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A hard homecoming: lessons learned from the reception center process in northern Uganda: an independent study

Report

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A HARD HOMECOMING

LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE RECEPTION CENTER PROCESS IN NORTHERN UGANDA

AN INDEPENDENT STUDY

AUGUST 15, 2006

This publication was produced for review by the United States Agency for International Development and the United Nations Children's Fund. It was prepared by Tim Allen and Mareike Schomerus of the London School of Economics on behalf of Management Systems International.

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AN INDEPENDENT STUDY



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Uganda Monitoring and Evaluation Management Services Project

A HARD HOMECOMING

LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE RECEPTION CENTER PROCESS ON EFFECTIVE INTERVENTIONS FOR FORMER 'ABDUCTEES' IN NORTHERN UGANDA¹

An Independent Study Commissioned by USAID and UNICEF

**May – November 2005
Revised April – August 2006**

Tim Allen and Mareike Schomerus

DISCLAIMER

The authors' views expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect the views of the United States Agency for International Development, the United States Government, or the United Nations Children's Fund.

¹ This is a slightly different title to that in the Scope of Work. It was agreed by commissioning agencies that it more adequately encompasses the research questions. The contents of the report are an edited version of longer document, which was distributed for discussion in December 2005.

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It should, however, be stressed that this is an independent study, and does not necessarily represent the views of any of these institutions or individuals.

Tim Allen and Mareike Schomerus
London School of Economics
July 2006

LIST OF ACRONYMS

ACCAN	Action Against Child Abuse And Neglect
ACCORD	A publication series of Conciliation Resources reviewing peace initiatives
ACORD	Agency for Cooperation and Research in Development
ARLPI	Acholi Religious Leaders Peace Initiative
AVSI	Associazione Volontari per il Servizio Internazionale
CCF	Christian Counseling Fellowship
CDO	Community Development Officer (District)
CPA	Concerned Parents Association
CPU	Child Protection Unit
CRD	Community Resilience and Dialogue
CSOPNU	Civil Society Organization for Peace in Northern Uganda
CVC	Community Volunteer Counselor/ Caregiver
DDR	Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration
FAC	Formerly Abducted Child
FAP	Formerly Abducted People/Person
FRONASA	Front for National Salvation (A military force lead by President Museveni, which collaborated with the UNLA in the overthrow of Amin)
EDF	Equatoria Defense Force (A militia group in Sudan)
GUSCO	Gulu Support the Children Organization
HSMF	Holy Spirit Mobile Forces
ICC	International Criminal Court
ICTJ & HRC	International Center for Transitional Justice and the Human Rights Center, Berkeley. University of California
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
IGA	Income Generating Activity
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IRC	International Rescue Committee
KCV	Katakwi Children's Voice
KICWA	Kitgum Concerned Women's Association
LC	Local Council (Councils exist at each level of administration, from the village - LC1 to the district -LC5)
LDU	Local Defense Unit
LRA	Lord's Resistance Army
MSF	Medecins Sans Frontiers
MSI	Management Systems International
MVC	Most Vulnerable Children
NCDDR	National Committee for Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration
NGO	Non-Governmental organization
NPCT	National Psychosocial Core Team
NRA	National Resistance Army (The former name of the Ugandan army)
OCHA	Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
SCiU	Save the Children in Uganda
SPLA	Sudan People's Liberation Army
SWAY	Survey of war Affected Youth: Research and Programs for Youth in Armed Conflict in Uganda
TPO	Transcultural Psycho-Social Organization
UPDF	Ugandan People's Defense Force
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
WFP	World Food Program
WHO	World Health Organization

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This independent report has been commissioned by USAID and UNICEF to examine assumptions and evidence about the needs and experiences of children and adults who have been forced to serve under the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA), and have subsequently escaped, surrendered or been captured by the Ugandan People's Defence Forces (UPDF). In particular it focuses on the process of 'reintegrating' formerly abducted people (FAPs) through reception centers, and the various challenges facing FAPs when they are reunited with their families. In addition it deals with a range of specific issues, outlined in the Statement of Work (SOW), including that of women who have been kidnapped, raped, impregnated by LRA combatants (commonly referred to as 'child mothers'), the role of the UPDF in the FAP return process, and the part played by the Amnesty Commission.

The field research was carried out for 100 days during 2005 in all the war-affected districts of northern Uganda. A variety of methods were used, including semi-structured and open-ended interviews, participant observation, and a survey of FAPs who have passed through reception centres (based on a sample of 886 FAPs derived from reception center registers). All reception centers were visited and most of the large IDP camps. The majority of interviews were with the FAPs themselves or their families, but others were made with aid agency and reception center workers, soldiers, government officials and community volunteers. An approach taken in writing up the report has been to interrogate prevalent assumptions, and where possible provide or cite relatively robust evidence. Where no such information is available, or could be collected by the research team, the lack of knowledge is highlighted. The background information on the conflict in northern Uganda, HIV/AIDS, mortality rates and conditions in the IDP camps, as well as most case studies, quotations from interviews and discussion of existing literature is presented in footnotes and in the appendices.

Findings Part 1: The Experience of 'Reintegration'

In practice, the term 'reintegration' means that FAPs who pass through the official channels (i.e. the UPDF and the reception centers) are sent to live with their parents or other relatives in the IDP camps. Once they have left the reception centers, follow up and monitoring is minimal. Conditions in IDP camps can be appalling, and social life is constrained by the threat of LRA attack and the controls imposed by the UPDF and Local Defence Units (LDUs). In spite of these factors, the majority of those FAPs who have been sent to the IDP camps remain there (of the 415 FAPs in the sample derived from the reception centers registers who were traced by the research team, around 70 percent were found to still be living in the IDP camp to which they had been sent, or had transferred to another IDP camp). This is partly because they have no other option, unless they have relatives in one of the nearby towns, or in another part of the country.

The material circumstances for FAPs in the IDP camps is usually no worse than it is for others who have not been 'abducted' and returned through the reception centers (in some cases it may be slightly better due to the provision of small assistance packages). However, FAPs are in constant fear of being recaptured by the LRA and the possibility of abuse from relatives and neighbours (of the 238 FAPs from the sample who were actually interviewed in person, or whose immediate family was interviewed, 25 percent had experienced negative attitudes). Many FAPs also stated that they found it hard to adjust to life in the IDP camps after being with the LRA, and there were some who talked about life with the LRA in positive terms. The LRA has been effective at imbuing recruits with its values. Setting them aside is not always straightforward. In this context it is also important to note that the term 'abduction' is not neutral. It suggests that there is no agency involved among those who have been with the LRA. This is not always the case. For populations in IDP camps a degree of cohabitation with the LRA is inevitable, and many

people have been ‘abducted’ more than once. From the research team’s interviews with the respondents it was clear that not all people who spent time with the LRA did so by force alone.

One of the ways in which social healing is claimed to occur in many reports and articles about the war in Northern Uganda is through traditional rituals of forgiveness. This research suggests that claims about the importance of these ceremonies have been overstated. Only 29% of the respondents had participated in any ritual (including Christian prayer meetings).

Another issue that has been sometimes exaggerated in discussion of the war in northern Uganda is the involvement of children. There is no doubt that large numbers of children have suffered terribly at the hands of the LRA. But vastly more have been forced to grow up in IDP camps, where they have also been prone to violence as well as the constant threat of infectious diseases. Moreover, the role of adults in the activities of the LRA is persistently under-reported. The average age of arrival at reception centers is just under the age of 18, and in most districts the average period of ‘abduction’ is less than a year. The reported abduction length for females is longer, but most of those taken by the LRA and returning through the reception centers have been males. For some years between 1996 and 2003 there were no females at all in the research team’s random sample of reception center data. These data suggest that a high percentage of those passing through reception centers were both adults at the time, and had been ‘abducted’ by the LRA as adults. Moreover, reception centers were mostly set up to deal with the needs of ‘children’. The majority of adults ‘abducted’ by the LRA are never registered by the centers or by the UPDF. Data collected by UNICEF from local councils and community volunteers between 1997 and 2001 showed that less than one third of reported ‘abductions’ were of children. Subsequently, the rate of child ‘abduction’ by the LRA may have increased. However, the results of recent surveys based on samples are contradictory. One of them has indicated that the rate of adult ‘abduction’ has remained very high indeed.

A further issue that is bedevilled with misconceptions is that of ‘child mothers’. The number of females passing through reception centers increased dramatically following operations by the Ugandan army against LRA bases in Sudan (although it remained much less than the number of males – around 30 percent in 2003/2004). Many of these women had spent two years or more with the LRA, and they returned with children. They have usually been referred to as ‘child mothers’, and have been the focus of much concern. The research team confirmed that what has happened to some of these women has been dreadful. They may have been forced to kill (in few cases their own relatives or school mates), and have been given to commanders as ‘wives’. Actions deemed as misdemeanours have been met with severe beatings and other punishments. There are, however, several problems with the way in which the problem of ‘child mothers’ has been presented.

First, the percentage of underage mothers in the IDP camps is very high. Although data is unavailable, it can be assumed to be in excess of the national average (23 percent of Ugandan women are pregnant or have given birth before the age of 18). So using the term specifically for women who have returned from the LRA is misleading. Second, the LRA’s abduction of women needs to be looked at in a social and historical context. Without condoning what has happened, marriage by capture has been relatively common in the past, and the evidence suggests that the LRA has not raped indiscriminately. Contrary to some reports, the research team found no evidence that HIV rates are high among ‘child mothers’. The women are selected for relatively stable unions that are expected to produce children. Third, although most were abducted as teenagers, the majority of those classified as ‘child mothers’ at reception centers are over the age of 18 (the average age of those that appeared in the sample of 248 FAPs who were followed up and located was 21). Fourth, the number of those classified as ‘child mothers’ at reception centers is relatively small (about 5 percent of all FAPs that have passed through). Fifth, the attitudes of ‘child mothers’ to their experiences vary widely. Some of those interviewed describe a harrowing ordeal. Other express affection for their LRA ‘husbands’ and hope to be re-united at some point in the future.

Sixth, social attitudes to the children of ‘child mothers’ may be affected by their lineage status. Without transfer of bride-price, the children are meant to be incorporated into the lineage of the mother. But this implies that they will have claims over her lineage’s land when the camps are broken up. Her brothers and their wives may resist this. At present it is difficult to assess the problem, partly because those ‘child mothers’ who have been sent to IDP camps have not been there long. However, it may be a material factor in the reported abuse that is commonly directed at these children.

Findings Part 2: The Return Process

After escaping, surrendering or being captured by the UPDF, an FAP is supposed to be transported to a barracks and kept at a ‘Child Protection Unit’ (CPU) for up to 48 hours. They are then supposed to be transferred to a reception center, and eventually reunited with their family. They are supposed to be informed about the amnesty, are given psycho-social counselling and are provided with some skills training. This research showed that in reality, this process is deeply flawed, not least because it only deals with a selection of those who have been ‘abducted’. Most adults who have been ‘abducted’ do not pass through the system, and there were many children who claimed to have been ‘abducted’, but have never been registered at a reception center. Some key points that emerged from interviews with FAPs who have passed through the system include the following.

Treatment by the UPDF was mixed. Some reported kindness from particular officers, but a few (6 per cent) reported abuse. Whatever their subjective experiences, the number of days that FAPs are kept by the UPDF exceeds 48 hours. On average they are kept for two weeks. Some FAPs reported pressure to join the UPDF or the LDUs, but the research team did not find this to be a widespread problem. The research team interviewed FAPs who have joined the 105th Battalion of the UPDF (which is largely made up of LRA veterans). They all stated that they chose to join, and all looked like they were over the age of 18. Underage recruitment in the the LDUs was found to be a common problem.

