explored in depth highlighting the importance of taking the individual's needs and socio-cultural contexts into account.
CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the overall research design and methodological considerations, and will again refer to the background, motivation and research problem, including the aim and objectives of the study. It also discusses extensively the method of sampling and the method of data collection – interviews – as well as data analysis and interpretation. Ways to ensure the credibility of the research, ethical considerations, and limitations of the research study are also outlined.

This study explores particularly the reintegration process involved for former female child soldiers – or the newly introduced term, ‘formerly abducted children’ (FAC) – in Gulu District in northern Uganda. The conflict in northern Uganda has taken its toll on the country for over two decades and while now in a time of slowly stabilizing peace, this region still faces a myriad of challenges (Kabahesi, 2009:19), including the problem of how to reintegrate the many thousands of FAC. There have been very few attempts to explore the experiences and trials of female FAC upon returning to their communities and as a result, very little is known about female FAC’s perceptions when it comes to their reintegration. Hence, this study has the potential to provide a unique contribution when it comes to the research about and documentation of female FAC.

There are numerous NGOs that have provided reintegration programmes for FAC in northern Uganda. Mrs Rosalba Owya, the Director of Peoples Voice for Peace (PVP), was approached by the researcher in order to gain access to participants in this study. As discussed previously, PVP is a NGO formed to address some of the issues faced by women exposed to armed conflict and so deals specifically with female FACs. All the participants in this study have passed through the reception centres provided by Gulu Support the Children Organization (GUSCO) or World Vision (WV) and underwent reintegration programmes provided by Empowering Hands (EH) and People’s Voice for Peace (PVP).
3.2 The Aim and Objectives of the Research Study

The aim of this study is to explore female FAC’s perceptions of their reintegration into the communities of Gulu District, northern Uganda.

The objectives are as follows:

3.2.1 To establish the extent to which these women perceive themselves as fully participating members of their communities in Gulu District, northern Uganda.

3.2.2 To establish the extent and the nature of the relationships these women have with their community.

3.2.3 To identify the potential challenges these women face when it comes to participation in the community.

3.2.4 To make recommendations for how the reintegration process for female FAC can be improved in northern Uganda.

3.3 Research Question

To what extent do female FAC in Gulu District, northern Uganda perceive themselves to be socially integrated?

3.4 Research Design and Methods

This section seeks to outline the research design and methodology. Findings in social research do not exist in a methodological vacuum. (Babbie & Mouton, 2007:72). Neuman (2006:50) postulates that “people often use theories without making them explicit or labelling them as such.” Theory can be defined as a “system of interconnected ideas that condense and organize knowledge about the social world.” (Neuman, 2006:50). The epistemological or theoretical framework of this study is a phenomenological approach which will be discussed in the following section.
3.4.1 Qualitative Research

A phenomenological approach to the study of female FAC’s perceptions refers to the individual’s perspectives on and experience of a particular phenomenon. (Neuman, 2006:55). “Phenomenology attempts to capture the lived experiences of people.” (Levers, Anderson, Boone, Cebula, Edger & Kuhn, 2008:6). This approach has the potential to provide subjective insights into the world of the participants. This may however entail subjectivity and may lead to biased conclusions. (Neuman, 2006:56).

The study is qualitative and follows an exploratory research approach. In qualitative research ‘soft data’ such as words, impressions, sentences and photos, is collected as opposed to the quantitative ‘hard data’ consisting of numbers and statistics. (Neuman, 2006:139). In qualitative research meanings and further understanding are causatively discovered as the research proceeds. Measures arise in an ad hoc manner, depending on the specific setting of the researcher, as opposed to the quantitative approach where measures are systematic and standardized.

Moreover, qualitative research seeks to provide a detailed account of “authentic interpretations that emerge in the natural flow of social life.” (Neuman, 2006:139). The advantage of this method of data collection is that it can provide in-depth information and insights into the problem at hand. (Hunter, 2005:12). In exploratory research an area that has not extensively been studied previously is considered. In this case an exploratory approach is appropriate, as the proposed study covers a relatively unknown phenomenon, that is former FAC’s subjective experiences with regard to their reintegration into society in Gulu District, northern Uganda.

This method of data collection gives a detailed account of the experiences of the few cases investigated and is based on the inductive method, which focuses on the specific in order to illuminate the general. (Neuman, 2006:52). Moreover, it aids the researcher when dealing with such research to concentrate on a few instances, which then enables a comprehensive in-depth understanding of the phenomenon at hand. (Hunter, 2005:12).
3.4.2 Sample and the Sampling Method

The purpose of qualitative research is to draw on relevant cases and events rather than a large representative sample. Hence, the researcher employs a non-probability sampling method, which is generally used in exploratory research. (Babbie & Mouton, 2006:71). Non-probability sampling refers to a sampling technique that selects only a part of a population, whilst probability sampling identifies all the elements of a population, and subsequently a random selection takes place. (O'Leary, 2010:34). The advantages of non-probability sampling are that it is less expensive and less time-consuming. (Hunter, 2005: 17). The type of non-probability sampling that was utilised is purposive sampling, which is a sampling technique that seeks to find a sample that is the most characteristic and representative of a population. (De Vos, Strydom, Fouche & Delport, 2006:202). When it is not desirable or feasible to utilize the whole population, purposive sampling is indeed highly applicable as it seeks to identify the most informative participants. (Neuman, 2003:213).

In purposive sampling the researcher chooses a particular group and/or place of study that is wanted for the specific research. (McNeill & Chapman, 2005: 50). Hence PVP, an NGO, and was approached as it deals specifically with female FAC and is situated in Gulu District, northern Uganda. The target population of this research was female former child soldiers who are now 21 years of age or older residing in Gulu District, northern Uganda. Another prerequisite is that these female FAC have been involved in some form of reintegration programme.

Leedy and Ormrod (2010:141) state that a sample size of between 5 and 25 respondents is commonly utilized in phenomenological research when conducting in-depth interviews or until saturation of information is reached. Saturation is reached when no new themes and concepts emerge from the research. (Babbie & Mouton, 2006: 288). Given this information, the sample size of the study consisted of 10 individuals.
3.4.3 Data Collection Method

In-depth, face to face interviews were carried out in order to elicit responses from female FAC in Gulu District, northern Uganda. According to Leedy and Ormroed (2010:141), lengthy interviews with participants who have direct experience with the phenomenon in question are commonly used in phenomenological research. Interviews can be defined as encounters between researchers and respondents where the respondent is asked questions relevant to the research topic. (May, 1993:91). Black and Champion (1976:354-356) add to this definition by stating that it entails a structured relationship between researcher and interviewee. Neuman (2006:305) differentiates between interviews and ordinary conversations as the former seek to elicit specific information based on pre-constructed questions.

Participation in this study was voluntary and a prior voluntary consent form was given to all participants (see Appendix V). The participants were informed of all the aspects of the study in a letter of participation (see Appendix VI), enabling the participants to make an informed decision related to their participation. The content and purpose of these forms were explained verbally to all participants as some of the participants were illiterate. An experienced translator was utilised in order to ensure that the returnees fully understood the content. The participants also had the opportunity to ask questions and clarify issues.

The interview schedule was based on four open-ended questions. Precautions were taken to ensure that the questions were well-structured and to avoid asking questions that could potentially ‘lead on’, therefore avoiding bias. (Yin, 2009:13). The questions are designed in such a way as to gain information about the interviewee’s experiences, feelings, beliefs and convictions. Tape recordings and transcripts were utilized in order to collect and interpret the data.

The interview schedule included the following questions:

- Can you tell me how it is to be a female former child soldier in your community?
- To what extent do you feel that you are now able to participate in your community?
• What are the factors that help or hinder you as a female former child soldier to become part of your community?

• In what way, if any, do you think the integration of female former child soldiers can be improved?

3.4.3.1 Planning the interviews

Comprehensive preparations were made before the interviews were conducted. Prior to the interviews the researcher carried out a review of the literature relevant to the field of study. Permission was sought from the Director of PVP, Mrs Rosalba Owya who performs the role of ‘gatekeeper’, which according to Neuman (2003: 536), is “a person in an official or unofficial role who controls access to a setting.”

Rosalba Owya, a well-known and trusted person in the community, enabled the researcher to build a much easier rapport with the interviewees and was readily available to offer assistance and advice if needed. The researcher was also assisted by a translator who was familiar with the local language and culture as well as with the area of Gulu District. In addition, the translator was given clear preparation before the interviews as well as debriefing at the end of each set of interviews. This was to ensure that the highest level of professionalism and integrity was upheld. The translator was instructed on the way the research was to be conducted. Responsibility, especially of upholding ethics during and following the completion of the study, was emphasised. Prior to conducting the interview every interviewee was again informed about the content of the interview and the aim of the research study so as to ensure that the participants were fully informed about the research study.

Consent was obtained from the participants prior to starting the interview. In order to capture as much data as possible all the information was recorded by using a tape-recorder. The interview was conducted in the Acholi language as the researcher felt that the participants might express themselves more freely in their mother tongue. A female translator was utilized throughout the interview so as to put the interviewees at ease and to avoid potential bias. The interviews were transcribed in Acholi and consequently translated into English by an experienced translator.
3.4.3.2 Closure

The closure phase of the interview process is an essential part of the interview. When the interview was completed, an ‘item-by-item’ review was carried out so as to assure that all the data was included. (Gary, Williamson, Karp & Dalphin, 2007: 141). The participants were informed prior to the interviews that there was no financial gain from taking part in the study. The participants were enthusiastic about the study and each one of them was very willing to participate. Some women even walked for 10 kilometres with their young babies to take part in the study. Subsequent to the interviews, the interviewees were asked if they had any concerns or if there was anything they wish to comment on. The women were, on the whole, positive at the end of the interviews. They pointed out that they felt that they had had the opportunity to voice concerns that they could not express in other circumstances. It did seem as if the participants were somewhat overexposed to research that had been conducted in previous instances, and were frustrated by the lack of any tangible results or progression. However, the researchers explained that the compiled findings were to be made available to them.

3.4.3.3 Data Analysis

The data analysis was conducted through thematic identification using Holloway and Wheeler’s (2001:181) adaptation of Giorgi’s steps. Neuman (2006:460) argues that “concept formation is an integral part of data analysis and begins during data collection.” Through conceptualization and organization of the data from the onset of the data collection, and the use of a well-structured coding system, it is possible to conceptualize themes and analytical categories. Coding refers to “the operations by which data is broken down, conceptualised and put back together in new ways.” (Strauss & Corbin, 1989:57).

The researcher identified the themes and concepts, and thence created categories to compound them. The volume of data from the transcriptions of the interviews was reduced as the researcher utilized a coding procedure to organize the information into themes, sub-themes and categories. (May, 2008:138).
3.5 Trustworthiness

In qualitative research, validity seeks to generate a balanced, fair and honest account of social life. According to Neuman (2003:185) validity refers to a “truthful [...] bridge between a construct and the data.” O’Leary (2010: 43) adds that in order to ensure the “true essence” of the research, the researcher needs to validate the data collected. Hence, validity is linked to “truth value” of the approaches and methods utilized in the research study. (Lincoln & Guba, 1985:290). Qualitative data is concerned with the subjective reality and world view of the participants, hence, in qualitative research one seeks to ensure trustworthiness rather than validity. In this regard, interviews can indeed be perceived as providing possibilities for the collection of trustworthy data of the everyday experiences of female FAC in Gulu District, northern Uganda. (Neuman, 2006:326).

In order to ensure trustworthiness and to avoid biased conclusions, the questions concern matters with which the interviewees are familiar and to which they can relate, in other words they will be relevant and comprehensible. Complicated terminology was avoided and concepts explained in order to ensure that the participants fully understood the questions. Trustworthiness consists of four subdomains: credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. (Lincoln & Guba, 1985:290).

3.5.1 Credibility

Credibility can be referred to as the truth value, meaning how accurately the findings reflect what has been disclosed in the interviews. (Lincoln & Guba, 1985:290). In order to ensure confirmability the responses were recorded verbatim, transcribed in Acholi and subsequently translated into English by an experienced translator.
3.5.2 Transferability

Transferability refers to the findings being applicable to another setting. (Lincoln & Guba, 1985:290). These challenges are met by clearly demonstrating how data collection and analysis was conducted and guided by concepts and models. The data was carefully and systematically collected. (Babbie & Mouton, 2006:271-275; De Vos et al., 2008:346). When looking at the experiences of female FAC in Gulu District generalizations can indeed be made. Hence, the experience of former female FAC in Gulu District is likely to echo the experiences of female FAC in northern Uganda and may also have parallels to the plight of female FAC in other African nations. In addition, the interview guide was designed in a manner that enhances a rich accurate identification and in-depth description of the phenomenon of the reintegration of female FAC.

3.5.3 Dependability

Within the qualitative realm of research, reliability refers to dependability. (De Vos et al. 2008:346) or consistency. (Neuman, 2006:196). This entails some kind of standardization or uniformity of the phenomenon at hand. In this regard it is crucial to apply the methods used for the research investigation consistently. (O'Leary, 2004:59). Initially it was planned that most of the interviews would be conducted in English; however as the research proceeded it was brought to the researcher’s attention that many of the participants were not proficient in English. It was then decided that all the interviews would be conducted in Acholi in order to enhance overall consistency of the measure. All the interviewees were therefore given the same opportunity to express themselves freely in their mother tongue.