Coordination between the UPDF, the Amnesty Commission and the reception centers was found to be poor. Very few FAPs are informed about the Amnesty Act. Most of those interviewed from the research team’s sample were very confused about it or had never heard about it. Only 25 percent had an amnesty card or were aware of the Amnesty Commission. Also those people who have been with the LRA, but are not registered at reception centers have no means of obtaining an amnesty certificate.

The reception centers were found to be a valuable resource for many of those FAPs that spend time in them. Their most important role was found to be the provision of a safe space in which the FAPs could adjust to the transition from the LRA to the IDP camps. For some, it enabled them to recover from injuries before having to cope on their own.

However, the research team found that the skills training offered at various reception centers was not very effective, and that attitudes to FAPs were not always appropriate. A complaint of adult FAPs was that they were treated as if they were children. Children also resented being patronised. The most commonly reported complaint about the centers was that things promised were not provided.

The team also found that the term ‘psychosocial’ is used in a very loose way. Little or no psychological assistance is provided, and none of those observed giving counseling to FAPs were trained therapists. Counseling is interpreted as teaching FAPs how to behave. The word ‘trauma’ is often used, and some ideas from psychotherapy inform efforts to help FAPs tell their stories, and even act out what has happened to them. But there is no system of monitoring the effects of these strategies, and the lack of trained staff involved is grounds for concern.

The numbers passing through the centers have varied from year to year. It peaked at over 4,000 in 2003, and declined to around 600 in 2005. Partly because the numbers arriving were so high for a period and the security situation in the IDP camps so poor, very little was done to follow up on those who had passed through in the past. Centers are currently trying to rectify this, but progress has been slow. Follow up of individual cases remains very limited. Only 13 percent of the 248 FAPs who were traced had been followed up in any way at all (including visits from researchers and aid agencies).

Some FAPS have been visited up by Community Volunteer Counselors (CVCs), and some agencies hope to use the CVCs to develop a more holistic approach to follow up rather than follow up of specific individuals. The result is that increasing demands are likely to be placed on CVCs. The research team found that their capacities and commitment were diverse. Many volunteers also expected some form of remuneration for their efforts.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The key conclusions include:

- Assumptions are not always supported by evidence.
- Most FAPs who pass through the reception centers live in IDP camps.
- The return of an FAP may place family networks under strain.
- The involvement of adults in the war has been underestimated.
- Not all FAPs have a negative view of their time with the LRA.
- Large numbers of those who return after being ‘abducted’ by the LRA are outside of the official system.
- The Amnesty Commission lacks credibility.
- Under age recruitment into the LDUs was noted as common practice.
- Reception centers offer a place of safety for FAPs before living in IDP camps.
- Psychosocial assistance provided at reception centers does not involve psychotherapy.
- There is limited follow-up for FAPs who have passed through the reception centers.

The key recommendations include:

- Sending FAPs to insecure IDP camps needs to be questioned and addressed by the concerned authorities especially government.
- There is an acute need for donors and agencies to resist received wisdoms about what is happening in northern Uganda and base interventions on robust evidence.
- Donors need to resist pressures to support population control strategies.

- Some IDP camps should be broken up as soon as possible, while others should be turned into permanent peri-urban centers with adequate services.

The Amnesty Commission should be provided with the necessary support to function adequately. Reception centers should be assisted to move in new directions and adapt to the situation at hand.

- Coordination between agencies working on the ground and between reception centers needs to be improved.
- Where trauma therapy is required, trained staff should provide it.
- Support should be provided for LRA peer support groups but careful monitoring is essential.
- The focus on ‘child mothers’ should be revised. Support projects should be targeted at those women in acute need, rather than just those who have spent time with the LRA. More generally, funding should also be shifted towards improving the livelihoods of vulnerable women in the region as a whole.
- Efforts should be made to ensure that the breaking up of the camps does not lead to the immediate expansion of urban slums.
- Donors and aid agencies must work with the government and the UPDF to improve the security situation. Without that happening, what can be achieved will remain very limited.



Pabbo IDP Camp (Photo: Melissa Parker)

I. INTRODUCTION

USAID and UNICEF commissioned this study to help assess how to meet the needs of children and adult men and women who have experienced ‘abduction’ by the Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA). Information on the background to the current situation in northern Uganda, including details about the IDP camps and the health situation is presented in Appendix 1. The report focuses in particular on the lessons that can be learned about the reintegration of ‘formerly abducted people’ (FAPs) through reception centers. Reception centers have operated as a mechanism for providing assistance to people after they have returned. Profiles of the various reception centers can be found in Appendix 6.2. The Statement of Work sets out three principle study questions, broken down into a complex set of overlapping sub-questions (see Appendix 7). These questions focus on:

1. The key assumptions under which the reception centers operate and the assumptions made during the reintegration process;
2. The roles of the UPDF (including UPDF CPUs), reception centers and organizations and authorities involved in family tracing and how they meet the needs of the formerly abducted children;
3. The lessons learned from the current reintegration process so as to establish recommendations for sound principles for reintegration of former abductees in the Ugandan context.

The report is structured as follows: The responses to the first two Study Questions make up the main part of the report. The findings are divided into two main sections. The first presents findings on the general issue of ‘reintegration’ in northern Uganda, and the second examines the stages in the return process in some detail, including an assessment of the activities of the reception centers and other actors. The third Study Question is addressed directly in the conclusions and recommendations section.

Two underlying points are stressed throughout the report. They relate to the reference in the study questions to ‘key assumptions’. First, good information about what has been happening in northern Uganda is very limited. The reception centers themselves have not prioritized data gathering, and their own records are mostly in a poor state. Data gathering by district officers and by other organizations has also been haphazard, and limited by logistical and security problems. This makes it virtually impossible to assess the overall effects of particular interventions, including the success or failures of reception centers in assisting ‘reintegration’ of FAPs. The second point is that the paucity of good information has contributed to the widespread acceptance of a range of questionable assertions. The tenuous connection between many aid workers, human rights activists, journalists and politicians on the one hand, and the mass of the population living in IDP camps on the other, has led to chronic problems with ‘echo-speech’ and reified categories. Numbers and anecdotes are repeated as if they are based on rigorous research, and become ‘true’ simply because they are repeated so often and are so rarely challenged. Similarly, terms are employed to classify groups and describe processes, which are often profoundly misleading. The research team has done its best to interrogate established perspectives, and to ask in each case if there is evidence to support them. In several instances the conclusion is that there is not.

STUDY APPROACH AND METHODS

The research team included seven European or US-based and seven Ugandan researchers. In total there were 100 days of field research. Following the methodology outlined in the SOW, a variety of approaches were used. These included a review of existing literature; participant observation fieldwork (both in IDP camps and at two reception centers); focus group discussions and interviews with officials, aid program staff, community volunteers and FAPs (using both open-ended and semi-structured methods), and a survey of FAPs who have passed through reception centers.

In the course of the research, the team visited and reviewed the activities of the following reception centers. At each center, the research team spoke to center staff (program managers, social workers, ‘counselors’, nurses, field workers) as well as spending time at the center. The reception centers visited include:

- Gulu Support the Children Organization (GUSCO),
- World Vision (children/ adults/ child mothers center),
- Kitgum Concerned Women’s Association (KICWA),
- Concerned Parents Association (CPA),
- Christian Counseling Fellowship (CCF),
- Caritas Center in Pajule,
- Rachele Center,
- Concerned Parents Association (CPA),
- Caritas Center,
- Action Against Child Abuse and Neglect (ACCAN) and,
- Katakwi Children’s Voice

To provide a structure to the research in the IDP camps, the research team took a 1-in-50 sample from all the reception centers registration books, a 1-in-15 sample from Caritas in Pajule and a gender-specific sample of 1/15 from the two reception centers in Kitgum (1/15 of the females and 1/15 of the males).² Once a sample of 886 names had been collected, the team attempted to find as many of the IDPs as possible and interview them. Choice of IDP camps visited was mostly linked to names in the sample. Almost all the larger camps were visited and many of the small ones. By the end of the fieldwork the research team had managed to interview 238 FAPs in the sample or their immediate family. Less detailed information was also obtained on 177 others. These data have been coded, and analyzed using MS Access.

The logistical difficulties of carrying out this research in a short space of time were considerable, both because of the breadth of the study and the diversity of actors that needed to be interviewed. Transport

² This in itself was a hugely time-consuming process, and it was not possible to obtain a sample from some of the centers without considerable persuasion (partly because certain centers had understandable concerns about confidentiality of the information). At some centers there was no database from which to work, and one had to be generated from hard copies of registration forms. For one center it was not possible to obtain data from which to take a sample until the very end of the field research. For that center, Rachele, we had to rely on data gathered from visits to IDP camps. Another center, CCF, simply could not be reached in time to be included in the sample.

THE SAMPLE

886 Formerly Abducted Persons

251 female, 635 male
1/50 from each center
1/15 male/female in Kitgum

Centers included in sample:

KICWA, CPA Kitgum, WV Gulu, Gusco, AACAN, KCV, CPA Lira

Center Breakdown of Total Sample:

AACAN: 27
Caritas Apac: 50
CPA Kitgum: 139
CPA Lira: 65
GUSCO: 55
KCV: 7
KICWA: 379
WV Gulu: 191

Double Accounting:

45 people from the sample have spent time in at least two different reception centers

Information Breakdown:

Information on 415 of sample, no information on 471

TOTAL Interviews conducted About Sample:

FAPs from sample: 238
Camp Leader or Neighbour: 170
Relative: 90
Guardian: 3

arrangements were a particular problem. Also, the security situation meant that investigation in some places had to be kept to a minimum. The research team was unable to find more information about the remainder than had been collected by the reception centers at the time of their registration. In some cases this was because the team was unable to visit the IDP camp to which the FAPs had been sent (mostly due to concerns about the team's security). In other cases it was because the FAPs had moved within or between camps, and the FAPs gave a false name when he or she registered at the reception center, or because the data recorded at the reception centers was incorrect in some other way.³ Other limitations of this research include the following:

First, interviewing people in the camp setting is challenging. There is always limited time available, especially when visiting the camps with a military convoy, and often people are surrounded by their family or camp officials, inhibiting what they say. Also, many FAPs have a version of their story which they tell and retell. FAPs and their families have come to associate a researcher's visit with a resource. They may give particular answers in order to extract material assistance. Only with considerable time and effort can a researcher obtain less superficial answers.

Second, a study methodology that is linked to the reception center registration process potentially excludes the majority of people who have been abducted. Evidence from the findings in the IDP camps indicated that many FAPs bypass the official channels, including the reception centers. This has also been found to be the case by other research teams using structured survey methods.⁴ The reintegration experiences of these FAPs fall outside the main focus of this study (although, where the research team has information, it has been mentioned).

2. FINDINGS PART I: 'REINTEGRATION' IN NORTHERN UGANDA

'[The formerly abducted people] must accept that they have already been forgiven. They must believe in the Amnesty Act; that it is real. They must accept that the community has forgiven them. They must go back to their own communities; we must not share negative attitudes with them; we must tell them that the communities are waiting for them and will welcome them warmly. They should learn to receive education from the community and to turn to the structures that are there to help them.'

—*World Vision Reception Center staff member at an Amnesty Commission workshop*

'At the center we convey the message that if you behave well, you will have a good life... But we try to prepare [the FAPs] for life in the camps ... we talk about the poverty and death ... you don't have to have been abducted to experience bad things ... and we don't tell them that everything will be ok ... No! There are challenges ahead.'

—*GUSCO Reception Center staff member*

³ There are FAPs who have gone through the reception center system more than once, and have become adept at keeping their identity unclear. In addition, we found that some FAPs give false names for their parents (perhaps to make it hard for Ugandan security forces to locate them). This research team became adept at finding out where FAPs were, but there is no doubt that many more might have been found if we had had more time.

⁴ The preliminary results of the most important recent survey were released in April 2006 as 'SWAY Research Brief 1' (available at www.sway-uganda.org). This study of war affected youth in northern Uganda is based on surveys of more than 1,000 households and nearly 750 youth from eight sub-counties in Kitgum and Pader districts. It found that only half of boys and men taken for more than a week ever passed through a reception center, and fewer still have received amnesty or any form of assistance.