3.5.4 Confirmability

Confirmability entails the confirmation of the findings by another researcher, thereby ensuring a peer check. In addition, gatekeeper Rosalba Owya was a well-known and trusted person within the community, which enabled rapport to be successfully established with the participants. This enabled the interviewees to feel comfortable and at ease throughout the course of the interviews, ensuring truthful answers which
enabled the trustworthiness of the study. Last but not least, the fact that the participants were ensured anonymity should not be overlooked when it comes to ensuring honest and unbiased answers. (Hunter, 2005:16).

3.6 Limitations

The fact that the researcher did not know Acholi constituted a language barrier. While this was alleviated by the use of an experienced translator it nevertheless restricted the researcher's control over the interview process. This was compensated for by an item-by-item review where the translator briefly translated what had been said throughout the interview. If the researcher thought it necessary, the interviewee was called back to answer any further questions for clarification.

Another limitation was that the women seemed to have been somewhat overexposed to researchers. As a result, there was a suspicion of the agenda of outsiders. Suspicion and mistrust may pose barriers to the data-gathering process. (Scharff, Mathews, Jackson, Hoffsuemmer, Martin, & Edwards, 2010:i). However, overcoming suspicion is a common challenge that researchers face in conflict settings and this was achieved by building trust and establishing rapport. This was facilitated by the gatekeeper, Rosalba Owya who, as mentioned, is a prominent and trusted person within the community. This enabled the interviewees to feel comfortable and at ease throughout the course of the interviews. Nevertheless, this does have the potential to create bias in the findings from the interviews.

3.7 Ethical Considerations

Researchers should abide by certain ethical principles and codes of conduct. Ethical guidelines are put in place to ensure that research is carried out in a morally acceptable manner. (Struwig & Stead, 2001:5). The researcher adhered to the ethical procedures of human research in accordance with the requirements provided by the NMMU. Clearance was granted by the University’s Ethics Committee and the researcher was presented with an approval letter (see Appendix VIII).
3.7.1 Informed Consent

Informed consent implies that all participants receive an accurate description of the research process, possible risks of participation, and what the information gathered will be used for. Given this information the participants were informed about all the aspects of the study. As recommended by Carson, Gilmore, Perry and Gronhaun (2001: 75) each interview started with an outline of the aim of the study in order to stress the importance of the research.

The participants were informed that the information would be disseminated within the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan Library in the form of a treatise and may be published in a scholarly journal. The interpreter was instructed to make use of simple language at all times taking into account that the majority of the interviewees lack formal education. Moreover, the ethical considerations and principles of confidentiality, privacy and anonymity, the possible benefits of the research as well as dissemination of findings were thoroughly explained.

3.7.2 Privacy, Anonymity and Confidentiality

In any research, it is crucial not to infringe on the participants’ right to privacy. When designing questions the researcher considered the importance of balancing the value of advancing knowledge against the value of non-interference in the lifestyle of the participants. The researcher feels that it is necessary to protect the privacy of the participants, as the population at hand may well be identified as vulnerable and marginalized.

The participants were ensured absolute anonymity and confidentiality. Confidentiality refers to keeping the research data safe. It implies that others are denied access and the data is only used for the study at hand. (Struwig & Stead, 2001:36). The participants were informed that their identity would not be revealed in any discussion, description or scientific publication. The findings will not be reported or published in a way that makes it possible to trace a specific participant.
3.7.3 Do No harm

It is crucial that the questions do not cause any unnecessary or irreversible harm to the participants. (Neuman, 2006:325). In this regard the questions were designed in a generic way that gained information about the interviewees’ present situation rather than evoking past trauma. The participants were debriefed by the researcher, who has a post-graduate degree in Psychology. Finally, the participants were informed that they have access to counselling by the staff of PVP.

3.7.4 Voluntary Participation

Coercion refers to compelling participants to take part in research. (Corey, Corey & Callanan, 2005:194). This stands in stark contrast to the individual's right to voluntary participation. (Struwig & Stead, 2001:356). Participation in the present study was completely voluntary. A prior voluntary consent form was given to the participants (see Appendix V). As some of the participants had limited ability to read and write, the content of the voluntary consent form was also explained verbally. The interviewees had the right to discontinue the interview at any time, and or decline to answer some questions and this was thoroughly explained. (O'Leary, 2010: 202).

3.8 Conclusion

This chapter discussed the research design and methodology of the study. Firstly, the aim and objectives of the study were presented. Secondly, the sampling method and method of data collection interviews were outlined. Finally, the data analysis and interpretation, the trustworthiness of qualitative research, ethical considerations, and the limitations of the research study were also discussed. Chapter Four follows in which the findings obtained from the data collected from the interviews are analyzed.
CHAPTER FOUR

PRESENTATION OF THE FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Introduction

The aim of the study is to explore female former child soldiers’ perceptions of their reintegration into the communities of Gulu District, northern Uganda. As stated in Chapter One the term child soldier is now replaced in the literature by the newly introduced term, ‘formerly abducted children’ (FAC). This term provides a more comprehensive description of the various roles children play in armed conflict such as soldier, mine sweeper, cook, porter, cleaner, forced wives. (Obika, 2010:2). For the purpose of this study the term child soldier and FAC are used interchangeably. All the interviews were conducted in Acholi as it was brought to the researcher’s attention that most of the interviewees were not fluent in English due the time spent in the ‘bush’ cut off from their communities. The researcher presents the findings and includes the participants’ verbatim responses to support and substantiate the data. Ten interviewees participated in this study and the following questions were posed:

- Can you tell me how it is to be a female former child soldier in your community?
- To what extent do you feel that you are now able to participate in your community?
- What are the factors that help or hinder you as a female former child soldier to become part of your community?
- In what way, if any, do you think the integration of female former child soldiers can be improved?

All the interviewees contributed to the data collection with their perceptions on reintegration, but some provided more comprehensive information in particular areas than others. During the data analysis process the women’s phenomenological experiences of their own reintegration process emerged from the data and are
grouped around themes, subthemes and categories. The overarching themes which emerged are as follows:

- Challenges with regards to reintegration back into society.
- Factors that facilitate reintegration.
- Suggestions on how reintegration processes can be improved.

When looking at the themes – challenges, facilitating factors and suggestions – it is also crucial to take on a holistic understanding of FAC reintegration into their communities. It is important not to view the challenges, facilitating factors and suggestions in isolation as they intersect, overlap and impact each other forming an interconnected system. For example, the suggestion of extended training opportunities emerged due to the challenges posed by lack of skills of returnees. The years spent in captivity had deprived many returnees of formal education as well as vocational training. The training provided by various NGOs for different vocations were identified as facilitating factors in the reintegration process, yet the study identified a need for extended on-going vocational training and formal education. The suggestions on improved reintegration processes were generated from the challenges returnees experienced and are illustrated below.

Figure 3: Overarching themes
Various subthemes have been identified within the key themes. Under the challenges theme the following subthemes emerged: stigmatization, lack of financial support, lack of skills, land issues, health issues, lack of communal responsibility, and lack of follow-up as displayed in Figure 4:

![Diagram of Challenges facing returnees]

**Figure 4: Challenges facing returnees**

All the subthemes are also interlinked and influence one another in various ways: discrimination hampers access to vocational training, resulting in lack of skills and in turn leading to lack of income and so on.

One of the subthemes which emerged from the theme of facilitating factors was the creation of collectives or so-called women's grassroots organizations. The collectives in the study are relatively small and informal organizations formed by the women at a grassroots level. These groups are organized around immediate socio-economic, political, or cultural needs. (Tasli, 2007:42-43). Collective women's groups enable women to pool social and material resources. These groups focus on women's empowerment, which is based on the idea that groups can be an effective
mechanism for helping women collectively overcome gender-based constraints and experience empowerment. (ACDIVOCA, 2012:1). Another subtheme was community dialog which has the potential to create consciousness and awareness amongst members of the community. Moreover, psycho-social support such as guidance and counselling was provided by NGOs and the women’s groups. In addition cultural practices and rituals, such as cleansing rituals and conflict resolution rituals, were identified as facilitating factors for reintegration. All these subthemes indicate factors that enhanced the reintegration process for these young women both upon return to the communities of origin and in the years that follow. These subthemes are as follows:

Figure 5: Facilitating factors for returnees

A recurring theme which emerged from the data were suggestions for improved reintegration. The interviewees themselves came up with suggestions based on what they felt was overlooked or inadequate in order for them to feel fully reintegrated into society. The subthemes which emerged from suggestions for improving reintegration were: follow-up assessments, cultural revitalization and communal responsibility, training, access to land, extended psycho-social support, access to health care. Many issues facing the returnees were gender specific, hence it is suggested that a gender specific approach to reintegration should be considered.
Suggestions on improved reintegration are closely related to challenges and facilitating factors. For instance, a facilitating factor for integration was cultural practices and rituals. However, this is not to say that these were provided adequately, hence a need to extend these practices was identified. As a consequence, a suggestion was made to further revitalize culture and communal responsibility in order to provide extended support and guidance for female FAC and to involve elders and traditional leaders in the community. These subthemes are illustrated in Figure 6:

![Figure 6: Suggestions for improved reintegration](image)

**Figure 6: Suggestions for improved reintegration**
4.2 Discussion of Themes and Subthemes

In this section an in-depth discussion of the themes and subthemes which emerged from the analysis of the data is provided. Although the women experienced considerable difficulties, especially upon return to their communities of origin, they also showed a remarkable strength to survive. They faced a harsh reality, nonetheless all showed a considerable level of resilience and agency. Resilience refers to “the ability to bounce back, it is a process which helps people to cope with the stress and hardship accompanied by a traumatic experience. It is influenced by a person’s inner strengths and external support structures. (International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), 2011:16).

Upon return some interviewees experienced welcoming attitudes from family and community members whilst they experienced rejection and ostracism from others. Similar findings were replicated in a study conducted by Annan et al., (2011:3) where it was found that:

*Women and girls are psychologically resilient [...] distress and difficulties are commonplace, but serious problems are concentrated in the minority. [...] These findings hold even for the longest serving females and those who were forcibly married or bore children.*

One of the interviewed women illustrates the prevalence of mixed attitudes upon return to the community of origin:

*Some people welcomed me and were very happy to see me because it was by God’s Grace that I managed to escape. But, others not, because their children did not come back.* (Interviewee, 1)

Nearly 66,000 children were abducted in northern Uganda by the LRA to serve in the fighting forces during the civil war that lasted for more than two decades (World Vision, 2007:1) and an estimated one-third of these are young girls. (Carlson & Mazurana, 2008:3). The vast abductions have had devastating effects for the abductees, their families and the broader society. Many community members are in despair and whole communities are disrupted due to the fact that their children did not return.
4.2.1 Challenges for Returnees

4.2.1.1 Stigmatization, Stereotyping and Prejudice

Stigmatization, stereotyping and prejudice constituted challenges to reintegration and were experienced by all of the interviewees. This was especially prevalent upon immediate return to the community of origin, however as time passed by it decreased. Similar findings were presented by Annan et al. (2011:xi): “Large numbers of youth report difficulties with their families and communities when they first return home from abduction, yet for most these problems lessen over time.” One of the participants explains that community members fear to socialize with her:

*Most people think [...] I can harm them because they say that I carry the spirits of those I killed. [...] I can beat and kill them so they avoid being close to me.* (Interviewee, 2)

Another young woman reported a similar experience:

*Elders pointed fingers at me, accusing me of having evil spirits in me and they would not allow me socialize with other people and children saying that the spirits I had could enter their children.* (Interviewee, 3)

She continues:

*Umm, they call us luneco (killers)! If you socialize with them, they can easily kill you!* (Interviewee, 3)

Traditional beliefs and superstition are an inherent part of the Ugandan society. The fear and belief that evil spirits had entered these women led community members to have prejudiced attitudes towards them. (Annan, 2008:50). One of the interviewees is blamed for the death of her husband although he passed away due to a medical condition.

*People point fingers at me saying she stayed in the bush, she is unfortunate, and has bad spirits in her that is why her husband died.* (Interviewee, 2)

Women who returned with children born in captivity report their hardships:

*Some [...] call me; cen (evil spirits) and they do not want my children to play with theirs.* (Interviewee, 8)

*Cen* is based on the belief that the evil spirits of persons you killed reside within you. This spiritual belief is not only harmful to the individual but to the family, neighbours
and the wider community and results in stigmatization of the individual. (Annan, Blattman & Horton, 2006:iv).