‘Actual ‘reintegration’ cannot happen in a disintegrated community. All we do is just prepare children for life in the camps... We may never succeed in reintegrating our children if we cannot get rid of the camps.’

—*The Director of CCF Reception Center, Pader*

2.1 WHAT DOES ‘REINTEGRATION’ MEAN?

Within the framework of disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) programmes, one of the main purposes of reintegration support is to assist persons who have been associated with fighting forces to return to civilian life as valuable and productive members of society.⁵ Although support for reintegration in northern Uganda is not within the framework of a formal DDR operation, the same principles apply. Effective programming involves striking a balance between meeting the needs and desires of ex-combatants and their families and those of the communities into which they are reintegrating. Usually this involves supporting ex-combatants to acquire a similar range of skills to those that civilians may already possess, and help to access the same opportunities and services as the rest of the population. While this may involve special programmes because of the particular experiences and needs of ex-combatants (for example, psychosocial support, accelerated education, skills training or temporary livelihood support), ultimately there has to be a level playing field of opportunity between ex-combatants and their families and the wider civilian population (often achieved through making reintegration programs equally accessible to other civilians). This applies to children as much as it does to adults.⁶ Otherwise, especially where serious human rights abuses have been committed, ex-combatants will be resented by the wider community and programming for their support will breed the stigma, discrimination and rejection that it is often seeking to ameliorate.

Global experience has highlighted a series of general approaches that are relevant and important when reintegrating former child soldiers and other separated children back into the community. These include working with the community as well as with the child to support return and reintegration, the necessity of considering age as an element in the reintegration strategy, the importance of family reunification where possible, addressing the challenges faced by girls and the need for follow-up to monitor the progress of children in their new environment.⁷ Many of these are articulated as good practice principles in the *Cape Town Principles and Best Practices*, adopted by UNICEF and NGOs in 1997, and the *Inter-Agency Guiding Principles on Separated and Unaccompanied Children*, adopted by the ICRC, UNICEF, UNHCR, IRC, Save the Children UK and World Vision International in 2004. The *Cape Town Principles* include the statement that: ‘All efforts should be made to keep or reunite children with their families or to

⁵ See, for example, Department of Peacekeeping Operations, 1999, *Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration of Ex-Combatants in a Peacekeeping Environment: principles and guidelines*.

⁶ See Action for the Rights of Children (ARC), 2002, *Critical Issues: child soldiers*, p26; Robinson, M., 2003, *Community-Based Approaches to Reintegration of Children Affected by Armed Conflict: An Overview of Approaches, Lessons Learned and Challenges*, A Presentation to the European Network for a Research Agenda on Children and Armed Conflicts European Seminar on Programmes on Reintegration of Children and Adolescents, Boys and Girls, Involved in Armed Conflicts, Innocenti Research Centre, p5.

⁷ See *Cape Town Principles and Best Practices on the Prevention of Recruitment of Children into Armed Forces and on Demobilization and Social Reintegration of Child Soldiers in Africa*, 1997, UNICEF; Verhey, B., 2001, *Child Soldiers: preventing, demobilizing and reintegrating*, World Bank, Africa Region Working Paper Series; Robinson, M., 2003, *Community-Based Approaches to Reintegration of Children Affected by Armed Conflict: An Overview of Approaches, Lessons Learned and Challenges*, A Presentation at the Innocenti Research Centre on Programmes on Reintegration of Children and Adolescents, Boys and Girls Involved in Armed Conflicts; *Inter-Agency Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Working Group (IDDRS)*, 2004, *Children and DDR (draft)*; Verhey, B. 2003, *Going Home: Demobilizing and reintegrating child soldiers in the Democratic Republic of Congo*, Save the Children UK.

place them within a family structure.⁸ However, this guide to good practice, like most others, also recognizes that there is no one model that can direct how to effect the social reintegration of children – local realities have to be taken into account.⁹ In particular, in times of conflict, acute strains may be placed on families and social networks.¹⁰

So, what are the local realities in northern Uganda? In Kitgum, Pader and Gulu Districts 90% of the population are living in camps for internally displaced persons in squalid conditions, where mortality and morbidity rates are alarmingly high, kinship networks under enormous strain and security very low. Vast numbers of school-age children are not receiving any meaningful education. Few persons, adults or adolescents, have access to livelihood opportunities – safe access to land is highly restricted and the micro-economy is very weak, to say the least. Many of those who have returned from the LRA over the past three years have never lived in IDP camps before. This may not be the case for those who have been abducted in the last few years, but even so, if ‘reintegration’ is taken to mean a return to social or economic normality as a productive member of society, the use of the term to describe what happens in northern Uganda is something of a misnomer. The terms ‘reinsertion’ or ‘reunification’ are perhaps more appropriate. The social and economic conditions in which the bulk of the population of the war-affected parts of northern Uganda are living are unacceptable and cannot be regarded as conducive for a return to ‘normal’ productive life for FAPs. By force of circumstances, FAPs are returning to social and economic conditions which are inappropriate for all persons, formerly abducted or not.

Accordingly, the conditions in northern Uganda pose huge challenges to programming in support of ‘reintegration’. Reception centers and any other programmes supporting ‘reintegration’ have to try to identify what can be done to support the return of FAPs while maintaining a level playing field, in a situation in which virtually the entire population is destitute and disenfranchised. Responses have included attempts to ‘sensitize’ family members and neighbors to accept returning FAPs and the provision of ‘packages’ of non-food items. Some centers have gone further and tried to provide FAPs with school access or vocational training. Given the context, what might be achieved by such interventions is inevitably limited. But there is also a further problem - one that makes a proper assessment of the return process very hard indeed. With few exceptions, reception centers have little information about what has happened to FAPs after they have been sent back to the ‘community’. The ability to follow-up with individuals has been severely compromised both by limitations of access imposed by security and the sheer numbers of individuals involved. Reception centers do not know much about what has actually happened to most FAPs after they have passed beyond their gates, and what is reported as ‘successful integration’, is largely anecdotal information about a few cases.¹¹

The lack of real information has fed rumors and assertions, which are commonly cited as ‘facts’. Reception center staff is aware that going to live in an IDP camp is far from ideal and that their knowledge of what happens to FAPs in the camps is limited, even for those FAPs who have passed through their own centers. Nevertheless, claims are sometimes made about what is going on that are determined more by notions of what ought to happen than by evidence. Although the team did not

⁸ UNICEF (27-30 April 1997). Cape Town Principles and Best Practices.

⁹ See Action for the Rights of Children (ARC), 2002, Critical Issues: child soldiers, pp26-45.

¹⁰ Various writers have drawn attention to the acute strains that occur in family networks during war and upheaval. See, for example, Igreja, V. (2004). Cultural Disruption and the Care of Infants in Post-war Mozambique. Children and Youth on the Frontline. J. Boyden and J. de Berry, Berghahn Books: 274 pp.

David Tolfree, amongst others, has drawn attention to the potential dangers of ‘fostering’ arrangements. He notes that ‘Traditional fostering involves an element of exchange and is rarely based on the best interests of the child...Spontaneous fostering in emergency situation will usually reflect cultural norms and practices...’Tolfree, D. (2004). Whose Children? Stockholm, Save the Children.

¹¹ During the time the team was in the field the improving security situation meant that some centers began to significantly enhance their follow-up work with FAPs. The results of this were, however, not available prior to finalizing this report.

encounter staff in the reception centers who specifically referred to the *Cape Town Principles* or the *Inter-Agency Guiding Principles*, a series of general implicit and explicit expectations underpin the approach that relate to best practice guidelines, particularly as they relate to children. These include the following assumptions.

- The best place for the child and young adult is with his or her family and back in the community;
- Family structures can support the returned FAP;
- The communities will be accepting of those who return from the LRA;
- The FAP will be willing to live in a displaced setting in order to be with their family.

The team found that when questioned about their activities, many reception center staff justify and defend what they are doing with reference to such ideas, and will often elaborate them by mentioning the Ugandan Amnesty Act, or special ‘Acholi’ capacities to forgive, or the prevalence of ‘traditional’ welcoming rituals. An issue that must be confronted, is whether conventional child protection procedures are being followed blindly, thereby closing down investigation of possible alternatives, or whether reception centers are making an implicit or explicit assessment of what is the best that can be achieved in extreme circumstances. Whatever the case, in northern Uganda the expectation that families and neighborhoods can provide a benign and caring environment in the harsh conditions of IDP camps is open to challenge. Perhaps there has been no choice, but vulnerable individuals have been systematically located in places that cannot be effectively monitored in part because they are too dangerous to visit. It is against this background that the team set out to establish empirically what has been happening to FAPs who have returned from the LRA.

2.1.1 WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

One ‘fact’ that is commonly cited in Gulu town is that 60% of FAPs who have passed through reception centers are now living in the municipality. Sometimes this was even mentioned by people who would also talk about the willingness of families in the IDP camps to receive their relatives back from the LRA. Although no studies could be cited which confirmed large scale FAP residence in the town, some informants at reception centers thought it was likely because they had sustained relatively close personal links with particular FAPs who were living nearby. The research team’s findings, however, reveal that it is incorrect. Evidence from the survey of FAPs suggests that a large number have settled in the IDP camps. An important finding from the semi-structured interviews with a random sample of FAPs and their families is that **movement away from the IDP camps has been over-emphasized.**

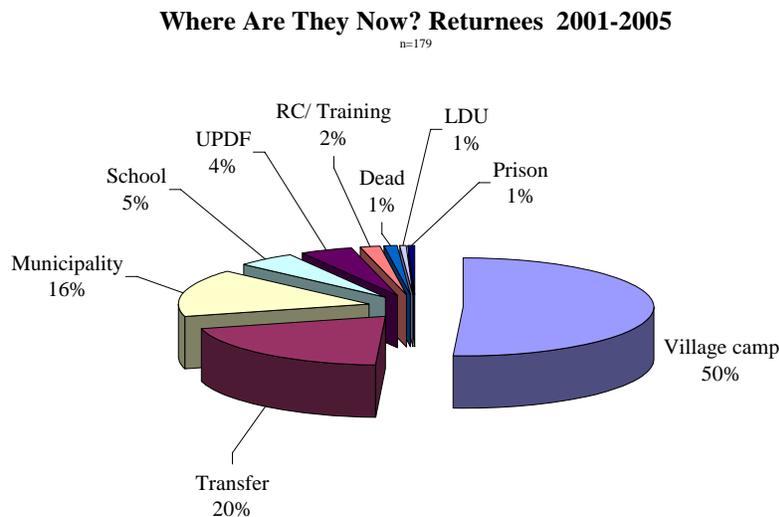
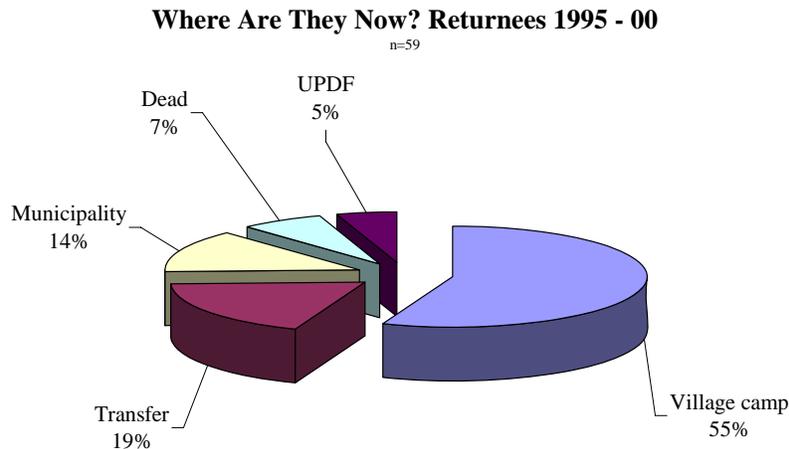
The research team followed-up with 415 FAPs who had passed through reception centers. Of these, the research team was able to interview or obtain detailed information about the whereabouts of 238. Of these, only 24 had moved to the district capital, 20 joined the UPDF, 1 joined the LDU, 5 had returned to their reception center for training, 9 were away from home at boarding school, 1 was in prison, 9 had died and 41 had moved to another IDP camp. The remaining 128 were still living in the IDP camps to which they had been sent. The 177 other FAPs who were followed-up with could not be located for an interview in the time available. Most were also said to be usually resident in the IDP camps. However, the research team was unable to verify this (and it is possible that some informants claimed that FAPs were resident in the IDP camps in the hope of obtaining relief items).