Another interviewee explains how some people in the community – even family – insult her and her children:

*It is very challenging especially when one comes back with children. Like in my case, I came back with two. It is very hard for people to accept them, even for my family members [...] My close relatives even throw insults at the children saying in latin paaduii which means you are the child of a rebel.* (Interviewee, 9)

The participants in the study experienced discrimination and rejection by their very own family members:

*People insult and point fingers at me saying that that girl came back from the bush. Even family members especially some of my uncles insult me.* (Interviewee, 5)

She reports that they treat her very badly and do not allow her to come close to the children in the community. She goes on to explain why the community does this:

*They think I have evil spirits and these spirits can blindfold me and I might end up struggling and killing the children.* (Interviewee, 5)

Another mother reports that she and her children are commonly made the scapegoats in the community and falsely accused of theft:

*If a neighbour loses a Jerrican (container for water), I and my children are the first to be accused.* (Interviewee, 9)

Within strongly patriarchal societies such as in northern Uganda, FAC are especially vulnerable, even more so the ones who return with children. A woman is traditionally dependent on her husband in order to sustain herself and her children. (Mckay & Mazurana, 2004:17). The women, especially the ones with children, report difficulties in finding a husband. The following quote illustrates this:

*We who returned from the bush are still young and would want to get married someday but there is no man here who wants to get someone like me with my children. The men do not like our children [...] me and the rest of the girls with the same experience cannot abandon our own children.* (Interviewee, 9)

Another interviewee has the following experience:
It is very hard to take care of all the children. Most of us who returned from the bush are very unfortunate. When we meet a man who wants to marry us, they first stay with us then [...] they abandon us. [...] It’s so painful for me. (Interviewee, 8)

The majority of girl soldiers have been abused sexually and the loss of virginity is perceived as defilement in the Ugandan society. A commander may take on many girls as wives. Many of these women return with children and this makes their reintegration and acceptance into the community even more difficult. Women and girls returning from armed groups are believed to be more ostracized than males, and in need of specialized assistance. (Kisulłe et al., 2013:97). The most vulnerable females, in this view, are the sexually abused and those who bore children as a result of this abuse. As a matter a fact there are many reports of how parents urge their daughters to stay with their husbands from the battlefield. What this means is that often the girls are compelled to stay with the same men that raped and abused them. (McKay & Mazurana, 2004:17).

In other cases the young mother who has been demobilized is forced to look after herself and her children with no or little support from the community. Some women see no other option than to turn to prostitution which results in these women becoming even more marginalized. (Commission of the European Communities, 2008:15). In the light of this it is evident how gender discrimination strongly affects the way women live their lives in northern Uganda. (McKay & Mazurana, 2004:17). In addition, the children born to rebels also suffer additional social stigmas and lack a sense of belonging as many times the identity of their father is unknown. (Badenoch, 2006:7).

I don’t know their father’s home, village or any member of their family. While in the bush, their father never disclosed this information for fear that when I [...] like others return, I could tell people about them and this would cause problems to their family and community. (Interviewee, 9)

A combination of factors is linked to the stigma that female returnees face upon return from captivity, namely superstitious beliefs (possessed by evil spirits), the stigma of rape and forceful impregnation. These all reduce the chances of their being able to marry. In war-torn areas such as northern Uganda marriage is commonly viewed as a survival strategy. Unmarried women with ‘fatherless’ children are especially vulnerable in northern Uganda as traditionally women are dependent on the men for access to resources and partaking in decision making. (Kisulłe et al.,
2013:97). The fact that they were exposed to sexual exploitation makes them vulnerable to further abuse and mistreatment by men. It is of utmost importance to address these issues in order to enable the women to take part and fully enjoy their rights in the community.

4.2.1.2 Lack of Skills

The years in the ‘bush’ have resulted in lost opportunities for these young women. On return they are commonly considered too old to return to school, or they are unable to do so as they have to find ways to fend for themselves and their children. They also express a concern for their children’s future.

4.2.1.2.1 Lack of Education

Post-conflict reconstruction becomes difficult due to the vast numbers of uneducated returnees (Fontana, 1997:51). In a study by Annan et al (2008:iv), it is reported that 20 per cent of female youth have received no formal education, and a third are unable to read and write. Forty-three per cent of women in northern Uganda reported complete illiteracy and 60 per cent say they are unable to read a book or newspaper. Women returning from captivity with children are three times less likely to return to school than those who do not conceive children in captivity and ten times less likely to return to school than girls who were never abducted. (Annan et al., 2008:vi). (see Appendix IX)

This study by Annan et al (2008:vi) also showed that the educational levels of abductees – especially long-term abductees – were lower than those of other young women. Similar findings are presented in this study as all the interviewees testified that the abduction had resulted in their inability to access the education system. An education expert working at the NGO Echo Bravo explains:

Those who grew old in abduction couldn’t fit into the average age of primary school when they returned [...] Abduction leads to disorientation in terms of your thinking, your education is affected. You are stigmatised and impoverished. (IDMC interview cited in: United Nations, 2011:22).
Neglect and lack of investment during the conflict have created major gaps in school infrastructure, classrooms, availability of teachers, and the provision of latrines, and water and sanitation facilities (UNPRAP, 2009:33). Many school buildings have been damaged or neglected during the conflict; some have been renovated but not all. Most rural schools in Gulu District lack teachers, desks and study material (United Nations, 2011:8).

Two generations of those who were abducted, and their children, are affected and many have been deprived of their right to education. (United Nations, 2011:4). Interestingly, in 2002 Uganda adopted Universal Primary Education (UPE) which in theory provided free primary school education (Adelman, Gilligan, & Lehrer, 2010:5), thereby theoretically fulfilling its obligations under international law. (United Nations, 2011:8). As postulated by Graca Machel:

*Education, and especially the completion of primary schooling, must be a high priority. For a former child soldier, education is more than a route to employment. Education also helps to normalize life and to develop an identity separate from that of the soldier.* (Machel, 1996:18).

In reality, many barriers continue to limit north Ugandans’ access to effective education. Despite the policy of free primary education, obligatory levies for school meals, uniforms and books make it hard, and sometimes impossible, for families to send their children to school. (United Nations, 2011:4). Particularly vulnerable groups, such as female FAC and their children, face additional obstacles to realising their right to education. (United Nations, 2011:5). Many female FAC are single mothers unable to go to school due to child-care responsibilities. (United Nations, 2011:22). The breakdown of the family, social structure and social cohesion have affected women-headed households in particular as there is no one to offer them assistance. (Owya, 2005:1). Female FAC and their children are left with no choice other than to leave school to engage in income-generating activities such as cultivating crops. (United Nations, 2011:17).

Many of the women in the study who returned with children expressed concerns about the future of their children and the possibility of their acquiring an education, and this is illustrated below:
Education is very expensive and I do not have the capacity to educate them (the children). (Interviewee, 8)

Education, from basic literacy and numeracy to more advanced skills, is crucial in the process of empowering communities and enhancing successful reintegration. (United Nations, 2011:4). Many of the interviewed women experienced frustration due to the fact that they were not on par with the educational level of their peers. The following illustrates how a returnee feels alienated from her peers due to her lack of education:

*My lost years in the bush [...] made me not finish my education. I really wanted to study [...] all my family members are educated. Even all my friends who remained at home completed their studies or are now at the university. This makes me feel left out. This is the most important thing that I feel I am missing.* (Interviewee, 9)

Noteworthy is the fact women in Ugandan society are commonly provided with fewer opportunities than their male counterparts. Hence, the educational level of Ugandan women generally tends to be lower than that of men. (Annan et al., 2008:vi). Another woman expresses the following concern with regard the future of her children and herself:

*If these children are left out without education, what future will they have? Like me, I can do petty things here and there to push them through primary but when they reach secondary level it becomes [...] hard. [...] If these children are not taken care of, [...] especially in future, will be very hard for not only them but us (the mothers) to cope as well.* (Interviewee, 9)

In a society which lacks public health care and social security the extended family and the children are expected to fend for the elders and sick. The interviewee points out that due to their dire situation their children have few opportunities. This creates a malignant cycle where economic difficulties and lack of opportunities are likely to be passed on from one generation to another. In this regard access to education is essential in developing communities and enabling community members to lead peaceful lives. (United Nations, 2011:5).

4.2.1.2.2 Lack of Marketable Vocational Training

Many participants of the study lacked marketable skills and hence an income. Gulu District in general is characterized by high unemployment. Hence, the challenges
faced by the interviewees are also commonly faced by other women in the area. Annan et al. (2010:1) point out that abduction has had little impact on economic activity and marketable skills; this is largely due to the lack of opportunities for women in general in the Ugandan society.

All the participants of the study received vocational training at the various reception centres predominantly in tailoring. Many of them pointed out that the training was not comprehensive enough:

_The training is not enough. I did not learn a lot. Even sewing some styles and fashion I do not know. Materials are not there and [...] how to get materials is the biggest problem._ (Interviewee, 9)

Training in tailoring seems to have been an affordable option but a too simplistic solution to a complex problem. The tailoring market is a saturated industry in Gulu District, leaving few opportunities for new tailors to enter the market. In a study conducted by Annan et al (2008:22) on 38 women residing in northern Uganda, nearly half received training in tailoring. Only a few received training in other professions such as catering, teaching, and brick-laying, as well as other skills such as weaving and auto repair. Worthy of note is that training in agriculture is not even mentioned amongst these vocational skills even though it is the most common source of income for Ugandans. The following illustrates the fact that training in tailoring is unlikely to provide a sustainable livelihood:

_Another challenge is that most of us girls who returned did the tailoring course and yet there are so many tailors in the market. For example, you find that those who did not experience what I went through in the bush are tailors and yet they have high level of education and have been sewing for long and have more skills than me. So, if you compare them with me who wasted ten years in the bush, you find that I cannot compete in the market. That is our biggest challenge. Umm, even so, when I get clothes to sew, some people start saying that; ‘ah, she is a returnee from the bush and she will spoil your clothes she cannot sew well, don’t take her! Even if she sews well,’ (breathing heavily), this makes me and others like me lose customers._ (Interviewee, 10)

Though all the interviewees in this study received training in tailoring, most of them are not working in this field. Actually many of the interviewees were given tailoring machinery, which they ended up selling. This is indicative of a need for better assessments when it comes to ascertaining the vocational needs of these young women.
However, there was a divergence in perceptions when it comes whether or not these women perceive their skills as marketable which highlights the individual difference in vocational needs. Some of the participants claimed that the training had indeed been very useful. One interviewee states:

*I am a tailor, I sew uniforms for school-going children especially when they are about to go back to school. And, also for different people especially when big days are approaching like; Easter, Independence, Christmas.* (Interviewee, 6)

Another woman tells the following success story:

*When people bring their clothes for sewing, they inform others about the services I offer. And, when I make a nice style, almost everyone comes asking for this particular style. This has widened my customer base and helped me know different people in the community.* (Interviewee, 7)

One can conclude that the tailoring training was indeed useful for some of the interviewees who were well-equipped for the competitive tailoring market, but the majority of them did not share this experience. The vocational skills programmes therefore yielded mixed results in equipping returnees with the necessary skills due to their limited scope.

4.2.1.3 Lack of Financial Support

In Uganda nine million people live below the poverty line, in other words they survive on less the 1 US dollar a day. In northern Uganda 72.5 per cent of the population lives below the poverty line compared to the national average of 31 per cent. (UNPRAP, 2009:37) In a study by Annan et al. (2008:iv) unemployment and poverty are reported to be widespread amongst young Ugandan women – most work less than two days a week and earn less 1,250 Uganda shillings or 0.75 US dollar a day. It is also reported that employment amongst female FAC “is moderately lower than that of non-abductees, although daily wages are little different.” (Annan et al., 2008:vi).

All of the interviewees expressed the lack of material support as major challenge to reintegration back into society. Burton (1989:159) asserts that societies are transformed when “fundamental social and political changes are made to correct
inequities and injustice to provide all groups with their fundamental human needs.” In this regard the material aspects in relation to one’s basic needs cannot be overlooked. The following quote illustrates this:

As a member of a given society or community, one should have some money or source of income. But I have nothing. This hinders me from being part of the community. (Interviewee, 1)

The same interviewee continues:

I need the money to improve my life [...] feed my family. (Interviewee, 1)

Again, for the women who returned with children the situation seems to be even more challenging. Another interviewee expresses the following concern:

My challenge on my side is concerning my children. How to cater for them [...] These children we came back with. [...] me like others [...] do not have the capacity. (Interviewee, 10)

4.2.1.4 Land Issues

The lack of land ownership is an issue not only for women worldwide but also for those in Africa. Women own one per cent of the land in Africa yet they are responsible for the production of 80 per cent of the food. (Pionetti, 2011:1). To enable women to gain access and land ownership rights is perceived as a crucial step towards “enhancing food and nutrition security, and reducing poverty. Having control over land would also strengthen their position [...] and promote other social and economic rights. Yet despite supportive laws in many countries, women often face discrimination.” (New Agriculturist, 2010:1).

In Uganda unequal access to land is one of the most significant forms of economic inequality between men and women. Women provide 90 per cent of all agricultural labour involved in producing food in Uganda, yet it is uncommon for them to own land, even though in 1995 the Ugandan Government passed laws for land ownership that ensure equal access to land regardless of gender. This is based on a clause of co-ownership of the matrimonial home in the Land Act. (New Agriculturist, 2010:1).
Although, the same Land Ownership Act supports the notion of customary law this does not imply that the customary law supersedes national law. In reality, the relationship between customary law and the formal legal system is ambiguous, complicating the settling of disputes. (International Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC), 2012:28).

Between 80 and 93 per cent of the land in Uganda is estimated to be under the customary tenure system. Moreover, the majority of land in northern Uganda does not have registered boundaries. (IMDC, 2010:1). Many landowners do not have deeds recognising their ownership rights. Rights and responsibilities that derive from communal ownership are shared among various members of the clan according to traditional practices. Consequently, there are considerable challenges for the 1.8 million previously displaced people who are in the process of rebuilding their lives. (IDMC, 2010:1) in terms of distribution of land as well as where to draw the boundaries. (Uganda humanitarian profile, 2012:3). Usually, the head of the clan or family, the 'custodian', has the responsibility to look after each member's land rights and to allocate land. Under this system, disputes are heard and settled by clan elders. (Kisuule et al., 2013:97).

The land dispute resolution processes include clan elders, magistrates’ courts and local councils. These mechanisms are often overwhelmed by the large number of returnees and sometimes accused of being biased and favouring customary patriarchal rites of land ownership. (IDMC, 2010:2; Ugandan humanitarian profile, 2012:4). Apart from traditional institutions, several mechanisms have been set up to solve land disputes. Local councils and courts exist at different levels and they are the first places where land disputes can be heard. They function in parallel with customary institutions. Ruling institutions do not function well in rural areas. They are generally underfunded and are reported often to be corrupt and overloaded with cases. Bringing one’s dispute to court is in most cases not a reasonable option because the court is generally far away and the process is too costly. (IDMC, 2012:29).

The lack of access to land posed a considerable challenge to many of the women that partook in the study. One of the interviewees expressed the following concern with regards to children born in captivity:
If only they (the children) have a place they call their own, they could do petty things (odd jobs) here and there to [...] further their education. [...] They feel they do not belong anywhere they feel neglected by everybody [...] So if they have land, however small it would be, they will never fail to survive. (Interviewee, 9)

Another participant of the study explains how relatives are unwilling to give them and their children access to land. This quote by a former female child soldier clearly illustrates this:

Some relatives do not like my children especially with the current situation of land grabbing and wrangles. If you are a nephew or niece, they do not allocate land for you and this makes me feel bad because they are my children and I cannot abandon them. If possible, if they could listen to our voice, that is we, the girls who came back from the bush with children, and allocate for us land where we and children like mine can live, then we could start our lives all over again. (Interviewee, 10)

The women in the study are responsible for providing for their households, therefore their access to land for food production is vital for the survival of the entire household. The problem is that the existing law on co-ownership of the matrimonial home in the Land Act is actually not being used. The traditional law is superseding this law in practice, and in accordance with patrilineal rites, land is traditionally not inherited by women. The UN Security Council reports that many women “continue to be chased away from their homes with only the clothes on their backs and sometimes with small children. (Global Network of Women Peace-builders (GNWP), 2012:127). Many female FAC and their children are especially marginalized as these households are commonly women-headed and the child is ‘fatherless’. (Kisuule et al., 2013:97).

4.2.1.5 Health Issues

Challenges in the public health system affect northern Uganda disproportionately. Health services have been disrupted because of conflict, insecurity, destruction, neglect and displacement. Public health service delivery is challenged in Gulu due to a combination of factors, including low government budget allocation to the health sector of only 9.6 per cent of the total health budget. The available clinics are understaffed, the staff lacks training and there is lack of medicines. (UNPRAP, 2009:27).
The Infant Mortality Rate (IMR) and the under-five mortality rate for IDPs in northern Uganda are respectively 123 and 200 per 1,000 live births, as compared to national averages of 76 and 137 respectively. The general IMR in the northern region is 105 per 1,000 live births and the maternal mortality ratio is 750 per 100,000 live births. The HIV prevalence rate in northern Uganda is 8.2 per cent, which is much higher than the national average of 6.4 per cent. (UNPRAP, 2009:27). In Gulu district the HIV percentage is 11.9 per cent. (Integrated regional information networks (IRIN) 2011:1). Women are especially at risk with regards to becoming infected by HIV. (Daily Monitor, 2012:1). In addition tuberculosis is reported to be widespread. In a study by Annan et al., (2008:viii) it was reported that tuberculosis (TB) was the most reported illness amongst women in northern Uganda.

The health of many of the participants in the study was affected adversely during the time they spent in captivity. The harsh living conditions in the bush and dire poverty and lack of nutrition resulted in poor health. In addition the sexual and physical abuse they had to endure also resulted in physical disabilities and other issues linked to their reproductive health. Women have also been disfigured through the atrocities carried out in this region, such as the cutting of facial and other body parts, gunshots and landmine injuries. (Liebling-Kalifani, Ojiambo-Ochieng, Marshall, Were-Oguttu, Musisi & Kinyanda, 2008:175). Many of these women have been infected with sexually transmitted infections such HIV/Aids, and are left with serious untreated gynaecological and reproductive issues. (Liebling-Kalifani, et al., 2008:186).

The majority of women fail to access medical treatment due to a combination of factors including lack of funding, lack of accessible health care facilities and the stigma of rape within the Acholi cultural context. (Liebling-Kalifani et al., 2008:186). Some of the interviewees still have wounds and disabilities from the war which have yet not been attended to. Many returnees are in need of specialist surgery and medical treatment in order to become fully functioning members of society.

This is the story of one of the interviewees:

You also find that some former female abductees like me have health problems. Some of us have scars from bullets during the war and it needs operation. We who came back from the bush need medical intervention. (Interviewee, 10)
Another returnee testifies how a disability due to the physical abuse she suffered whilst in captivity has significantly impaired her life:

_Honestly, life is hard. I cannot do anything. My hands were beaten and my bones broke when I was in the bush because I was too young to carry heavy loads. Empowering Hands took me to the Gulu Independent hospital for treatment but they, the hospital said they could not operate me. Instead they referred me to Mulago (in Kampala the capital). Due to financial constraints, I did not go. I feel pain and the bones have continued to grow out._ (Interviewee, 2)

The fact that many women suffered from serious conditions which are untreated poses a considerable challenge to their reintegration. Hence it is crucial to address these issues in order to enable these women to become self-sufficient members of society.

A combination of factors has contributed to the women’s poor health status in Gulu District. In the report _Bearing Witness_, Murungi (2011:12) points out that early and frequent pregnancies, sexually transmitted infections (STIs), HIV/Aids, prolonged sexual, physical and psychological abuse, malnutrition and poverty are some of the reasons for women’s poor health.

4.2.1.6 Lack of Follow-up on the Success of Reintegration

Reintegration is a long-term process and the long-term goal is to facilitate financial independence and acceptance by community members and leaders. In this regard it is important to bridge the gap between the short-term relief gap and long-term development concerns. (Özerdem & Podder, 2008:7) However, the findings of the study indicated a lack of follow-up assessments and evaluation. This is a crucial aspect of assessing the long-term success of reintegration and a requirement for achieving successful reintegration. The following quote provided by one of the interviewees illustrates this:

_When I rejoined my family members, there used to be home visits to assess our involvement in the community and how we were coping but this lasted for only one year. If this could continue, it would make it easy for organizations and the Government to identify the existing gaps and hence, think of ways to address them._ (Interviewee, 1)
The interventions by many NGOs and humanitarian actors in post-conflict settings fall short due to the premature downscaling and closure of humanitarian activities. This is particularly prevalent in Gulu District and also poses a threat to lasting solutions and long-term successful reintegration. (IDMC, 2012:10). The lack of follow-up and the short-term focus pose a considerable challenge to successful reintegration and sustainable peace.

4.2.1.7 Lack of Communal Responsibility

The abductions and displacement have had devastating consequences for the family structures and the social fabric of society. (McKay & Mazurana, 2006:28). It is believed that almost 95 per cent of the population were displaced and the vast number of abductions of children in northern Uganda has resulted lack of respect for traditions due to social values and moral order falling apart. (IDMC, 2012:4). This has ultimately resulted in unmet responsibilities, increased crime, and high rates of drug consumption. In addition, the family structure has been increasingly disrupted due to the large number of orphans in the community and to domestic violence. (McKay & Mazurana, 2006:28). This is the testimony of one of the returnees and how she feels about the lack of communal responsibility:

*Before the war, everyone was looked after by someone in the community but this was lost during the war. If this culture could be re-introduced, it would help so many people like me.* (Interviewee, 4)

It is also reported that the authority of and respect for the elders has weakened drastically. The elders are traditionally perceived as the glue that holds communities together and as those who offer the wisdom and guidance for the younger generations. (IDMC, 2012:4). They also perform cleansing rituals discussed in the next section.
4.2.2 Facilitating Factors for Returnees

Amongst the factors that facilitated integration for these young women were the strengths that came from providing each other with support through the creation of collective groups, community dialogue, psycho-social support, cultural practices and rituals.

4.2.2.1 Collective Women’s Groups

The women in the study pointed out that the social support provided by various collectives or so-called grassroots women’s groups created by NGOs, such as PVP and EH were particularly successful in facilitating reintegration. Strength does come in numbers or as postulated by Rowlands (1995:103) “individuals work together in order to achieve a more extensive impact than each could have had alone.” This leads to what can be referred to as collective empowerment. Collective empowerment is accomplished by means of the collective action of a group. Rowlands (1997:115-116) also states that collective groups provide a sense of collective agency, self-organization and management, group identity and group dignity. Here, agency refers to the capacity to make choices and act upon them. Self-organization implies the ability to organize in a purposeful manner. Group identity is the shared sense of belonging to a group, while group dignity refers to a sense of self-worth and respect by virtue of group membership. This quote from one of the female returnees illustrates this:

*Being in the group makes me feel valued and by sharing experiences, I understand that there are also some people who had almost the same experience as I had during the war.* (Interviewee, 5)

The former female abductees that participated in the study pointed out that to network with others and to share similar experiences and challenges were especially helpful. It made them realize that they were not alone in their plight, by providing them with a space where they were not alienated or ostracized. These groups can also be perceived as the catalysts of a transformation starting at local level. They take a bottom-up approach to empowerment as these women’s groups support the idea that change must come from below. (Tasli, 2007:42-43).
4.2.2.1.1 Income-Generating Self-help Groups

These collective women or grass-root women’s groups have brought about some improvements in the lives of their members, especially in terms of meeting their practical gender-based needs. Collective action promotes women’s livelihoods and empowerment. The creation of collective groups serves an important role when it comes to overcoming problems linked to limited resources and marginalization in society. (Pionetti, 2011:9). These collective capabilities create a platform for people to mobilize and organize to solve problems themselves. (Word Bank, 2002:12).

EH and PVP initiated the creation of income-generating support groups and self-help projects. (Oywa, 2005:3). Thousands of women organized into groups and engaged in sustainable economic activities such as buying and selling groceries, vegetables and second-hand clothes as well as fishing, cultivating and farming. All the interviewees in the study found these groups very helpful. This is the story of one of the interviewees illustrating the benefits of income-generating self-help groups:

*I can start up income-generating activities like rearing goats, among others so as to improve our lives and that of our children. With the profits, I can buy basic needs like food, soap and paying medical bills.* (Interviewee, 1)

Being able to pool labour, resources and assets assists women to overcome gender-specific barriers and particularly marginalization in times of poverty. This kind of investment has enabled many to meet their basic requirements and support their children in school. (Owya, 2005:3). The ability to increase their income and invest in their families and communities will then help to improve their families’ health and well-being. (Global Hands, 2013:1). Pionetti (2011:2) points out that the potential benefits of collective action are around production and marketing. This allows group members to specialize in certain skills, and to access knowledge and resources. When resources are pooled the ability to manage risk and unanticipated costs is also strengthened. (Pionetti, 2011:2).

4.2.2.1.2 Dance, Drama and Singing

All of the participants pointed out how participating in groups involved in drama, dance and singing was particularly useful, a source of strength and a way of avoiding
recurring traumatic thoughts. To gather and to socialize through dance, music and drama conveys a message of peaceful interaction with peers and the wider community. Recreational activities build and rebuild relationships with family and community members. (ICRC, 2011:11). In addition they facilitate mutual acceptance, highlighting the positive contribution these individuals make to the community. (ICRC, 2011:13).

One of the participants explains how participating in these activities assists her to relate to others in the community:

*I love dancing, playing and making jokes with all categories of people, be it children or adults.* (Interviewee, 8)

She goes on state that participating in these activities put her mind at ease:

*Participating in these activities makes me forget my problems and the bad things that happened in the past.* (Interviewee, 8)

A similar experience on the relief from recurrent thoughts about the traumas of the past was shared by another participant of the study. The following quote illustrates this:

*I can sing very well. It (to sing) erases bad thoughts.* (Interviewee, 2)

Another female FAC explained how her dance and drama group has enabled her and other community members to take part and reach out to the wider community:

*The dance and drama group initially constituted of formerly abducted persons but later even those who did not stay in the bush joined [...] Together with the group members, we act and inform people about our situation, the way we feel and how we would want people to treat us.* (Interviewee, 1)

This is an example of how a group which initially consisted of abductees came to comprise women from the wider community. This non-discriminatory approach indicates high levels of reintegration and the acknowledgement that all women in the community are indeed sharing similar challenges and that they can draw on the strengths and resources of each other. As a matter a fact it is believed that programmes that are more inclusive are more effective when it comes to reintegration. (ICRC, 2011:14).
Drama, dance and singing as a medium of communication are closely related to the subtheme of this section, namely community dialogue. As postulated by the Director of PVP, Mrs Oywa, “peace can only be achieved through dialogue.” (Oywa, 2005:3). Community dialogue has the potential to change consciousness and raise awareness amongst members of the community. From a conflict management perspective community dialogue can be perceived as a form of 'transformative mediation'. Transformative mediation is designed to change the awareness and the manner in which people relate to one another. (Bush & Folger, 1994:56).