The pie charts below present information about those FAPs whose whereabouts the research team was able to confirm, and also show how these differ between those who reported at reception centers between 1995 and 2000, and those who reported between 2001 and 2005.¹² It is striking that the patterns are

¹² Note that if the 177 others who were reported to be normally resident in the camps are included, the percentage of those resident in the camps would be even higher.

similar, with the exception of those being educated away from the camp, which is higher in the more recent cohort.

These data suggest that, in spite of the acute difficulties, **most FAPs who have passed through the reception centers remain with their families or within the same IDP camp** (even when they returned several years ago).



The findings from the IDP camps suggest the following factors are particularly important in explaining why movement out of the camps is limited.

- First, the social life in the IDP camps is such that returned people are absorbed into the population (even if they may not necessarily be fully accepted or ‘forgiven’). The team came across many examples. At one end of the spectrum, some families welcome back their relatives, and the returned people appear to be re-incorporated into moral networks. At the other end, there are restraints imposed on the actions of those who want to be hostile, including local ‘by-laws’, which usually include rules about not insulting returned people. In addition, many of the camps are large, housing thousands of people. So it can be possible for someone to move from home to home in search of somewhere relatively more comfortable. This is particularly so for women,

who normally live at the residence of their sexual partner. A few female FAPs told the team that they had decided to ‘marry’ after being abused at their parental home.

- Second, there are potential benefits associated with having a registered FAP person in a household. Certain reception centers, notably Rachele, provide relatively generous packages for the families of abducted people, as well as school fees for the FAP. This certainly caused some resentment. Those who receive less because the center they have passed through was less ‘generous’ or well endowed complain that they are being treated unfairly, while families with no member who has been through a center can often be heard to complain that people are being rewarded for having been with the LRA. Nonetheless, the eagerness with which people claim to have been ‘abducted’ to researchers highlights awareness that it is the only category of person that is likely to attract significant additional assistance from the aid agencies.
- Third, there are few opportunities to move away from IDP camps. For most people in the camps there is barely any source of income. A day’s laboring for a local landowner or army officer is enough to buy a couple of sodas in Gulu town. Transactional sex might be a little more lucrative, but there are few who can afford to pay for it, and returns are more likely in the form of accommodation and food. Most people have little or nothing to sell in the market place. Even for those who are supposed to be issued with Amnesty Certificates, the cost of travel to Gulu or Kitgum is often prohibitive, let alone the cost of staying in the towns. For many people, movement to towns is only possible if they have relatives who can look after them when they arrive. In addition, there are constraints on movement imposed by the UPDF and the threat from the LRA. In some places it may only be possible to move away from the IDP camp in a military convoy.

‘Night Commuting’

The obvious (apparent) exception to these observations about movement is the phenomenon of ‘night commuting’. This refers to the daily migration of young people into urban centers in the evening to sleep. It was not a primary focus of our research, although night commuter shelters were visited and interviews were made with children on the move. Media interest and aid agency responses have mainly focused on the very visible night commuter shelters in Gulu and Kitgum towns. These service the municipalities and those camps in walking distance. The numbers of young people moving into the town at night have declined since the LRA massacres of 2004, but hundreds still make the journey. While concerns about abduction remain, there are also other factors at work too. Several of those interviewed said that they found the shelters more comfortable than the cramped conditions in their parents’ homes, and some shelters provide entertainment and education. There is electricity in the towns too, and the possibility of socializing with age mates. In addition, it is important to note that the vast majority of young people living in the war zone are unable to walk into the main towns. In this context, the emphasis on night commuting at certain very public locations in Gulu or Kitgum seems misplaced. If it is the case that children and young adults are vulnerable to LRA abduction, then they are surely much more vulnerable in the more poorly protected IDP camps that are rarely visited, let alone studied. Here young people have no option but to remain where they are at night. In large camps, like Atiak, Anaka and Pabbo, the team noted that there was movement of some young people into the centers at dusk, but this aspect of more localized night commuting has been largely overlooked.¹³

¹³ It was noted by the team that some of those moving into the centers of IDP camps at night were young women. There are also indications that transactional sex occurs quite frequently, whereby women are offered a place to stay in return for sex. This was stated to us by people living in the camps. Several researchers have drawn attention to this problem in the main towns, it is also very likely to be an issue elsewhere (see, for example, Williamson, 2005).

2.1.2 TREATMENT OF FAPS IN IDP CAMPS

The research team's data indicates that most FAPs sent to IDP camps stay there. At one level it would therefore appear that family structures are robust enough to cope with receiving FAPs back, and that despite all the challenges, family reunification has been a relatively successful approach to reintegration.

The team, however, is cautious about drawing this conclusion. The study was not able to assess the degree to which the prolonged war and relocation of the population in camps has led to a breakdown in social accountability (this would require more detailed ethnographic work than was possible within the time frame of the research). However, there were indications of acute tensions, some of which have serious long term implications.

The team came across many stories of how 'reintegration' into a family network has been possible, and there appears to have been willingness for neighbors to accept that the person who has been with the LRA was not accountable for their actions. However, less positive accounts are also common. There is no doubt that antipathy and resentment of formerly abducted people (especially towards those who have passed through reception centers) is quite widespread, although it seems to vary from one IDP camp to another. It is manifested in a wide variety of ways, from children calling each other names to physical abuse.¹⁴

Of those 238 FAPs in the sample for whom the research team has interview material, 55 respondents (i.e. just under 25%) stated that they had experienced negative attitudes since their arrival (including two who also stated that their life is now fine). Most of the abuse was in the form of name-calling (e.g. 'GUSCO man', 'child of Kony', 'bush person'). The average age of those reporting negative attitudes towards them was 18. Of those who reported negative attitudes, 14 were women and 41 men.¹⁵ The number reporting negative attitudes is likely to be an underestimate, because some of those who did not report negative attitudes may have been unwilling to talk about such things in front of relatives.

Just 21 respondents (i.e. less than 10 percent) said that their life is fine now. There is no detectable pattern why they felt more positive about their lives than others: some of them had been abducted years ago, but others had returned from the bush as recently as 2004. Out of the 21, only five had received skills training, a quarter had applied for Amnesty; about half had received a cleansing ceremony. Three had previously experienced negative attitudes towards them. Some lived with their families, others did not. Individual personality clearly plays a large part in how a person adjusts – a point that came out strongly in our participant observation fieldwork.¹⁶

Extracts from interviews about life in the IDP camps are presented in Appendix 4. From these interviews, and from our ethnographic field work, it became evident to the team that family relationships are generally under even greater strain than is at first apparent. One of the consequences of the upheavals in the war zone of northern Uganda is that bride-price has generally not been paid, making the lineage status of women and their children ambiguous. To accept a person into a clan implies that a claim is being recognized to clan land, which may have serious implications when or if camps are eventually dismantled and there is a large-scale return to rural life. Without bride-price exchange, the lineage status of a woman

¹⁴ The team recorded a telling example when a group of camp inhabitants were stopped by a group of UPDF soldiers and made to slash the long grass and vegetation along the side of the road. This is a common practice, and something that people living in the camps have to put up with. While they were working, the soldiers stopped another group and singled out one young man. They called him 'You GUSCO man!' and told him that no one had told him to come back from the bush, so he should slash twice as much as everyone else! By-standers found this very amusing. FAP accounts of life in the IDP and life with the LRA are presented in Appendix 6.4.

¹⁵ FAPs expressed different views about the significance of abuse from family and neighbors. Some stated that they were very upset about it (a few began crying when they talked about it). Others did not appear to take it seriously.

¹⁶ FAPs and others interviewed stated that likeable and outgoing people are much more quickly accepted than those who are disturbed or aggressive.

and her children is that of her father rather than her sexual partner. This might place her and her children in competition with her brothers' wives for resources.¹⁷

Furthermore, the lack of bride-price exchange means that affinal relations are unpredictable. Women may move from one sexual partner to another, sometimes taking children from a former union with them, but sometimes leaving them with their mother, a former co-wife, or perhaps a wife of one of their mother's brothers. All of these people might be considered family members, but the situation does not correspond to the caring family unit, which seems to be implicit in so much of the child protection literature. In northern Uganda, as in other parts of Africa, family networks are complex, and can be particularly dynamic in situations of social stress. Patrilineal and patrilocal traditions have been weakened, even though the IDP camps mostly concentrate clans, and matrilineal connections have become more significant. The point in this context is that the 'families' to which FAPs are returned might actively involve their mother's and father's, but might not. Very many FAPs are not being cared for by both biological parents, and some by neither.¹⁸ This does not necessarily mean that they are not loved and cherished, but it is a risk. It is perhaps most likely when the FAP has been away for years, and the mother has started another family with a different partner. It is not enough to note if a FAP is staying with his or her mother or with another relative. There is a need to know how the FAP is being treated. That is something that could only be done effectively with a systematic follow-up of individual cases.

2.1.3 VIEWS ABOUT 'REINTEGRATION'

The research team asked community leaders, social workers, FAPs and their families what they felt assisted the returnees most effectively in finding their way back into society. In reply, many used the word 'reintegration', but were usually quick to qualify that 'reintegration' did not mean returning to a normal kind of life, given the IDP camp situation. Many of the answers received dealt with what would be desirable for successful 'reintegration' if only it was possible, rather than what has actually worked in practice.

It was striking that the language used by respondents, including the FAPs themselves, tended to replicate that of the reception center social workers. There was, for example, much talk of 'sensitizing', 'trauma', 'counseling', and 'children'. Problems are raised with the use of these terms later in this report; here they are placed in inverted commas, like the word 'reintegration' itself, to indicate that our informants used these expressions, or their local language equivalents, in response to the team's questions. Below is the summary of the main general issues raised by our respondents.

Structured facilitation of return: The need for adequate facilitation is a constant theme in the statements of respondents. Most people have views about how it should occur, and drew attention to shortcomings. A point repeatedly stressed was that 'reintegration' could only be attempted if there is a structure that supports such an endeavor, whether it is a strong family, a well-trained camp leader or a community volunteer who is aware of the issues that might arise. Family members, FAPs and community leaders all said that they need reliable facilitators to mediate between them. The research team witnessed occasions when FAPs were first reunited with their relatives after many years. It could be a very difficult encounter, in which people would not know what to say to each other. It was easy to see why tactful management of the meeting was considered so important. Many informants also emphasized that follow-

¹⁷ That is what happened among returning refugees to the West Nile region of Uganda in the 1980s. It could happen in the current war zone on a huge scale. At present, people living in camps are all so impoverished that the notion of competing over clan assets may seem remote. Nevertheless, relationships may be affected now by what is anticipated for the future.

¹⁸ We tried to assess this systematically in our survey of those who had passed through the reception centers, and it was clear that quite a large number of FAPs were not living with a parent. However, in most cases we were not able to assess what this meant. For example, a parent might be living nearby or a woman might be living with a sexual partner. Also the terms 'father' and 'mother' can carry wider connotations than biological parent.

up by reception centers should be an important part of facilitation. As one informant put it, it makes the FAPs ‘disciplined, because if they start getting disorganized, they are counseled.’ Several FAPs said that follow-up visits reassure them that there is still someone out there who cares about them. However, it was widely recognized that in practice follow-up very rarely happens.

Reinsertion packages: Not surprisingly, all FAPs felt that the packages of foodstuffs, commodities and money given to them on leaving reception centers were helpful. But it was also mentioned as a cause of resentment among people who had not been ‘abducted’, both by some FAPs and by their neighbors and families. Moreover, FAPs could not understand why different centers and agencies provided such different things. For example, those who were not having their school fees paid complained that it was unfair that others had been given sponsorship. Incomprehensible inconsistencies were also highlighted by camp officials. One camp commander pointed out that the reception centers were not giving equal support to all FAPs in his camp and that the ‘Amnesty Commission has issued certificates to some formerly abducted children and not to others. The children complain that the community leaders do not seem to care for them in the face of such differences.’

A warm reception: Camp officials often mentioned that, ‘first and foremost, children have to be loved’ and they need to be given a warm reception, because ‘the first thing that makes ‘reintegration’ successful is the welcome.’ They explained that how a ‘child’ is received back home sets the tone for the duration of their stay. Virtually all camp leaders were adamant that each family needs to be able to provide a welcoming ceremony at the very least.¹⁹ The FAPs who told the research team that they were warmly welcomed say that they felt comforted when they saw that the community was indeed receiving them well, as they had been told: ‘At World Vision, they told us that there were people to talk to us when we are at home. And so... there was no need to go back to the center again when we have reunited with our families.’

The term *cen* refers to a kind of spiritual pollution, affecting those who have performed violent acts, or who have witnessed them, or been in contact with death. Sometimes it is talked about as if it is a kind of vengeful ghost. At other times it refers to a malevolent spiritual force that emanates from the affected person. There is also the idea that *cen* may accumulate in a person over time. Various local healers attempt to control or mediate *cen*, including *ajwaki* (spirit mediums) who can perform rites of exorcism.

Many camp officials also emphasized more complex healing and cleansing ceremonies, even though relatively few of the FAPs in this study sample were reported to have actually received such a ceremony (e.g. 19 percent in Gulu and 9 percent in Pader). It was often claimed that they were important for ‘the community’, because they reduce fear of the FAPs, including fear of their spiritual pollution or *cen*. One mother described how after her son came home; they had to first cure him with a goat-slaughtering ceremony. Preparing such ceremonies gave camp leaders an opportunity to ‘sensitize’ the community and to make sure that ‘we are going to use a better language, because if we use a bitter language they (i.e. the FAPs) may go back to the bush.’ It is important to note this link between ceremonies and what might be termed public education. This is certainly an important part of their current role in northern Uganda, and helps explain why certain leading activists have given them such emphasis.

Attitudes to healing amongst FAPs themselves were very mixed. Some confirmed that ceremonies could be beneficial; others were disinterested and seemed a bit surprised as to why they were being asked about them. Overall, research findings using semi-structured interviews (as well as our participant observation fieldwork) suggested that healing could have an important place in helping some FAPs become integrated into social networks, but for others rituals were largely irrelevant.

Keeping FAPs busy: One of the most disturbing aspects of spending time at IDP camps is the sight of so many people, including children, sitting around for hour after hour with nothing much to do. Camp

¹⁹ This, however, strictly referred to welcoming ceremonies, not healing or cleansing ceremonies.

officials stressed that ‘reintegration’ worked best when the FAP is actively involved in activities, and FAPs themselves commonly contrasted the relative freedom they had enjoyed in the bush with the boredom and constraints of life in the camp. Camp leaders stress that encouraging children to play games is a good idea – although the research team did not see evidence of this happening (apart from during the very occasional visits to some IDP camps of aid agencies that specialize in organizing such activities – e.g. War Child).

Counseling: It was also emphasized that FAPs need to be ‘counseled always on how to stay with other people and to socialize well with people,’ because this makes them ‘gradually forget their past life.’ Many FAPs themselves would say this. When asked who should counsel them and what kind of counseling did they want, answers tended to refer to advice about proper ways of living given by relatives and neighbors.

Group activities: A wide range of group activities was mentioned as being helpful, including traditional dances, sports activities, school or joint business activities. However, these things were usually mentioned as being a good idea, rather than what was necessarily happening, and informants in the camps noted that many FAPs remain rather separate from the rest of the population.

Peer support: Some FAPs emphasized the need to establish strong peer support networks. Not all agreed about this. Other wanted no reminders of what had happened to them. The team noted that in FAP peer support groups (such as a darts club), the hierarchies of the LRA tended to be replicated.²⁰ Members of these groups, and those who like to meet with other FAPs on an informal basis, said that jointly finding a way of thinking about a better life in the future can be an energizing experience. It makes the FAP feel as if their time in the bush was worth something, rather than the beginning of a wasted life. At the very least their experience can help others.²¹

Predictably, all of those interviewed drew attention to **barriers and obstacles** to successful ‘integration’. Foremost among these observations are the following:

Limited economic opportunities: A huge problem that was mentioned by just about everyone was that the economic opportunities in the IDP camps and in the urban municipalities are very limited. Even those FAPs who had received some training found that they could not secure an adequate income. Overall the research team found little evidence that any technical skills learned at reception centers have proved adequate to secure a livelihood.²² However, the difficulties that FAPs have in earning an income are probably no worse than for most other people living in the region.²³

Treating adults as children: Linked to the absence of a viable livelihood, a common complaint among adult FAPs is that they are not taken seriously, but are treated like children both at the reception centers and after they are sent to the IDP camps. They state that they want to be given a choice as to how they live, and to be taught things that actually enhance their skills and capacities, rather than assuming that they have nothing to offer.

²⁰ One indication of this was that FAPs who had a rank in the bush were invariably the first to speak on behalf of group members. In some groups, the FAPs’ bush ranks were incorporated into administrative arrangements.

²¹ As one FAP explained: ‘Other returnees from here are traumatized. They always refer them to me to counsel them. I always counsel them and tell them about the problems we faced from the bush. So I ask them, “Do you want other problems?” In case if the government imprisons you, like that one who already is a thief, and who refused to listen to my instruction. He has been imprisoned.’”

²² There were very few exceptions to this: some FAPs reported that the bike they had been given secured them a livelihood as a *boda boda* (bike-taxi).

²³ The team noted that a ‘skill’ that some FAPs have learned at the centers is how to make applications and requests to aid organizations (and to researchers). Moreover, many FAPs have had their first experiences of living in a municipality while residing at the reception centers, and this potentially afforded them choices, which they otherwise would not have had. For a relatively small number, it becomes apparent that returning to the IDP camps is not the best option.

Pessimism: Many FAPS said that they often felt unable to move on with their lives, because they felt so pessimistic about the future. This was said by some to make settling down in the camps or towns almost impossible. Those who reported no hope for the future were also often those who contemplated going back to the rebels.²⁴



Distribution of soap and other essential items, Opit IDP Camp (Photo: Melissa Parker)

Security situation: All of those interviewed mentioned the security situation in the IDP camps. Fear of ‘re-abduction’ was often mentioned by FAPs, and staff at reception centers also expressed concerns that those who have passed through the official system might be particular targets. In addition there are concerns among many FAPs that people in the general population will attack them.

Concerns about the LRA focus on ‘revenge’ attacks on IDP camps that have apparently welcomed returning combatants, and also to the possibility of LRA punishments for those who escaped from the LRA (as opposed to those who were released). These fears are well grounded. The attack on Pagak camp in May 2004, for example, was a ‘retaliation’ against the population’s positive public reception to surrendering LRA combatants (which was reported on the local radio station). Since then there has been an improvement in the security of some camps, but they all still remain vulnerable. Even when the UPDF and LDU engage with the LRA, the consequences may not be very reassuring. Those who have previously been with the LRA state that they feel especially vulnerable during these kinds of incidents.

The LRA has been able to move deep into a camp at night, and there have been worries voiced that specific returned people might be targeted for ‘re-abduction’. The team found no evidence of this actually happening (although it probably has in the past). However, the team came across several people who had stories about being abducted three or four times without having been specifically targeted. It is common for FAPs to describe how people who had tried to escape are executed. The survival of FAPs who have

²⁴ Most state that to actually do so would be impossible. As one put it, ‘I felt like going back but I know even if I go back to the rebels, no one will welcome me.’ However, we know of one confirmed case where it has happened.

experienced multiple abductions indicates that this is not always the case. Nevertheless, all FAPs say that running away from the LRA is very dangerous.²⁵

Fear of the UPDF: The LRA is not the only security hazard that was mentioned in interviews. The UPDF and Local Defence Units (LDUs) are responsible for the security of civilians (there is next to no civilian policing in the IDP camps). However, reports of human rights violations by soldiers are not uncommon. Soldiers enforce curfews and persons found beyond the designated boundaries without permission and knowledge of the UPDF/LDUs are at risk of being beaten or worse. When soldiers feel under military threat, their behavior can be particularly unpredictable and harsh.²⁶

Treatment by family and neighbors: This issue has been discussed above. Even if they are accepted or tolerated now, some FAPs expressed concern that the situation would not last. A commonly heard complaint was that after an initial welcome, FAPs started to be called ‘bad names’, particularly when it became clear that they would not receive extra relief items.

Most of those who have passed through the reception centers are living in the IDP camps. However, some are unwilling to take such a risk. The research team carried out multiple interviews with a ‘peer group’ of former LRA veterans (i.e. FAPs who had been with the LRA for several years and had been engaged in armed combat), including some middle level officers. They were living in Gulu municipality and admitted that they feared living out in the IDP camps, because of what might be done to them. Similarly, one of the ‘wives’ of a senior LRA commander who was staying at World Vision asked what could be done for her children, who, she was sure, would be harmed if people found out who they were.

2.1.4 ‘ABDUCTION’ AND ATTITUDES TO THE LRA

Attitudes of FAPs to their experience of being with the LRA vary widely. A problem with the use of the term ‘abduction’ (*mako* in the Acholi and Langi languages) is that it is not a neutral term. It allocates no agency to those who are taken. It suggests that they are passive victims.

²⁵ Many recounted how they had tried to escape, but were recaptured and severely beaten or even forced to kill someone. One of the GUSCO social workers described what happened to a boy at the center after being re-abducted: ‘Since he had escaped from the rebel’s captivity not so long ago, they swore to kill him, along with all the other children who dared to escape but were recaptured.... He and four other boys were tied up and lined up ready to be killed. One by one the boys were hacked with a machete - the rebels always say they cannot waste bullets on ‘escapees’ or ‘abductees’. He was the last in line and luckily for him – when the third boy had been killed, a UPDF helicopter which was following the rebels came in view, quite low and started firing at them. The rebels took off, leaving him behind where the soldiers later picked him.’

According to another FAP, also at GUSCO: ‘I ran away the first time but I was caught then I did not dare to try again because I knew for sure I would be killed if I was caught. It was sheer luck that separated me and some boys from the rebels – I decide to escape then. [...] I wanted to come back and continue with my schooling.’ Even talking about escaping after arrival like this can be considered foolish. It was striking that many FAPs claim that they were captured by the UPDF (‘I did not escape; I was just captured by the government soldiers. I had not even thought of escaping before’), and had not tried to escape (‘I did not escape, I did not even think of doing it. What was the point anyway? We were captured by UPDF soldiers during a battle.’) This was especially the case when they were interviewed together with other FAPs. In private, some said that they thought other FAPs would report them to the LRA if they admitted that they had returned voluntarily.

²⁶ In one attack at Atiak camp, which occurred while members of the team were staying there for the night, a group of LRA launched an assault in the early evening, quite close to the center. The local UPDF responded, and a short exchange of fire ensued, with casualties on both sides. The events that followed were very revealing. The UPDF soldiers moved around the camp shouting at people in Swahili. Then they made everyone put out fires and lights, and anyone found moving around near the main street was beaten. The soldiers were in a panic and their behavior unpredictable and potentially dangerous. In the morning, the body of the LRA combatant who had been killed was still lying in the road. No one had been allowed to cover him with leaves, as is the custom, and the local pigs were eating his body. In this way, *cen* was spread amongst the population. It seemed the camp population were being terrorized and punished for what had happened.