One interviewee explains how community dialogue has enabled positive change and created consciousness in the community:

*Community dialogue involves all members of the community. Through dialogue we share and exchange ideas with one another which brings positive change to me and other members in the community.* (Interviewee 1)

The inclusive approach is instrumental in community dialogue and enhances information sharing and relationship building at all levels of the community. To involve leaders – men and women of the community who represent and guide political, civic, and religious sectors – is important. Leaders play an important role in the flow of information within a community and their involvement can add greatly to the overall success. In particular, leaders influence the public, help pass the message on, and have the power and authority to bring about change. (Bahir, 2010:8).

Greater interaction between individuals in the community allows new relationships to be established or existing ones to be strengthened. (Bahir, 2010:8). The establishment of relationships is an important aspect of conflict transformation. As postulated by Dukes (1999:48), relationship building is to take place on all levels of society involving individuals, relationships, small and large social systems, in order for successful reintegration to take place. Community dialogue enhances reintegration. Social reintegration can be described as the process whereby former female abductees and their children perceive themselves to be a part of and accepted by the community and the wider society. (Mashike & Makalobe, 2003:25).
To make use of radio shows is indeed a useful tool in disseminating information to a large audience as a tool for community dialogue. In a report by the USAID Uganda it is pointed out that a radio is available in many households in the Acholi region. (USAID, 2007:32).

Another abductee points out how radio talk-shows, in particular, have been helpful in enhancing community reintegration and developing an empathetic understanding in order to overcome prejudice, stigma and stereotyping in the wider community:

Through dialogue, one gets to know how others feel about a given situation and that those who were in the bush are also human beings like them. We did not join the rebels willingly but rather were forced. So they need to understand us. (Interviewee, 3)

Another quote illustrates how community dialogue through radio talk-shows has been particular useful when it comes to enhancing understanding and community acceptance:

Life used to be very hard due to prejudice and stigma but with the continued radio talk-shows and sensitization of community members about the dangers of prejudice, stigmatization, and stereotype amongst others, this made most people realize their mistakes and made them change their actions. (Interviewee, 1)

The word sensitize refers to an attempt to make oneself or others aware of and responsive to certain ideas, events, situations, or phenomenon. (Business Directory, 2013:1). For the purpose of this paper sensitizing will be regarded as informing and sharing with others in order to make them become aware and develop an understanding of the plight of FAC.

Awareness raising can also be referred to as consciousness raising, and aims at developing a critical consciousness in women who are enabled to “move from a position of unquestioning acceptance of the social order to a critical perspective on it.” (Kabeer, 2001:25). Awareness raising or sensitization seeks to break social, superstitious and other barriers among the community through sharing information and dialogue. As one overcomes these barriers, communities are able to express themselves more freely, both individually and collectively. This is also likely to result in change in the community as a whole when it comes to attitudes and behaviour. (Bahir, 2010:8).
4.2.2.3 Psycho-Social Support

Psycho-social programmes in the post-conflict context seek to strengthen resilience and alleviate suffering, by creating increasing levels of trust and tolerance. (ICRC, 2015:15). “Resilience is not something some people have and others do not […] It is a process determined by people’s inner strengths and external support structures.” (ICRC, 2015:6).

When returnees arrived back from life in captivity the reception centres such as WV and GUSCO and other NGOs such as EH and PVP provided psycho-social support and counselling for returnees. The following quote illustrates one returnee’s experience of the counselling and how it has assisted her to cope with day-to-day life challenges:

The counselling I received while at the rehabilitation centre and training by Empowering Hands has enabled me to gain courage to cope with life’s challenges … and how to handle different personalities in the community. Now, I feel even if someone says anything bad about me, considering what I went through while in the bush, I know how to handle it. For example, when one, calls me Kony, meaning rebel, I welcome it. Sometimes I keep quiet and ignore them but if they persist, I accept because I know deep down my heart I did not join the rebels willingly. (Interviewee, 9)

In this case the counselling has empowered this young woman to handle on-going issues in the community such as stigmatization and ostracism. Moreover, it has also enabled her to reach insights free of self-blame and focusing on self-worth and growth. The psycho-social support has enhanced the well-being of the interviewees in the study considerably. Well-being is described by Annan et al. (2008:48) as an individual’s thoughts and feelings and their relationships with family and the community. An even more positive picture is portrayed by the following interviewee:

After I received counselling and training by Empowering Hands, I realized that I can socialize freely with members in the community. (Interviewee, 1)

Another interviewee explains how the training and counselling she received has enabled her to give back to the community and to counsel others. The gain is two-fold in that it not only heals oneself but also the wider community:

I got counselling and training and would in turn counsel traumatized members of the community. (Interviewee, 7)
Another participant of the study points out that the nature of the training she received from EH was very useful:

*I received training on reconciliation and forgiveness. This helped me to stand in the gap. For example, when someone calls me or other returnees names – Aduui, Cen (possessed by evil spirits) – I try to make them understand we didn’t want to go to the bush but we were forced against our will. By telling the truth, I gained courage to socialize and interact with other members of the community.* (Interviewee, 6)

One can indeed conclude that the participants of the study found the psycho-social support they received useful in contributing to healing both the self and the broader community. Counselling seems to have been an important tool towards self-growth and self-restoration as it equipped these women with the skills to assert their rights and to look at themselves from an empowered perspective. According to the World Bank (2013:1) empowerment can be defined as the process of enhancing the capacity of individuals or groups to make decisions and to transform those decisions into desired actions and outcomes. “In essence the aim of empowerment is self-determined change.” (World Bank, 2013:1). This enabled these former female FAC to become active agents of change in their own lives.

4.2.2.4 Cultural Practices and Rituals

Acholiland in northern Uganda is a region very rich in cultural traditional rituals. Many of these rituals have the potential to heal, purify, reconcile and facilitate the process of returning to the community. This also ensures harmony between the individual, the community and their ancestors. (Mæland, 2010:5). Given this information, cultural practices and rituals play a central role in conflict transformation and thus in the reintegration processes.

Among the Acholi, reconciliation takes preference over revenge, and amnesty and truth telling are much more acceptable than condemning the guilty. (Allen, 2007:149). There are various rituals that play an important role in conflict transformation and reintegration. *Mato oput* involves the perpetrator and the family of the bereaved sharing a drink which is a mixture made from the blood of a sacrificed sheep and a bitter root. This is to show that the parties have overcome the dispute and reached an agreement about compensation. Traditionally this was done by
intermarriage and the offspring was to symbolize or replace the deceased. (Allen, 2007:147-148).

In terms of this study the most common ritual for the girls and young women upon return from captivity is stepping on an egg, nyono tong weno, or cleansing of the land, moyo cer. These rituals are designed to ‘cleanse’ them from evil spirits. They also serve as a reuniting of the returnees with their families of origin, as they mark the transition from the life in captivity to living with their families of origin. These ceremonies commonly include the participation of parents, community members and elders within the clan. Clan and tribal chiefs may also participate. (Mæland, 2010:6). Carzon & Mazurana (2008:62) report that these rituals may in some cases result in “a sense of relief and alleviated notions of guilt on the part of returnee women and girls.”

The benefits of cleansing rituals are twofold, erasing the individual’s sense of guilt as well as enhancing community acceptance. It is evident that these traditional rituals play an important role in the success of social reintegration.

4.2.3 Suggestions for Improved Reintegration

The third overarching theme which emerged from the data collected throughout the interviews related to suggestions on how reintegration for female FAC can be improved. The women who took part in the study generated suggestions themselves on how they could be reintegrated more fully. They provided suggestions on how to overcome the challenges they faced when it came to their reintegration. In this regard suggestions and challenges are closely related. Suggestions also link to facilitating factors, as many of these, such as training, were indeed helpful to reintegration, albeit provided inadequately. Hence, extended provision of these emerged as a suggestion. Recurring subthemes generated from the findings were: the need for follow-up assessments, cultural revitalization, communal responsibility, training, access to land, extended psycho-social support and health care and a gendered approach.
4.2.3.1 Follow-up Assessments

In order to find ways of improving and enhancing reintegration it is crucial to assess the success of reintegration. The findings of the study indicated a lack of follow-up when the returnees arrive in the community of origin. An interviewee who believes that continuous follow-up plays a vital role in reintegration explained as follows:

_The most important thing to do is constant follow-up of each of us to know of how we are, what we do in different areas in the villages._ (Interviewee. 1)

The Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) and the International Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) advise Uganda donors to sustain focus on northern Uganda. “Economy and development need to have reached a level where people have created sustainable solutions to their difficulties, otherwise there is a renewed risk for instability.” (International Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC), 2009:1) “Sustained commitment is required for some time to come to ensure that the progress made thus far becomes irreversible.” (IDMC, 2009, 2009:5).

Programmes and initiatives need to be based on identifying the long-term success and challenges of reintegration.

4.2.3.2 Cultural Revitalization and Communal Responsibility

The reintegration process needs to involve the returnees as well as the wider community. It was reported that social structures and community cohesion were eradicated by the adverse effects of the prolonged war in Gulu District. (McKay & Mazurana 2006:28; IDMC, 2012:4). Improving community cohesion and community responsibility is an important step towards enhancing reintegration. Community dialogue through drama, radio talk-shows and singing also proved to be an important tool for creating community cohesion and awareness. (Bahir, 2010:8). Given this information it can be suggested that these tools should be utilized on a larger scale by NGOs and humanitarian actors.

Another step in this process is that of cultural revitalization. It is important to restore traditional mechanisms in society in order to ensure successful reintegration for the female FAC, but also to aid conflict transformation in Gulu District at large. In the
study it was highlighted that not all returnees were given the opportunity to participate in cultural reintegration rituals. This is a story of one of the young women, who believes that she is possessed by spirits and wishes that she would be able to go through cleansing rituals:

*No one is willing to take the responsibility so the rituals can be performed. If rituals could be performed, then hopefully the remaining spirits could get out.* (Interviewee, 6)

The interviewee points out that she feels that no one is willing to assist her with cleansing rituals. Other interviewees describe similar situations with regards to lack of communal responsibility and how many traditional support mechanisms have been lost during the protracted conflict. It is crucial to draw on the strength of the community and to involve the elders as they play an important role traditionally in the Ugandan society.

A study by Allen (2007:150) reports that revitalizing the role of the traditional chiefs, Rwodi-mo, would play a vital role in sustaining and strengthening moral values and promoting harmony in the wider community. In light of this, working towards revitalizing their role and function seems to be essential for the successful integration of former abductees, as well as for the wellbeing of the community at large.

4.2.3.3 Extended Training

Based on the data collected in the study it is evident that there is a need for extended training. Training in this regard refers to both vocational and formal education. In a report from the Tokyo Conference which took place on 31 May 2013, it was stated that eradicating gender disparities in education, for example, will accelerate progress towards eliminating hunger and will improve child and maternal health, as educated women and girls are better able to make informed choices about family planning, nutrition, health, and education. (Tokyo conference, 2013:1). Given this information and based on the findings of the study, education and training play a crucial role in successful reintegration and creating opportunities for full participation. This is the story of one of the interviewees. She believes that education is likely to provide her with more opportunities in life:
First of all when you are educated, you can get a good and decent job, you can be self-employed and hence become independent and able to sustain your family. But if you are not at all educated, to find something to do (for a living) is very hard. (Interviewee, 10)

Education plays a pivotal role in successful recovery and reintegration as it equips people with the tools to rebuild their communities. (United Nations, 2011:4). Education in this regard encompasses formal education as well as vocational training. “Scholastic support, basic literacy and vocational training help to build a brighter future.” (ICRC, 2011:12).

The primary need of the female FAC in Gulu District may not necessarily be formal education, but rather training that can aid them in finding a livelihood. The majority of the women in the study pointed out that the vocational training they received, which was predominately tailoring, failed to generate an income due to the fact that the market was saturated. In light of this it seems that skills development by NGOs in the area was implemented without a thorough needs assessment having been carried out. Many of the women in the study expressed a need to acquire marketable skills, such as baking, catering, and administrative office work. Some training might be expensive and difficult to implement but, in order to provide meaningful skills which can generate an income, it is crucial that a wide range of training possibilities is made available to these female FAC. Being able to generate an income and become self-sufficient is not merely likely to put food on the table but also to increase these returnees’ self-esteem. “To make a positive contribution that the family and community will value increases acceptance, in turn leading to higher self-esteem.” (ICRC, 2011:12).

This is important for female FAC’s long-term well-being as it serves to improve perceptions of them in the community and reduces stigma and prejudice. To actively take part in society and to interact with others is crucial for their recovery and reintegration. (ICRC, 2011:12).

It can be suggested that the NGOs ought to provide these options and perhaps consider other options when it comes to vocational training. In the report *Children affected by armed conflict and other situations of violence* (2011:12) by the ICRC it is stated that FAC sometimes view training programmes as a short-term protective space rather than a long-term life plan. They may receive training in saturated
occupations such as tailors, or urban professions such as hairdressers, electricians or mechanics which may not be applicable in a rural setting. (ICRC, 2011:12). The primary economic activities underpinning traditional livelihoods in Uganda are agriculture and herding; other micro-businesses complement them. Thus agriculture and enterprise development should be central, not peripheral, to assistance.” (Annan et al., 2008:iix). However, the lack of access to land for female abductees constitutes a major challenge to their becoming self-sufficient farmers.

4.2.3.4 Access to Land

Ensuring women's equal access to agricultural resources and land is believed to have an immense impact on food security and overall economic growth. According to the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), if women had the same access to productive resources (such as land and crops) as men, they could increase yields on their farms by 20 to 30 per cent, raising total agricultural output in developing countries by 2.5 to 4 per cent. (Tokyo conference, 2013:1).

The fact that so many people were displaced – 95 per cent of the population in Gulu district – has given rise to considerable issues and disputes with regard to allocation of land. The means to resolve these disputes are limited. (IDMC, 2010:2). Even though the Ugandan Constitution supports equal access to land for both women and men, customary law based on patriarchal inheritance and ownership is widely practised and marginalizes women. Just over 30 per cent of households in northern Uganda are female headed compared to the national average of 26.9 per cent. (UNPRAP, 2009:35). Many of these women are at risk of being denied access to land by their relatives. (IDMC, 2010:2). In this case returnees and their children are especially vulnerable.

Access to land plays a central role in the reintegration process for female FAC. Many of them are left to fend for themselves and their children as their livelihoods depend on their ability to farm land and sell what they harvest. (IDMC, 2012:5). In order to accomplish successful reintegration it is crucial to ensure and implement inheritance of land based on gender equality. Women need to know their rights to own and inherit land. In addition they need to be empowered with the ability to exercise their
rights. It is reported that young women are reluctant to openly challenge traditional authority and senior members on land issues. (IDMC, 2012:29). In this regard it is also imperative to sensitize and create awareness in the wider community about women’s right to land ownership.

4.2.3.5 Extended Psycho-Social Support

Counselling was highlighted as one of the facilitating factors to integration. It was EH and PVP, in particular which provided counselling for the returnees; other NGOs such as GUSCO and WV fell short in this regard. The interviewees in the study found the psycho-social support they received useful towards healing themselves and the broader community. However a need for extended psycho-social support for returnees as well as the wider community was identified. One of the returnees indicates the importance of counselling for the returnee as well as for the community on an on-going basis:

*Some members in the community still say words that offend us and this makes us feel isolated and rejected. If both parties are continuously counselled, it will reduce tension between members in the community.* (Interviewee, 3)

4.2.3.6 Access to Health Care

Many women in the study reported adverse effects regarding their health status and are in dire need of medical treatment in order to become functioning members of society. The harsh living conditions, captivity, starvation and abuse have resulted in poor health. In addition, the sexual and physical abuse they had to endure also resulted in physical disabilities and other issues linked to their reproductive health. It is crucial to make health services available to these women in order for them to be able to fully participate in society and have the potential to become productive members of society. In a report from Annan et al. (2008:71) it is reported that serious war injuries prevent many “from performing basic tasks such as walking and running, working in their fields, or even standing up with ease. Chest and back injuries from carrying heavy loads are most common.”
It can be suggested in line with the UNPRAP report (2009:29-31) that there is need for a greater focus on the development of health facilities in northern Uganda. Many health facilities are largely inaccessible due to the fact that they are far away from rural villages. In a response to this it suggested that outreach/mobile clinics could provide support to under-served communities.

Community-based health initiatives need to be scaled up. This report highlights the need for extended training in basic safe health practices such hygiene and first aid. It is also crucial to provide support for increased community-based nutritional support and capacity-building for emergency nutrition response. This could be done by imparting relevant knowledge about nutrition to community members but also by supporting them in achieving a sustainable livelihood. (UNPRAP, 2009:30).

When it comes to HIV prevention and treatment, campaigns for safe practices and testing must be implemented at a local level. It is important to realize that women and girls are particularly at risk, hence the struggle against HIV/Aids cannot be separated from the struggle of equality for women and men. (UNPRAP, 2009:29-30). Finally, networking amongst community members, local health practitioners and national hospitals is crucial, as is the strengthening of referral services for those who need treatment, be it surgery, or treatment for TB, HIV/Aids or other diseases.

4.2.3.7 A Gender-based Approach to Reintegration

It was brought to the researcher’s attention that all women in Gulu District shared similar struggles regardless of whether they were formerly abducted or not. The struggle of reintegrating back into society is faced by the majority of women in this region as nearly 95 per cent of the population was displaced. The collective women’s groups, such as those initiated by EH and PVP, initially consisted just of returnees but later came to include all women in the community as they faced similar needs and challenges. Women in Gulu District, northern Uganda, are discriminated against and marginalized; hence opportunities are limited for all women. To involve all women regardless of returnee status also enhances reintegration and community acceptance of former abductees.
Given this information a gender-based all-inclusive approach is suggested rather than one which focuses on the plight of former FAC. When integrating gender perspectives into post-conflict reintegration the ultimate goal is gender equality in terms of equal opportunities for women and men. In this process it is crucial to be attentive to the specific needs of both women and men in order to achieve successful reintegration.

Tasli (2007:i) calls for an increased focus on women's concerns in the design and implementation of socio-economic and political interventions. In order to achieve empowerment this author argues for gender-sensitive transformation of the structures in which women's subordination is embedded.

Gender equality is defined by the World Health Organisation (WHO) “as the absence of discrimination on the basis of a person's sex in providing opportunities, in allocating resources and benefits or in access to services.” (WHO, 2013:1). Gender equality means that women and men have the same rights, and the same access to resources, opportunities and protection. Women have the “agency to use those rights, capabilities, resources and opportunities to make strategic choices and decisions” about their lives. (United Nations, 2005: 33).

This does not imply that women and men are the same or that they are to be treated the same, but rather calls for the absence of bias or discrimination. Equality between women and men leads to sustainable, people-centred development. (United Nations, 2001:1).

Gender equity refers to the fair and just distribution of benefits and responsibilities between women and men. The different needs of women and men are recognized. In order to rectify imbalances between the sexes differences should be identified and addressed. Gender analysis identifies, analyses and informs action to address inequalities that arise from the “different roles of women and men, or the unequal power relationships between them, and the consequences of these inequalities.” (WHO, 2013:1).
4.3 Conclusion

Chapter Four provided a comprehensive outline and discussion of the findings of the study. The main themes were outlined along with the emanating subthemes and categories. These were analysed and discussed in detail while focusing on the aim of the study of exploring former female child soldiers’ perceptions of their reintegration. The next chapter concludes the study, provides recommendations, and concludes by making recommendations and assessing the significance of the study.
CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter the findings of the study were presented. Several overarching themes, sub-themes and categories emerged and were subsequently discussed based on the data collected from the interviews. This chapter presents conclusions generated from the findings of the study and discusses the limitations of the study. The value of this study is explained, as well as the important insights this study has provided. In addition, there are recommendations and suggestions on how the reintegration process for female former abductees can be improved in northern Uganda and other war-affected areas and proposals for further research.

In consideration of the objectives set at the beginning of the study the researcher undertook to:

- Establish the extent to which these women perceive themselves as fully active members in the communities of Gulu District, northern Uganda.
- Establish the extent and the nature of the relationships these women have with their community.
- Identify the potential challenges these women face when it comes to participation in the community.
- Make recommendations for how the reintegration process for female FAC can be improved in northern Uganda.

The researcher made suggestions and recommendations for non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and other humanitarian actors involved in reintegration for female formerly abducted children (FAC). This study, based on interviews with female FAC highlighted the importance of a gendered yet holistic approach which involves the whole community in the reintegration process. It is also crucial to bear in mind that reintegration is an on-going rather than time-limited process. This will be discussed in more depth in the following sections.
5.2 Summary of Research Findings

The reintegration of former female child soldiers is often an unacknowledged yet crucial aspect of conflict transformation. Women are gradually becoming increasingly recognized in the traditionally male-dominated domain of peace-building. (Mazaruna & McKay, 2004:115). Nevertheless, they are still given limited opportunities for participation. (Kabahesi, 2009:34). Women’s needs are overlooked in post-conflict Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR) initiatives. (Norville, 2011:1).

In many societies women are commonly excluded because of prevailing patriarchal hegemonies, with northern Uganda and Gulu District being no exception. Owya (2012:25) points out that even though Acholi women have illustrated both capacity and motivation “to be involved in peace initiatives, they continue to be marginalized from many of the official initiatives to address the war. They have not taken part in the negotiation processes nor been appointed to the Amnesty Commission when it comes the conflict in northern Uganda.”

Given the information that there is limited literature on young female FAC and reintegration and that women are commonly overlooked in peace building this study has the potential to generate valuable insights and recommendations in this important field. The findings of this study are relevant to stakeholders such as NGOs facilitating reintegration for former female child soldiers in northern Uganda and other post-conflict areas and this relevance is discussed below.

- The study indicated that past and present reintegration programmes for FAC in Gulu District are insufficient or inadequately designed to meet their needs.

- The importance of employing a gendered approach to reintegration, taking into account the specific challenges facing girls and women, was pointed out in this study. Women in Gulu District shared similar struggles in the post-conflict environment regardless of abductee status. Hence, reintegration initiatives should not merely focus on female FAC but should include all women in the community.

- The most pervasive needs identified throughout the study are education, training and livelihood support for FAC.
Health care for the most severely affected female FAC is largely insufficient and inaccessible. This hampers them from participating fully in daily activities such as working and providing for their children.

Upon return many female FAC reported problems of stigmatization and ostracism from their families and the extended communities, but for most this situation improved as the years went by.

Revitalizing cultural mechanisms and collective community support are important tools in the reintegration process. Traditional cleansing rituals also play an important role in facilitating reintegration and community acceptance.

Collective women’s groups or grassroots women's groups where women would support one another and pool their resources proved to be important vehicles of self-sustainability and empowerment.

A need for thorough assessments based on the specific needs of individual female FAC was also identified.

The lack of follow-up assessments and evaluation on the success of reintegration is a weakness and a source of concern. This is a prerequisite to successful reintegration and the improvement of existing reintegration programmes.

This study confirms what is already known about the impact of war on girls and women and that they face gender-specific challenges due to their vulnerability and sexual exploitation. This is especially prevalent in strongly patriarchal societies, such as northern Uganda, where girls and women are oppressed in many ways. The unequal distribution of land in northern Uganda is an example of gender-based discrimination excluding women and especially female-headed families from land ownership and the means to self-sustainability. Even though these women faced challenges they displayed considerable resilience and did become empowered to become active change agents in their own lives, through the creation of collective women’s groups. Collectively they were able to start income-generating projects and create community awareness. This will be discussed in more detail in the following sections.
5.2.1 Coping with the Challenges

The women in the study are not just victims, but also survivors asserting control over their lives. Many female FAC are fending for themselves and their children in a society where women are traditionally dependent on their men. All of the women in the study testified that they were faced with considerable difficulties on return to their communities of origin in terms of stigmatization, discrimination, lack of participation in economic activities and lack of community acceptance. The interviewees tell stories of how they gradually reached empowerment, insight and autonomy in their daily lives. The creation of collective women’s groups proved to be especially useful in this regard as it enabled women to pool their resources, providing social as well as material support. Dance, drama and singing groups reached out to the community and created community dialogue, while income-generating self-help groups created the potential for self-sustainability. In addition, psycho-social support and training in conflict management, as well as counselling provided by NGOs such as People’s Voice for Peace (PVP) and Empowering Hands (EH), proved to be very valuable tools for empowerment and self-agency. Self-agency can be described as an individual's perception that an action is the consequence of his or her own intention and that they can express their autonomy. (Renes, Vermeulen, Kahn, Aarts & Haren, 2012:i).

Another indicator of empowerment was the fact that the interviewees provided several suggestions on how their reintegration process could be improved which indicates high levels of insight. These women are working towards being active agents of change in their own lives. In a post-conflict setting external resources and possibilities are indeed limited due to the adverse effects of prolonged war; nevertheless these women have taken on a self-empowerment approach, attempting to make the most of their situation given the opportunities at hand.

Empowerment which is part of the conflict transformation process is also discussed by Lederach (1998:8), and Miall, Ramsbotham and Woodhouse (1999:345). These theorists hold that conflict transformation entails the empowerment of individuals, groups, and organizations to negotiate new relationships and structures in post-conflict society. Hence these theorists view the reintegration process in a holistic manner.
Figure 7. shows the interrelatedness and connectedness of the interactions between the individual (the former female child soldier), groups and other organizations (NGOs, governmental entities). Female FAC’s situations should not be viewed in isolation; instead their situation should be analysed and understood holistically taking into account the many factors that may influence the individual’s well-being and development.

![Diagram of interaction between individual, groups, and organizations]

**Figure 7: The Interaction between the individual, groups and organizations**

The existence of community-based support groups, such as the ones created by PVP and EH, strengthens existing resources around the female former child soldier. The organizations referred to include NGOs, humanitarian actors and governmental entities, such as PVP, EH, World Vision (WV), Gulu Support the Children Organization (GUSCO), the Red Cross, The United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) and The Uganda Fund for War-Affected Children and Youth to name a few. This interconnectedness also implies a level of complexity because it relates to the entire system and stresses the interdependence between various parts of a given environment. The individual’s needs are met through the support and opportunities provided by the surrounding structure groups and organisations. In order to fully reintegrate former female child soldiers it is important to address their needs and create opportunities for self-growth based on their capabilities.
In practice this can become challenging for organisations when the needs of the returnees may go beyond their mandate, expertise and capacity. Here, the importance of networking – information-sharing between actors at both the group and the organizational level in order to achieve successful reintegration – becomes evident. An example of this is EH’s psycho-social programme. EH is in partnership with Gulu Hospital; they have a referral system which enables them to refer individuals that are in need of extended trauma counselling to practitioners at Gulu Hospital.