This is certainly the case in very many instances, but in others it is not. In some IDP camps we found informants who told us that they had been ‘abducted’ several times. One man said it had happened to him eight times. Often these people are taken for relatively brief periods to carry food or give directions. But the fact that they have survived to be ‘abducted’ repeatedly indicated a degree of (perhaps unwilling) cohabitation with the rebels. Quite a lot of people have faded in and out of contact with the LRA, and have kept a close contact even when living in an IDP camp or municipality. For large number of people living in camps, putting up with the LRA is not so different to their experiences of the UPDF (both constrain activities and occasionally require free labor).

Moreover, once someone has been ‘abducted’ and kept (i.e. not quickly released) by the LRA, they are initiated into a new kind of life and inculcated with new values. Some young women taken as ‘wives’ and young men trained as combatants described to us how they came to accept the LRA way of life, and strove to gain status within it.²⁷ This might be considered evidence of their remarkable resilience in appalling circumstances. But it would be a mistake to assume that they have led a life of pretence for months or years.

The attitudes of our FAP informants were remarkably diverse.²⁸ Some had clearly had an atrocious time, and remained appalled and terrified by what had happened, or expressed nothing but bitterness for those who had abused them. Several did indeed show signs of deep mental disturbance. In one interview, a recently returned young woman stared into space and recited the story of her experiences in awesome detail, talking for more than two hours in a monotone, and ostensibly showing no emotion. She talked about how she had participated in killings and what she had eaten as if they were the same kind of thing. In contrast, a few FAPs surprised the research team by being indifferent to what had happened to them, or even amused by it. One young woman said that it was good in the bush, because she did not have to worry about being abducted by the LRA any more, and then fell about laughing. Others make a clear distinction between life in the bush and life in the reception center or in the IDP camps, and suggest that different rules apply in each situation. It was also striking how some FAPs (especially those who might be categorized as ‘veterans’) described life in the IDP camps and life with the LRA as if they existed in separate moral spaces. There were FAPs who expressed affection or respect for LRA commanders. In addition, as has been noted above, there is a strong sense of camaraderie among some FAPs, and LRA hierarchies, including gendered hierarchies, tend to be replicated in peer support groups.

A point that emerged from the interviews and discussion with FAPs was that it was often the shifting between the world of the bush and the world of ‘normal’ life that was most difficult, painful and disturbing, not the actual living in the other moral space itself. Once the rules are established and clear, conforming to them could be comforting and reassuring. For some FAPs, there was an acute sense of loss in not being able to integrate their lives in the bush with their lives since their return, and that living with people who had not been in the bush meant a kind of denial of their experiences. These were people who had attained status in the LRA – command responsibility and ‘fame’. In the IDP camps they could not build on this achievement. It was only others from the LRA who recognized it. This was compounded by the advice they had been given at reception centers not to talk about their experiences with neighbors in the IDP camps, and was one reason given why FAPs seek out each other’s company after they are

²⁷ To give examples, here are three quotes taken from interviews with (male) LRA veterans at one IDP: (1) ‘I was striving so much to get a rank. That is why they sent me to go and lay an ambush: I would go. I was given difficult tasks. I would perform them, because I was striving to get the rank and that was how I got it.’ (2) ‘Killing in the bush: to the commanders it was fame. When a commander orders killing, he becomes famous.... Everybody would struggle to get a rank or to be famous.’ (3) ‘Fighting was very nice for us, especially when we were on the winning side. If you go and find you have killed many of your opponents you are very happy. It was not bad, we felt it was nice.’

²⁸ This sort of information rarely emerges from structures and semi-structured research methods, but emerges over time as a relationship is built up during participant observation or sometimes in very long, open-ended interviews. Appendix 6.4 presents several short extracts from interviews about life with the LRA.

released from the centers. The research team does not offer these observations to suggest that no FAPs are traumatized by their time in the bush, far from it, but information is too limited to make sweeping assertions, and things are certainly much more complicated than is generally suggested. It certainly makes no sense to assert that the LRA and FAPs do not have values, and it is unfortunate that this has been promoted as a piece of received wisdom, both in the media and by aid agencies.

Staff at most of the reception centers made the point about the lack of values amongst FAPs. A World Vision publicity booklet quotes the director as saying: ‘We have to go to the community and help the children keep on the right path. They have grown up with the LRA. Many of them do not have values.’²⁹ Views about the lack of values among FAPs are of course affected by the notion that the LRA has no perceivable agenda. But, even leaving aside the political manifestos that have been distributed at various times, this is obviously not the case. The LRA may have become a way of life with certain benefits to those who accept it, such as access to selected women as ‘wives’, nevertheless, like Alice Lakwena’s Holy Spirit movement before it, the LRA has a project in wanting to make a new Acholi society – one that may incorporate non-Acholis, and that is purified of corruption and immorality. The war and killing is a form of healing, of cutting ‘wrong elements’ out of society and purifying it. Doubtless most people reading this report would view this as a warped and pernicious ideology. It would be wrong, however, to suggest that it is not based on the articulation of shared values.

The power of the LRA is strongly linked to spiritual and moral values and its emphasis on healing rites and religious ceremonies, which are contrasted with the corruption, political compromises and impurity of life in Uganda, Africa and the world as a whole. Those who have participated in LRA rites may say that they do not believe in them any longer, or that they came to reject them, but the team did not come across any who deny their effects on behavior. Joseph Kony, like Alice Lakwena, has effectively harnessed widely recognized and feared spiritual forces. Many FAPs said that they believed, or even still believe, that he can see into their minds, and would know if they tried to escape. Some also observe that their spiritual experiences with the LRA were much more intense than anything they had experienced before or afterwards. For many FAPs, their time with the LRA was a time when they were close to the spirit world, maybe even to God. The Director of CCF Pader noted that some of those who come to her center comment that they spent many hours in prayer when they were with the LRA, but now are only expected to pray for relatively short periods, and they are not expected to take God so seriously.

It is important to recognize that rituals are not just the expression of beliefs, but that they also shape or create beliefs. As religious practice demonstrates everywhere, regular collective performance of rites affects what people come to think is true, and this is particularly so for children. The LRA has been persistently underestimated as a military and political force partly because its institutionalised system of promoting and regulating values has been dismissed as incoherent madness. If only that was so!³⁰ Extracts from interviews with LRA veterans are presented in Appendix 4.

²⁹ When asked to elaborate on this remark, he said that children arriving at the center: ‘... do not value human life ... it is a value that just is not there. They have no feelings, they have lost the ability to feel...Many have had to kill their own parents, or watch others kill their parents ... they have killed with regularity and dismissiveness ... it has become as simple a task as tearing up a piece of paper’ [*at which point he tore up a blank sheet of white paper*]. We asked if they have actually come to value other things; and that it is a question of them having different values, rather than no values. Commenting on a particular FAP who had just arrived – an obviously terrified young man in good physical condition but with badly cut bare feet from running for miles in the bush – World Vision’s director remarked: ‘Well, he has come to value being alive and eating food ... but you must remember that he has been living with great fear under the control of a commander. Maybe you are right ... they have changed their values [in the bush] ... it is not that they have no values.’ But is it really the case that those who have spent time living with the LRA only value eating and staying alive? The evidence is that there is much more to the LRA than that. Indeed, the evidence points the other way.

³⁰ A detailed discussion of the LRA is beyond the remit of this report. Interested readers are referred to Finnstrom (2003) and Allen (2006).

2.1.5 TRADITIONAL HEALING AND LOCAL FORGIVING

Over the past ten years, there has been a great deal of emphasis by local and international NGOs on traditional and religious healing. A view has been promoted that the people of northern Uganda, and especially the Acholi, have a special capacity to forgive, and that local understandings of justice are based upon ‘reintegration’ of offending people into society. It has even been argued that this is not only a mechanism through which FAPs are re-incorporated into society, but even that it offers a way of resolving the war itself, and is a viable alternative to the criminal justice measures promoted by the International Criminal Court (which has been investigating war crimes and crimes against humanity in northern Uganda).³¹ Much of the discussion focuses on certain rituals, notably a blessing ceremony which involved the FAP stepping on eggs, and a more complex reconciliation ceremony called *mato oput*. The issue has been picked up by the media. *The New York Times*, for example, rarely publishes articles on Uganda, but in April 2005 chose to run a substantial piece on the topic.³² Performance of traditional healing ceremonies has also been funded by various aid agencies.

The team’s research findings indicate that there are several serious problems with assertions made about these ceremonies. One is that ideas about ‘amnesty’, ‘forgiveness’, ‘reconciliation’ and the setting aside of punitive judgment are not conceptually distinct in the Acholi language (or the related Langi language). *Timo-kica* means ‘doing forgiving/reconciliation etc.’ and can be used for all of them. So talk of ‘forgiveness’ may not mean quite what it suggests in English. Amongst other things, the conflation of different notions makes it hard to explain why the Amnesty Act – a legal instrument – has to be periodically extended by parliament (although amnesty granted to an individual under the terms of the act is not timebound). The attitudes to forgiveness or amnesty are not as consistent as is so often asserted.³³ Many of those spoken to, begin by saying that they want *timo-kica* but go on to express enthusiasm for prosecution and punishment. Claims about Acholi forgiveness need to be closely interrogated, and certainly not taken at face value. The following are the key points about traditional healing that emerged from this research.

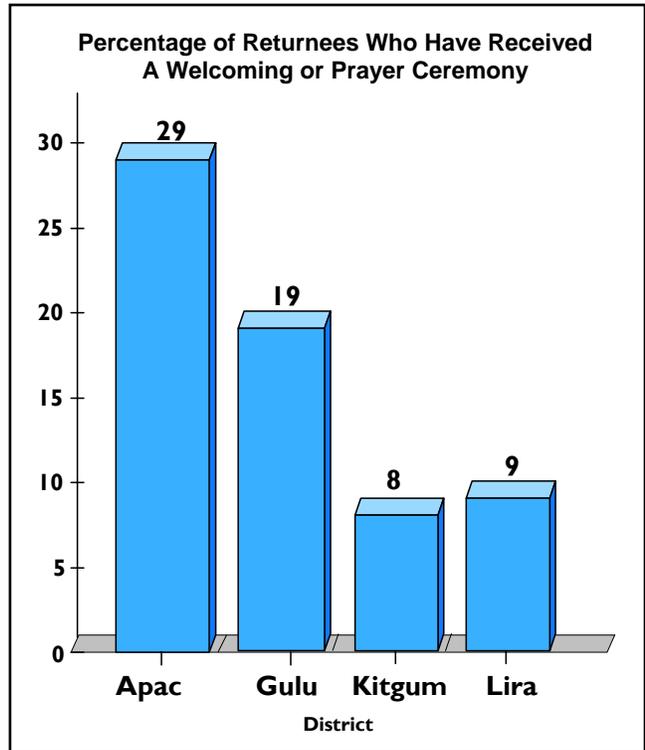
³¹ For example, one generally excellent study comments that the Ugandan Amnesty Act is seen to be compatible with Acholi dispute resolution mechanisms: ‘culturally, people’s ideas of forgiveness are entrenched. They don’t kill people; they believe the bitterness of revenge does not solve the problem. So it was easy for people to accept the idea of amnesty. The culture is for compensation.’ The report quotes a religious leader as saying that: ‘Some people say you can’t give in to Kony. But when you look at the Acholi people, they believe in *mato oput*, which is a reconciliation ceremony here. In Acholi culture there is no death sentence, because they know that the death sentence increases violence. They practice that in their culture, so why not in this?’ Thus, it is claimed, there is a clear feeling that the amnesty is based on values that are seen as compatible with the context in which it is being applied (Lomo and Hovil, 2004: 45). Many otherwise thoughtful and well-informed contributions continue to assert this view without serious question. For example, on February 1st 2005, the Civil Society for Peace in Northern Uganda issued a briefing paper. It contains the following statement on ‘traditional justice mechanisms in Acholi’: ‘it is worth mentioning a few words about the Acholi justice system, which is based on compensation, reconciliation and ‘reintegration’. The main objective of the justice system is to integrate perpetrators into their communities with their victims, through a process of establishing the truth, confession, reparation, repentance and forgiveness. Mechanisms such as *mato oput* and *bending of the spears* are ancient Acholi rituals which, despite many years of war and displacement are still being practiced in the sub-region, and have the support and confidence of the majority of Acholis and their traditional leaders....’ CSOPNU (2005). The International Criminal Court Investigation in Northern Uganda. Briefing Paper. C. S. f. P. i. N. Uganda, Civil Society for Peace in Northern Uganda.

³² Here is an extract from the article: ‘The International Criminal Court at The Hague represents one way of holding those who commit atrocities responsible for their crimes. The raw eggs, twigs and livestock that the Acholi people of northern Uganda use in their traditional reconciliation ceremonies represent another. The two very different systems - one based on Western notions of justice, the other on a deep African tradition of forgiveness - are clashing in their response to one of this continent’s most bizarre and brutal guerrilla wars... Lacey, M. (2005). Atrocity victims in Uganda choose to forgive.’ New York Times. New York.

³³ An important exception is the recent questionnaire-based study by the International Center for Transitional Justice. International Center for Transitional Justice (2005). *Forgotten Voices: A population-based survey on attitudes about peace and justice in northern Uganda*. Berkeley, Human Rights Center, University of California, Berkeley.

Some FAPs state that they have undergone a form of local or religious ritual, from ‘stepping on eggs’ and sprinkling water, to Christian prayer meetings following their return. Of the 238 FAPs from the sample who were interviewed in person (or whose immediate family members were interviewed), just 69 stated that they had been involved in such a ceremony. They generally say that they found these re-assuring, and that is made them feel more relaxed.

While secular reception centers, notably GUSCO, encourage FAPs to participate in such rituals, the institutional attitude at Christian reception centers, such as World Vision, is less positive. One World Vision staff member explained that he has found that some FAPs, especially the children, are upset by the violence in sacrificial ceremonies, and dislike the ritual ablutions because they remind them of the healing rites that were performed by the LRA in the bush.



In general, the research team found that the role of local healing in ‘reintegration’ has been overstated or misunderstood in many reports. The rituals and ceremonies that FAPs have undergone are not compensation rituals and they do not necessarily indicate that someone is forgiven and fully accepted. Rather, they can be part of a process, the first stage of which is to recognize someone has returned, and can be considered to be a social person. Such rituals are, for example, performed when someone returns home after working in another part of the country for a period.

From the scores of interviews carried out, the team concluded that rituals of healing are quite common, but they do not confirm that the community as a whole has set aside accountability for crimes aside. There was no widespread enthusiasm for *mato oput* or other ceremonies performed by the Paramount Chief. On the contrary, some Acholi people spoken to are adamant that such public rituals are useless, or make things worse by concentrating *cen* in the urban centers. Not surprisingly, Madi, Langi and Teso informants are even more dismissive. They have also suffered at the hands of the LRA, so why should it be the Acholi who do the forgiving? Most of those talked to, in the IDP camps mixed concern about the security implications of issuing warrants for the arrest of Kony and his senior commanders, with a willingness to see them prosecuted and punished. Certainly there was no general rejection of international justice. Often there was concern about how such legal measures are going to be applied, and why it has taken so long for their plight to be noticed.³⁴

³⁴ Furthermore, the emphasis on Acholi customs as a means of dealing with the LRA has other unfortunate connotations. In Uganda, especially in the south of the country, there is a tendency to demonize the Acholi people. For political and cultural reasons they are caricatured as innately violent. It is not uncommon to hear people in Kampala say that they should just be left to get on with their war on their own. All the talk about the Acholi forgiving those among them who have killed and mutilated can seem to reinforce the perception that they are not like other people and have their own ways of managing themselves. In our experience, the majority of Acholi, Madi, Langi and Teso who have been affected by the war want a more adequate security response to the situation and some form of legal accountability for those who have abused them, both in the LRA and the UPDF.

Overall, the team's findings corroborate those from the 2005 ICTJ & HRC survey of adults. Over 2,500 randomly selected adults in Gulu, Pader and Kitgum Districts were asked: 'What is Justice?' The most common responses were 'compensation': 8 percent, 'assistance to victims': 10 percent, 'truth and fairness': 11 percent, 'reconciliation': 18 percent, and 'trials': 31 percent. Just 7% of respondents mentioned 'traditional justice'.³⁵

2.1.6 THE ROLE OF ADULTS IN THE LRA

The SOW for this report, like most documents relating to the war in northern Uganda, highlights the plight of children. This is understandable. By any criteria, what has happened to children is appalling. However, a finding of this research is that the role of adults has been under-emphasized. Of course this depends on what is meant by the terms 'child' and 'adult'. There is a tendency for local people to refer to 'our children in the bush', and it is probably the case in most African societies that someone is viewed as a 'child' until they have produced children themselves and are living in their own home. But if a child means a person under the age of 18 years, then many assertions about the war have to be treated with skepticism. In this subsection, we examine two aspects of this issue. First, we discuss our data on patterns on 'abduction' and the results from other surveys. Second, we point out that allocating the status of 'child' to all FAPs is not just misleading, but affects responses by reception centers.

The research team has been unable to find evidence that over 80% of LRA combatants are children, or were abducted children (a figure that even appears in the ICC press release about the Ugandan referral³⁶). This does not mean to say that it is certainly untrue, but it is not a figure that appears to be based on data about 'abduction' – or indeed any other source that the team could discover. Perhaps not surprisingly, it is countered by UPDF soldiers, who claim that those they end up actually fighting are mostly adults - many of them well into their twenties or older. The two LRA fighters killed in exchanges while the team was researching in the IDP camps were certainly not children, although they may have been abducted as children.

Significantly, the average age of arrival at reception centers is just under the age of 18. Many of those who pass through the process are mature adults, including quite a few of the so called 'child mothers', and a significant proportion of these people were abducted close to or after their 18th year. It is also important to note that the vast majority of those who arrive at reception centers are male. The impression has sometimes been given that girls predominate among FAPs, partly because of the publicity and concern that was focused on those abducted from St. Mary's College Aboke in 1996. The reception center data counter common assertions, but it needs to be stressed again that they are partial. There is ample evidence that a large proportion of abducted people never go through the reception center process at all.

UNICEF carried out a survey of all 'abductions' that had been reported through local councils and community volunteers between 1997 and 2001 (including short 'abduction's of just one day). It found that a total of 28,903 people had been taken from Gulu, Kitgum, Pader, Apac and Lira Districts between 1990 and 2001.³⁷ The most intense period of 'abduction' during this decade occurred soon after the failed peace negotiations, with over 6,000 reported 'abduction's in 1996. Fewer than 10,000 of the reported 'abductions' (less than a third of the total) were 'abductions' of children (i.e. people less than 18 years of age). The largest number of 'abductions' was of people aged 18-35 years (about 45 percent). The overall majority of those abducted were male (about 70 percent). By the end of 2001, about 16,000 abducted people had returned (i.e. they had escaped, had been freed by the LRA, or they had surrendered or been captured by the Ugandan army). Just fewer than 13,000 were still missing (i.e. still with the LRA or

³⁵ ICTJ & HRC, 2005. Respondents could give more than one response.

³⁶International Criminal Court (2004). *Press Release: Background information on the situation in Uganda*. The Hague, International Criminal Court.

³⁷ UNICEF (2001). *Abductions in Northern Uganda and South-Western Uganda: 1986-2001*. Kampala, UNICEF.

dead), of which 5,555 were thought to be children. The vast majority of those who had returned had done so within a year of their ‘abduction’ (almost 80 percent).

**AVERAGE AGE OF ARRIVAL AT RECEPTION CENTER/
AVERAGE ‘ABDUCTION’ LENGTH
(1995 – 2005)**

Male

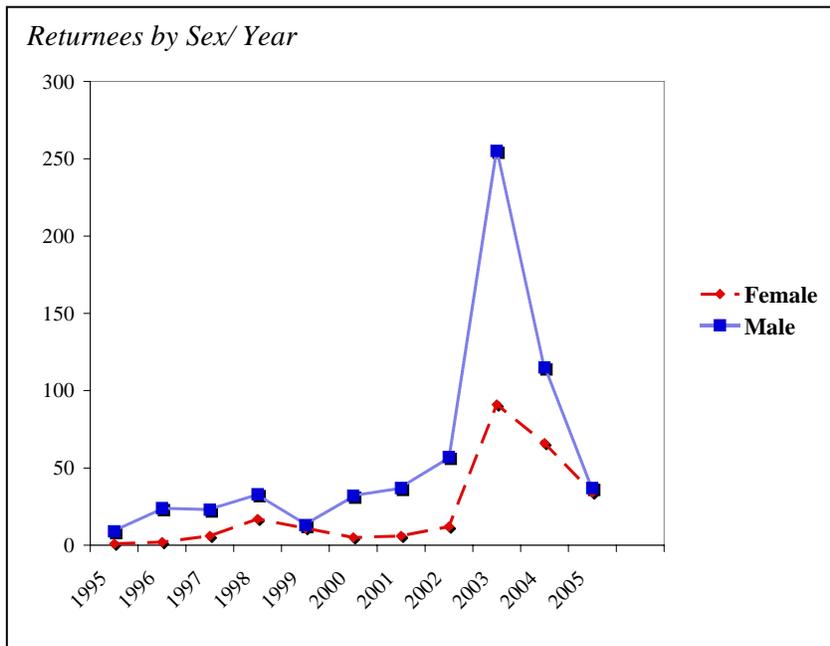
District	Age	StDevAge	Abduction Length
Kitgum	20	10	30
Apac	19	10	255
Pader	19	7	241
Gulu	18	6	256
Lira	18	6	167
Katakwi	15	5	425
Soroti	14	0	640

Female

District	Age	StDevAge	Abduction Length
Apac	17	5	1,445
Gulu	16	4	616
Kitgum	16	6	558
Pader	16	4	895
Soroti	15	0	46
Katakwi	14	2	200
Lira	14	2	122

Abduction length relates to number of reported days in captivity. Data is based on entire sample of 886 FAPs

Numerous further reported ‘abductions’ have occurred since 2001, but the system of collating data broke down during the upheavals in 2002, and is currently in the process of being re-established. It may be that patterns of ‘abduction’ have changed during the past four years. Reporting at reception centers suggest that large numbers of children were abducted after UPDF operations against LRA bases in Sudan began in 2002. Many adults were also abducted at this time, but some informants have suggested that there might have been a shift in LRA strategy. It was perhaps less necessary to abduct adults as porters to transport food over long distances, because LRA groups were operating from Uganda. There may also have been a demographic factor. The IDP camps are known to have a very high fertility rate and low life expectancy. A significant majority of the population is under the age of 18 (more than 55 percent are under the age of 15).³⁸



Such trend in increased child ‘abduction’ may be reflected in one of two large-scale questionnaire surveys carried out in 2005. The WHO Mortality survey of July 2005 estimated that 1,168 people were abducted

³⁸ WHO and T. R. o. U. M. o. Health (2005). Health and Mortality Survey Among Internally Displaced Persons in Gulu, Kitgum and Pader Districts, Northern Uganda, World Health Organization: page 11.

between January and July and had not returned home within Gulu, Pader and Kitgum Districts. All were of people below the age of 35, and 46 percent were below the age of 15. However, this appears to be an extrapolation from just 28 reported cases in the sample of 3,830 households.³⁹ The other recent questionnaire-based study interviewed 2,585 randomly selected adults in Gulu, Kitgum, Lira and Soroti Districts.⁴⁰ The results were very different. They suggested that the scale of ‘abduction’ is extraordinary: 40 percent of respondents claimed to have been abducted themselves, and 31 percent claimed to have had a child abducted. In Gulu and Kitgum the figure for adult ‘abduction’ was over 50 percent and for children 38 percent. If these self-reported ‘abductions’ really occurred, then the total numbers involved would run into the hundreds of thousands. Even allowing for ambiguity in what is meant by the term ‘abduction’, this is unlikely.⁴¹

While recognizing problems with the data sets, there are some important points to stress. The scale of child ‘abduction’ has been terrible, and so have the experiences of some of those who have been abducted. But the evidence from this study shows that it has not been the only form of recruitment to the LRA. More adults than children have been abducted, although it is possible that this has changed since 2002. Also, the number of males ‘abducted’ exceeds that of females, and the majority of ‘abducted’ people never pass through reception centers (or, for that matter, the UPDF).