When the female FAC returns to her home community it is noted that new relationships are developed through the creation of collectives or so called grass-root women’s groups. These groups enable women to pool their social and material resources. The women in these groups set up various projects such as income-generating self-help groups, dance, drama and singing groups to create community dialogue and enhance community interaction. As a result new relationships between female FAC, women in the community and community members emerge. Initially these collective women’s groups consisted of just female FAC but later they started to include other women in the community. This was based on the notion that the needs of women in Gulu District were similar regardless of whether the women were formerly abducted or not.

In addition these collective women’s groups were set up by the women themselves in collaboration with NGOs such as EH and PVP. Female FAC in Gulu have taken the initiative by forming collectives to pool their resources and empower themselves economically and socially. In addition, these collective groups also serve as platforms from which these women can reach out to the wider community and create awareness about their situation. The fact that the women have created these collective groups is an indicator of local ownership rather than dependency on external assistance which is critical in achieving reintegration and sustainability. In order to achieve true ownership and grassroot empowerment it is crucial that community members can say that it is their programme and not one that was imposed on them. “If they feel it is theirs, they will work for it and it will become sustainable.” (ICRC, 2011:7).
To be empowered implies that one has the power to exert control over the resources and decisions that impact one's life. (Alsop & Heinsohn, 2005:4). Thus degrees of empowerment are measured by:

- the existence of choice
- if the choice is being exercised
- if the desired outcome is achieved.

The findings of the study showed that the creation of collective groups empowered women to become proactive. Proactive refers to acting in advance by creating or controlling a situation rather than just responding to it after the fact. (Business Directory, 2013:1). An important factor of this study is the income-generating self-help groups which enabled these young women to pool resources together and deal with unanticipated situations, and to take pre-emptive measures such as stocking up grain and corn.

As discussed extensively in Chapter Four the women's groups use dance, drama and singing as a medium to create awareness and community dialogue about the plight of female FAC. In addition radio talk-shows sensitize community members about female FAC, helping them to realize that they were abducted against their will and forced to commit atrocities. This enhances sustainable conflict transformation as it stresses community acceptance, on-going dialogue and equipping community members with the resources and tools to handle their situation in a sustainable manner.

5.3 Recommendations

5.3.1 A Gendered Approach

A gendered approach to reintegration, including all women in Gulu District rather than just FAC, is recommended. A gendered approach looks at the specific challenges and needs of girls and women in conflict. When discussing gender, we generally refer to the social differences and relations between men and women,
which are learned and transformed. It is important to note that gender is socially constructed. A gendered approach seeks to identify differences in roles, responsibilities, opportunities, needs and constraints. (United Nations Development Programme, 2013:4).

In war zones many young girls are forcefully abducted and forced to participate in the conflict: the role they play varies from combatants, cooks and cleaners to forced wives. (Carlson & Mazurana, 2008:3). Upon return to their communities of origin many of the women become active in peace-making initiatives. Many take part in the formal and informal sectors of the economy in order to provide for themselves and their children. The women who bore children are usually the sole providers for their families. Women also suffer from sexual violence and displacement. Yet during war and in its aftermath women are often left out of activities directed at resolving the conflict that profoundly influenced their lives. (Norville 2011:5).

Gender differences and socio-economic inequalities make women particularly vulnerable to crisis. Women can also be at greater risk of violence and inequity during recovery from conflicts. (UNPRAP, 2009:19). This is particularly true when it comes to northern Uganda and many other post-conflict zones in the world. (Commission of the European Communities, 2008:14). The findings of the study highlight the gender specific needs and challenges.

Given that nearly 95 per cent of the population in northern Uganda has been displaced (IDMC, 2010:2), women in the area share similar difficulties. Consequently, all women in northern Uganda can be identified as vulnerable regardless of their abductee status. To involve all in the reintegration process enhances reintegration and community acceptance of former abductees.

Gender inequalities in northern Uganda add vulnerability to the population already struggling to overcome the effects of protracted conflict for over two decades and its harsh impact on women in the region. (UNPRAP, 2009:20). Based on the findings there are gender-specific challenges faced by women such as gender-based discrimination, marginalization, the high prevalence of women-headed households, and issues linked to the sexual exploitation that these women have been exposed to which makes them particularly vulnerable to future abuse. On average women earn
less than men, are given fewer opportunities to participate in peace building and, their educational level is lower. (Tonheim, 2010:3). Many girls face gender discrimination in their communities. They are not easily accepted back into their communities of origin especially if they bring back children born in captivity. (Tonheim, 2010:3). The needs of female FAC, and especially those who return as mothers, and the needs of the children born in the conflict are largely neglected by researchers. (Tonheim, 2010:4). Reintegration programmes need to be designed to fit the specific needs of these young women. When designing DDR programmes it is crucial that women are treated with consideration to their sex. (Commission of the European Communities, 2008:14; Tonheim, 2010:3). Specific programmes that include a focus on the needs and vulnerabilities peculiar to women and girls could serve as a necessary step in achieving the objective of equitable needs-based targeting and assistance. (Annan et al., 2008:85).

Humanitarian actors such as NGOs must pay particular attention to mothers and their children. (Commission of the European Communities, 2008:15). This group is especially vulnerable to further abuse and exploitation. When reintegrating these women it is crucial to work towards reducing vulnerability to sexual violence by enhancing their empowerment and self-sustainability through providing them with the necessary skills such as marketable vocational skills (for example, farming and baking) and resources (land, grain and corn).

Conflict transformation can also be viewed as the restructuring of social institutions and the redistribution of power from high-power groups to low-power groups. This is where a grassroot empowerment approach becomes imperative. Women need to be protected in line with the reform of Uganda’s Constitution which was introduced in 1995 and amended in 2005 based on “new standards of protection, participation, ‘formal’ equality and which expanded the grounds of non-discrimination.” (Constitution of the Republic of Uganda 1995 amended in 2005, 2005:1). Paragraph VI emphasises the importance of gender balance and fair representation of marginalized groups (such as former child soldiers). Paragraph 33 state that:

(1) Women shall be accorded full and equal dignity of the person with men.
(2) The State shall provide the facilities and opportunities necessary to enhance the welfare of women to enable them to realise their full potential and advancement.

(3) The State shall protect women and their rights, taking into account their unique status and natural maternal functions in society.

(4) Women shall have the right to equal treatment with men and that right shall include equal opportunities in political, economic and social activities.

Based on the data collected throughout the interviews it is evident that women returnees experienced specific issues upon return from the LRA. These difficulties emerged due to sexual exploitation and bringing back children from captivity, but also due to lack of opportunities for women in general and the traditional practices of patrilineal inheritance and land ownership. Women in northern Uganda are being marginalized and discriminated against. (Murungi, 2011:16) which violates their rights as entrenched in the Uganda Constitution.

The United Nations (UN) highlights the importance of creating an enabling environment with equal opportunities for participation for both women and men in achieving gender equality. Reintegration programmes should seek to empower politically and socially. The achievement of social development is far more effective in achieving sustainable development than short-term material support. (UNPRAP, 2009:14).

5.3.2 Education

Education and skills development play an important role in post-conflict reconstruction and in achieving long-term conflict transformation. Women in northern Uganda commonly lack formal education and education plays a crucial role in achieving empowerment and reintegration. Uneducated youth are deprived of the possibility of participating in economic activity and social life. (Nannyonjo, 2005:6-7).

Limited access to education denies children their basic human right to education. The Ugandan Constitution holds that “a child is entitled to basic education.”
However, in reality many young Ugandans, especially in northern Uganda are unable to attend school, due the costs of school uniforms and scholastic material, and many are left with no choice other than to take part in income-generating activities. (Nanyonjo, 2005:6-7).

Child mothers have been identified as least likely to be able to acquire a formal education upon return to their communities of origin. (Annan et al., 2008:vi). Any education initiative should be tailored to meet the special needs of females, including the educational gap due to the lost years of education and child care needs.

The young mother, their children, families, the schools and local leaders should be sensitized to encourage these young women to attend school. Educated youth can aid the post-conflict challenges and contribute to sustainable solutions. (United Nations, 2011:4). It is crucial to make sure that child labour does not stand in the way of school attendance. Moreover, a recommendation is to look into ways of relaxing or waiving school uniforms; providing school feeding programmes and books may also encourage school attendance. It is generally agreed that educating women and young girls contributes to the overall development of the country.

5.3.3 Vocational Training

The needs differ from one returnee to the other. Some may return as young adults and rather opt for vocational training than formal education. Training initiatives should be based on the special needs of female FAC and take the age and the specific experience of the former abductee into account. (Commission of the European Communities, 2008:15).

The findings of this study indicated that all interviewees did receive vocational training upon return; however this training was largely inadequate and lacked specialization. To provide the most commonly held skill in the community will only add pressure in an already saturated market. (Commission of the European Communities, 2008:15). It is crucial to conduct a thorough needs assessment before developing vocational training programmes. The benefit of empowering these returnees with productive skills reduces the risk of them and their children taking up
arms as a means of livelihood and thus prevents the resurgence of war. (Mæland, 2010:5).

5.3.4 Land Ownership

The findings of the study pointed out that the lack of access to land and land ownership greatly marginalized women in northern Uganda. Female FAC can be identified as particularly vulnerable in this regard as many are sole providers for their families. The traditional paternal rites of land ownership and inheritance prevent many young women from accessing land.

In this regard it is crucial to empower women with the relevant knowledge. Firstly, they need to be informed that they are entitled to landownership in line with the 1995 Land Ownership Act granting women land ownership. This overruled traditional laws where land is inherited by paternal rites. (IDMC, 2012:132).

Secondly, the community, the leaders, the elderly and the men should be informed that it is in their interest to ensure that women have access to and control over land. This would contribute to food security and overall economic growth in the region. (Tokyo conference, 2013:1).

The Ugandan Government needs to start working towards the implementation of gender equality when it comes to land ownership. At present these well-meaning laws exist on paper but have still not been put into practice. (IDMC, 2012:132). Moreover, to improve women’s land rights is to contribute to improving their wider social, political and economic equality. Therefore, you cannot separate improvements in land rights from these wider improvements.

5.3.5 Revitalizing Traditional Conflict Management Mechanisms in Society

The people of the Acholiland region have a deep traditional culture rich in rituals. However, the findings of this study indicated that, due to the adverse effect of protracted conflict, many of these practices have been lost.
The Ugandan Acholi society has many traditional ways of handling disputes and traditionally these are done in a peaceful manner with the aim of restoring communal harmony. One example of the traditional rituals which have the potential to facilitate conflict transformation is the *mato oput* rite that allows for reconciliation with compensation, rather than vengeance. *Mato oput* entails sharing of a bitter root and blood. Other cleansing rituals are those of stepping on an egg, *nyono tong weno*, and cleansing the land, *moyo cer*. (Allen, 2007:154). They can both be incorporated in the overall conflict transformation process, as well as the reintegration process for these female FACs.

Revitalizing these by bringing in chiefs and traditional leaders as part of the reintegration and conflict transformation process would have the potential to heal, purify, reconcile and facilitate the return to the community of female FAC. This also would ensure harmony between the individual, the community and their traditional beliefs. (Mæland, 2010:5).

### 5.3.6 An Integrated Non-Discriminatory Approach

In the aftermath of war youth are struggling and suffering due to war and displacement. This is especially true in Gulu District where almost 95 per cent of the population was displaced meaning that reintegration is of particular relevance to the entire community (Harlacher, 2009:1) and ought to be a holistic process involving everyone. Almost one child from every extended family in this area has been abducted. (Veale & Stavro, 2011:18).

The findings of this study indicated that women in Gulu District shared similar struggles regardless of whether they were abducted or not. Abduction itself and abduction experiences are not good predictors of vulnerability. (Annan et al., 2008:70).

Specialized and exclusive assistance for FAC may be counterproductive, except in a few cases. (Annan et al., 2008:70). If reintegration programmes are not open to all vulnerable individuals in the community they may actually further stigmatize and ostracize FAC. Exclusive reintegration programmes may further separate FAC from
the community. It is crucial to avoid creating the impression that FAC are being rewarded for having been part of an armed group. A non-discriminatory approach to reintegration is fundamental in order to ensure the acceptance of former child soldiers and reconciliation in the community. (Commission of the European Communities, 2008:13).

The needs of female FAC should not be overlooked but rather incorporated into the overall reintegration process. Annan et al. (2008:ix) offer support for this in their study of northern Uganda where they suggest that the Ugandan government and NGOs should refrain from targeting specific categories such as abductees or mothers. These authors claim that “abduction status does not need to be a special category, determinant, or precondition of aid.” (Annan et al., 2008:ix). They continue by stating that assistance will be more effective if it is aimed at observable measurable needs such as levels of literacy, employment, family rupture, emotional distress and health. Female FAC may be more disadvantaged members of the wider general community, nevertheless an all-inclusive need-based approach should account for this.

5.3.7 Long-Term Focus on Reintegration

A prerequisite to determine the successes of reintegration and to be able to improve reintegration programmes over time is continued assessment of the reintegration of returnees. The findings of this study indicated a pervasive lack of follow-up assessment by NGOs such as WV and GUSCO.

It is crucial for donors to realize that sustained support is needed in order to achieve successful reintegration and education and skills development. (United Nations, 2011:6). Until economy and development have reached a level where people have found durable solutions to their plight there is a renewed risk for instability. (IDMC, 2009:1).
5.3.8 Active Encouragement of the Creation of Collective Support Groups

The findings of this study indicate that collective women's groups play a crucial role in empowerment and reintegration, hence a recommendation generated from the findings is that NGOs and other humanitarian actors should focus on actively encouraging the creation of these groups. These groups prevent external dependency and a long-term sustainable approach to reintegration is ensured by pooling and strengthening existing resources.

The World Bank (2002:12) points out that “people’s organizations, groups, and networks, working with others, can mobilize resources to improve individual health, education, and security of assets.” This is particularly relevant with regard to the collective women's groups in this study as it assists people to express their needs and exercise their voice. This has resulted in increased awareness and understanding in the wider community. Collective action through people’s membership-based organizations can also improve access to business development and to new markets where people sell their products. (The World Bank, 2002:12). In this regard the income-generating self-help groups have proven to be especially helpful for women in Gulu District, northern Uganda.

5.4 The Importance of the Study

This study does not account for women who did not attend the reception centres upon return from captivity and this could be an area of interest for future studies. Moreover, conducting research on former female FAC from other areas in Uganda and elsewhere may also have the potential to generate useful insights. When it comes to the literature on former FAC there is little written on the reintegration process of female FAC. This posed a challenge with regards to the literature review of the study as there was little previous research to inform this study. However, it also highlights the importance of conducting similar studies, and for researchers to make their findings readily available.

This study attempted to explore the experiences of female FAC in Gulu District, northern Uganda related to their reintegration process. The findings of this study are
relevant to stakeholders such as the NGOs involved in reintegration in northern Uganda – People’s Voice for Peace (PVP), Empowering Hands (EH) and World Vision (WV) and Gulu Support the Children (GUSCO). The findings of this study are also significant to various post-conflict areas around the globe, but particularly in Africa. In addition, the researcher made some suggestions and recommendations for extended research in the same and similar fields such as making provision for female FAC who have been excluded from reintegration programmes.
6. REFERENCE LIST


### APPENDIX I: The use of children in armed conflict worldwide 2010-2012*

Table: Use of child soldiers by state armed forces and state-allied armed groups, January 2010 – June 2012

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>National army</th>
<th>Other elements of state armed forces</th>
<th>State-allied armed groups</th>
<th>Use of children as porters, spies, messengers, human shields and other temporary or informal roles</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Afghanistan</td>
<td></td>
<td>Police: Afghan National Police (ANP) and Afghan Local Police (ALP)</td>
<td>ANP and Afghan National Army (ANA); use at checkpoints including as messengers and tea boys.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central African Republic</td>
<td></td>
<td>“Self-defence” militias</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chad</td>
<td>Chadian National Army (ANT)</td>
<td>Sudan armed opposition group: Justice and Equity Movement</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colombia</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Côte d’Ivoire</td>
<td>Former Defence and Security Forces (FDS)</td>
<td>Republican Forces of Côte d’Ivoire (FRCI)</td>
<td>Armed militias and “self-defence” groups instituted by supporters of former President Gbagbo and President-elect Ouattara, including Jeunes patriotes and Commando Invisible</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democratic Republic of the Congo</td>
<td>Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (FAROC)</td>
<td>Paramilitary force: Republican Guard</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eritrea</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Somali armed opposition group: Af-Shabaab</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iraq</td>
<td>Civil defence force/militias: Awakening Councils</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Israel</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Israel Defense Forces (use of Palestinian children as human shields)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Libya (post-Gadhafi forces)</td>
<td>Libyan Armed Forces</td>
<td>Paramilitary force: The Kata’ib</td>
<td>State armed forces (use of children as human shields)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Myanmar</td>
<td>National armed forces: Tamassaw Kyl</td>
<td>Paramilitary force: Border Guard Forces</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philippines</td>
<td></td>
<td>Paramilitary force: Citizen Armed Forces Geographical Units</td>
<td>Armed Forces of the Philippines (use of children as informants, guides and porters)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rwanda</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>DRC armed opposition groups including the “M23”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somalia</td>
<td>Transitional Federal Government</td>
<td></td>
<td>State-allied militias, including Aby Suwe Woy Juma’a</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Sudan (Republic of)</td>
<td>Sudan People’s Liberation Army (SPLA)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sudan</td>
<td>Sudan Armed Forces</td>
<td>Police forces: including the Central Reserve Police and Border Intelligence Forces</td>
<td>Pro-government militias</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Syrian Arab Republic</td>
<td></td>
<td>Paramilitary force: Popular Defence Forces</td>
<td>Chadian armed opposition groups</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thailand</td>
<td></td>
<td>Civil defence force/Village Defence Volunteers</td>
<td>Syrian armed forces and allied armed group, Shabiba militia (use of children as human shields)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>British Army</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yemen</td>
<td>Armed Forces of Yemen</td>
<td>Paramilitary forces: Central Security Forces and Republican Guard</td>
<td>Pro-government tribal militias</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

APPENDIX II: Map of Uganda

Source: http://bechollashon.org/img/abayudaya/Uganda_map_large.jpg
APPENDIX III: Map of Gulu District

APPENDIX IV: The Acholi, Lango and Teso Regions

APPENDIX V: Informed consent form

NELSON MANDELA METROPOLITAN UNIVERSITY: INFORMATION AND INFORMED CONSENT FORM

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RESEARCHER’S DETAILS</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Title of the research project</strong></td>
<td>A study of the reintegration of female former child soldiers, Gulu District, northern Uganda.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Reference number</strong></td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Principal investigator</strong></td>
<td>Anna Bertelsen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Address</strong></td>
<td>9, Eighth Avenue, Port Elizabeth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Postal Code</strong></td>
<td>6019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Contact telephone number</strong></td>
<td>076-9945575</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DECLARATION BY PARTICIPANT</th>
<th>Initial</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I, the participant and the undersigned</td>
<td>(full names)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>ID number</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Address (of participant)</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A.1 HEREBY CONFIRM AS FOLLOWS:</th>
<th>Initial</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I, the participant, was invited to participate in the above-mentioned research project</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>that is being undertaken by</td>
<td>Anna Bertelsen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>from</td>
<td>Political and Governmental Studies</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
of the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>THE FOLLOWING ASPECTS HAVE BEEN EXPLAINED TO ME, THE PARTICIPANT:</th>
<th>Initial</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>2. 1</strong> Aim:</td>
<td>The researcher is studying female former child soldiers’ perceptions of their experiences. The information will be used to increase the understanding of gender specific experiences of female former child soldiers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2. 2</strong> Procedures:</td>
<td>I understand that I will have a personal interview about the way I experience being a female former child soldier.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2. 3</strong> Risks:</td>
<td>I understand that there are no foreseen risks involved and that I am free to discontinue this process at any time should I want to.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2. 4</strong> Possible benefits:</td>
<td>As a result of my participation in this interview insight in the perceptions of female former child soldiers will be gained, possible challenges explored and potential ways of improving the reintegration process of female child soldiers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2. 5</strong> Confidentiality:</td>
<td>My identity will not be revealed in any discussion, description or scientific publications.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2. 6</strong> Access to findings:</td>
<td>The results will be disseminated in the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan Library in the form of a treatise.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2. 6</strong> Voluntary participation / refusal / discontinuation:</td>
<td>My participation is voluntary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>My decision whether or not to participate will in no way affect my present or future care / employment / lifestyle</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3. **THE INFORMATION ABOVE WAS EXPLAINED TO ME/THE PARTICIPANT BY:**

Anna Bertelsen

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language</th>
<th>Afrikaans</th>
<th>English</th>
<th>Xhosa</th>
<th>Other Acholi</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Initial</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

and I am in command of this language, or it was satisfactorily translated to me by [...] .

I was given the opportunity to ask questions and all these questions were answered satisfactorily.

4. No pressure was exerted on me to consent to participation and I understand that I may withdraw at any stage without penalisation.

5. Participation in this study will not result in any cost to myself.

**A.2 I HEREBY VOLUNTARILY CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN THE ABOVE-MENTIONED PROJECT:**

Signed/confirmed at on 20

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Signature of witness:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Full name of witness:

Signature of participant
**STATEMENT BY OR ON BEHALF OF INVESTIGATOR. (S)**

1. **Anna Bertelsen** declare that:

   I have explained the information given in this document to . (name of participant)

   and / or his / her representative . (name of representative)

2. He / she was encouraged and given ample time to ask me any questions;

3. **This conversation was conducted in**
   - Afrikaans
   - English
   - Xhosa
   - Other

   And this conversation was translated into

   by

4. I have detached Section B and handed it to the participant **YES** **NO**

Signed/confirmed at on 20

Signature of interviewer

Signature of witness:

Full name of witness:
## DECLARATION BY TRANSLATOR

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I,</th>
<th>Caroline Agon</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ID number</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qualifications and/or</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Current employment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>confirm that I:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Translated the contents of this document from English into</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Also translated questions posed by . (name of participant) as well as the answers given by the investigator/representative;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Conveyed a factually correct version of what was related to me.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Signed/confirmed at on 20

I hereby declare that all information acquired by me for the purposes of this study will be kept confidential.

Signature of translator

Signature of witness:

Full name of witness:

## IMPORTANT MESSAGE TO REPRESENTATIVE OF PARTICIPANT
APPENDIX VI: Letter of participation

Dear participant

My name is Anna Bertelsen and I am a Master student in Conflict Transformation and Management at Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University South Africa. I am conducting the following study: A study of the reintegration of female former child soldiers in Gulu District, northern Uganda. This research study explores to what extent female formerly abducted children perceive themselves as integrated into society, what roles they play in post conflict and the challenges they may face.

You are being asked to participate in this study. Participants will be provided with information that explains the purpose of the study as well as what is expected of you. This information will include any potential risks, benefits and rights.

To participate, you will be asked to provide written consent to confirm that you agree and understand the conditions of the study. The informed consent statement has been prepared in compliance with current statutory guidelines.

The information you provide will be kept strictly confidential and will not be shared with anybody else.

Participation is completely voluntary, and you have the right discontinue at any time throughout the interview.

However, I hope that you will participate in this study since your views are very important to this study.

If you have any queries with regards to the study please do not hesitate to contact me.

Anna Bertelsen
Principal investigator

Political and Governmental Studies: NMMU

S205067603@live.nmmu.ac.za
APPENDIX VII: Letter of permission

PEOPLE'S VOICE FOR PEACE

Our Ref: ............................

Your Ref: ............................

Dr. Lyn Snodgrass
Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University (NMMU),
South Africa.

Date: 3rd April 2011

Dear Sir

Re: PVP commitment to provide moral support to Ms Anna Bertelsen during her research in Gulu.

People's Voice for Peace has been contacted by Ms Anna Bertelsen, a Swedish Master student in Conflict Management and Transformation at Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University (NMMU) in South Africa for assistance in the process of conducting a research in Gulu district, Northern Uganda entitled:

A study of reintegration of female formerly abducted children in Gulu District, Northern Uganda.

I am writing to confirm to you that PVP and other partner organisations have a rich experience of working with and supporting particularly child mothers who returned from the Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA) captivity. We believe that this research will also help to deepen our understanding on the issues and challenges of reintegration and participation in post-conflict peace-building and recovery. We are therefore willing to provide all the necessary assistance to ensure successful completion of this study.

We hope the University will have no reservation to allow her to come to Uganda.

Yours truly,
Rosalba Oywa
PVP Founder/Chairperson Steering Committee.
Appendix VIII: Ethics Approval

Ref: H/11/ART/PGS-003

6 June 2011

205067803
Miss A. Bertelsen
Selwyn Court
8th Avenue
PORT ELIZABETH
6001

Dear Miss Bertelsen,

A study of the reintegration of female former child soldiers in Gulu district, Northern Uganda

Your above-entitled application for ethics approval served at the RTI Higher Degrees sub-committee of the Faculty of Arts Research, Technology and Innovation Committee.

We take pleasure in informing you that the application was approved by the Committee. The Ethics clearance reference number is H/11/ART/PGS-003, and is valid for three years, from 01 June 2011 – 01 June 2014. Please inform the RTI-HDC, via your supervisor, if any changes (particularly in the methodology) occur during this time. An annual affirmation to the effect that the protocols in use are still those, for which approval was granted, will be required from you. You will be reminded timeously of this responsibility.

We wish you well with the project.

Yours sincerely,

Nxali

Ms Jannet Nxali
FACULTY OFFICER

cc: Promoter/Supervisor
HoD
School Representative: Faculty RTI
APPENDIX IX: Summary of formal education, literacy levels, school attendance of youth in northern Uganda.

Table 3.1: Summary Statistics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Illiterate (unable to read or write at all)</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Able to read a book or newspaper</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average years of education (among all)</td>
<td>7.0</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average years of education (among those ever enrolled)</td>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>6.1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never attended school</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never attended school (if currently under 18)</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Currently enrolled (if under 18)</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>74%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dropped out of primary school</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dropped out of secondary school</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ever attended university</td>
<td>0.6%</td>
<td>0.3%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ever received vocational training</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Completed grade 7</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Made transition to secondary school (of grade 7 graduates)</td>
<td>76%</td>
<td>73%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source Annan et al., (2008:18)