Adult ‘abduction’ and the incidence of ‘abduction’ outside of the reception center process are well known to those working on the ground, even if they are down-played (or even denied) by reception center staff and government officials. Many people interviewed expressed views about it, one of which was that adults and those outside the reporting system only spent short periods of time with the LRA, and were less ‘traumatized’ than those who go through the official process. It is possible that this is the case, but it is worth bearing in mind that there is little information on those who have not passed through the reception center system. Of the FAPs talked to who had not passed through reception centers, many were indeed only taken for short periods, but others had spent months or years with the LRA. Moreover, the data from the reception centers show that many of those who passed through had actually not been with the LRA for long periods.

Although the research team was unable to make a rigorous assessment, the findings tend to confirm that it is mostly adults who have been abducted as porters, sometimes on a rather affable basis. But the team also found that some adults choose, or were compelled to join the rebels as combatants. Another finding was that those abducted as mature adults and kept by the rebels were usually male. The team found that if adult females are kept, they are almost invariably still young, because they are selected as ‘wives’ (although a few women in their mid 20s who were interviewed were retained by the LRA as domestic servants for those selected as ‘wives’).

The absence of so many abducted adults from the formal ‘reintegration’ process, and the emphasis on children within the system has contributed to an assumption that all FAPs can be treated like children irrespective of their actual age. Several FAPs who were at reception centers, or had passed through them,

³⁹Ibid: page 20.

⁴⁰ International Center for Transitional Justice (2005). *Forgotten Voices: A population-based survey on attitudes about peace and justice in northern Uganda*. Berkeley, Human Rights Center, University of California, Berkeley.

⁴¹ There are clearly weaknesses in all these data sets. The data collated by UNICEF are based on reported abductions. There may have been reasons why some people avoid this process, not least because it might involve questioning by the UPDF. On the other hand, surveys based on self-reported abductions (i.e. when the person interviewed states that he or she has been abducted to the researcher) indicate much higher rates. However, such claims have to be treated with caution, because there can be incentives to claim to have been abducted. The Rachele Reception Center in Lira, for example, has found that a high percentage of those put forward as formerly abducted children for its education sponsorship program from some agencies have in fact never spent time with the LRA. This is one of the reasons for the often-noted tension between the Rachele Center and other groups involved in ‘reintegration’. The WHO data is also flawed in that the sample used was designed to assess overall mortality rates, and is really too small to make reliable estimates on abduction.

complained to the team that they were treated as if they were unable to think for themselves. These included several ‘child mothers’ who were in their late twenties. Some said that they found the attitude of reception center staff patronizing. A few complained that they were not allowed to be with their sexual partners.

In addition, it was observed by reception center staff that the power dynamics that had been in place with the LRA have sometimes been replicated in the centers. For example, ‘child mothers’ who had been the ‘wives’ of commanders were said to expect other FAPs to wait on them like servants. The research team did not see this happening, but it was apparent that some ‘child mothers’ had a sense of their status and a confidence that others lacked. The team also noted that LRA military ranks were informally replicated in social gatherings away from the centers, for example in peer support groups, at the Labora Farm project (see Appendix 3) and within the UPDF.

Several reception centers have recognized the replication of LRA ranks as a problem, and have tried to deal with it. Some, like CARITAS, have a policy of only accepting FAPs who have not had a rank in the LRA. This was said by staff to make the FAPs in the CARITAS centers more manageable. Those centers openly accepting adults (i.e. recognizing that many FAPs are over 18) try to keep them apart from most of the children. World Vision in Gulu has three separate centers, for ‘child mothers’, ‘adults’ and children. Nevertheless, there remains a tendency to conceptualize all FAPs as being like children, to allocate them little agency, and to expect them to show that they are ‘normal’ and ‘good’ by following instructions.

Many of those who have spent prolonged periods with the LRA learned to use the rules to their own advantage. They made choices that enabled them to become integrated and to try to achieve a high status, and they do not regard their time with the LRA as a completely negative experience. The team’s impression is that such incorporation into the LRA is as representative of people passing through the reception centers as the harrowing stories about abuse recounted in most reports and articles – which is not to suggest that these people have not been abused also. Indeed, it is perhaps those people who found meaning and status in violence that are the most ‘traumatized’ of all. After all, the psychiatric concept of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder emerged in the US as a way of interpreting the pathological tendencies of Vietnam veterans.

What passes as ‘counseling’ at reception centers has little to do with psychotherapy. It is more like an education in how to behave properly in the ‘community’. Arguably, there are positive outcomes to this kind of approach, but there are also significant dangers, which are compounded by weaknesses in monitoring and follow-up. Most FAPs who at one point accepted LRA values may regret having done so, but (without necessarily apportioning blame) it is the case that very violent people have been sent out into the population with no mechanism of surveillance.⁴² Whatever the merits of the blanket amnesty procedures, it seems a risky policy.

More generally, the association between the LRA and children has contributed to the argument that those who have performed atrocities must be forgiven, and the assertion that such a view is widely accepted by the population as a whole. This too is open to question.

2.2 ‘CHILD MOTHERS’

The SOW requires inclusion of a section on ‘child mothers’ in the report. The following issues have been addressed:

- The context in which the problem of ‘child mothers’ has arisen

⁴² One of our key informants amongst LRA veterans has now returned to the LRA. A recent survey of nearly 750 youth from eight sub-counties in Kitgum and Pader districts. Has found that: ‘A surprising number of abducted youth, including a third of the children, say there was a time they felt like staying with the LRA. More than a tenth admits to having felt loyalty to Kony, and having ambitions to become a commander.’ (SWAY, 2006).

- Data on ‘child mothers’ who have passed through the reception centers
- The diverse attitudes and experiences of those classified as ‘child mothers’
- Current responses to ‘child mothers’

In addition, Appendix 5 includes numerous extracts from the research team’s interviews.

2.1.1 THE CONTEXT

In recent years there has been a great deal of concern voiced about the plight of ‘child mothers’. This is partly because the number of ‘child mothers’ arriving at reception centers increased following the Iron Fist Offensives of the UPDF across the border in Sudan since 2002. Most ‘child mothers’ have been rescued, handed over by the LRA or escaped during the past three to four years. Understanding of the phenomenon has been powerfully influenced by the success of the book *Aboke Girls* in representing to the outside world what is happening in northern Uganda, and various international aid agencies, notably World Vision, have been lobbying for the foregrounding of the issue in assistance programs. Not surprisingly, stories about ‘child mothers’ have been picked up in the media. There is now a widespread perception that the raping of girls by the LRA is one of the most important aspects of the war, and assisting those abused should be a priority for funding. A consequence is that several of the reception centers have emphasized the needs of ‘child mothers’ as a special group, and run projects aimed at helping them. There are also constant pressures from some donors to expand such activities.

There is no doubt that young women, some of them pre-pubescent, have been abducted, and have been given as ‘wives’ to LRA combatants as a reward for their actions. Many ended up as the ‘wives’ of commanders, and some commanders have many such ‘wives’. Kony himself is said to have had more than forty. There is also no doubt that the experience of this form of marriage has been harrowing for many of the girls who were forced to go through it. However, there are also various things that need to be considered in an assessment of the ‘child mother’ problem, all of which are largely being ignored – although, as with other externally driven policy agendas, many local staff are well aware of the complexities and contradictions in what they are doing.

The issue of ‘child mothers’ in northern Uganda is generally discussed as if it is something completely new and radically different from the social norm. This is not entirely so. The notion of a ‘child mother’ has to be set in the wider context of early marriage in Uganda as a whole. According to the 2000 Demographic Health Profile, 13 percent of women were mothers or pregnant for the first time before the age of 17, 23 percent before the age of 18, and 54 percent before the age of 19.⁴³ The age of consent is 18, which means that the families of almost a quarter of Ugandan women up to this age could theoretically bring a charge of ‘defilement’ (and this is partly why so many ‘rape’ cases are brought to court). The war-affected districts of northern Uganda were not included in the 2000 survey, but are known to have a very high fertility rate, and it can be assumed that the percentage of technically underage mothers is well in excess of average national rates. Set against these data, applying the term ‘child mother’ specifically to women returning from the LRA with children is unhelpful. It is a point that was not lost on the director of CCF in Pader.

‘Child mothers’ are really a general issue in Acholi society and that issue is overshadowed by the emphasis on formerly abducted ‘child mothers’. The donors miss the point a bit by forgetting everybody else.’

What potentially sets those currently classified as ‘child mothers’ apart is not so much their age, but the fact that they were forced into sexual unions. However, in this respect too there are things to consider.

⁴³Republic of Uganda (2001). Uganda: Population, Reproductive Health and Development. MoF Population Secretariat, Planning and Economic Development. Kampala. Page 25.

When a young man has no access to resources with which to begin negotiations over bride price, an alternative is ‘marriage by capture’, or ‘elopement’, sometimes with an element of force. Some earlier studies about the Northern Uganda region during the early and mid 1980s, found out that women would quite often describe their first sexual encounters in ways that involved something that was not dissimilar to ‘abduction’. A girl might be collecting water away from the village and be intercepted by a boy and his friends. They would then take her somewhere and sexual intercourse would occur. The girl was supposed to resist, although it was often said that this was part of a ritual, because she will have indicated that she wanted to be taken beforehand. The Acholi poet, Okot p’ Bitek wrote an essay about such procedures back in the 1960s, which he called ‘Acholi love’. But some of the women interviewed who had experienced this kind of marriage were rather less positive.

Going back to pre-Protectorate times, marriage by capture was practiced on a relatively large scale as an aspect of local wars. Local war leaders and chiefs formed alliances with ivory trading companies and raided neighboring areas for slaves to transport tusks and also for women to take as ‘wives’. Even after the setting up of Protectorate rule, it remained common for girls to be given in various kinds of dispute settlement. They might be handed over at a very young age in compensation arrangements, including *mato oput* ceremonies, to produce children for the wronged lineage in compensation for those that had been killed.

Thus the LRA practice of abducting young women as wives has historical and cultural resonances. There are reports of more conventional rape by the LRA, but they are rare. Indeed, there are also accounts of LRA executions of combatants who have sexual intercourse without permission. The girls are mostly taken to become ‘wives’ in much the same way as chiefs and war leaders in the past – including ancestors of some of the current ‘traditional’ chiefs (*rwodi*). It is not the only way in which LRA activities mimic aspects of previous upheavals. It may also be a reason why, contrary to some reports, HIV infection among FAPs is low (or at least there is no evidence that it is higher than among similar age cohorts in the IDP camps – The research team only came across one confirmed case of HIV among ‘child mothers’).⁴⁴

None of this condones the dreadful things that have been done to some young women by the LRA. The point is simply that in taking young women as ‘wives’, the LRA has systematically manipulated and corrupted certain existing conventions and moral norms. This is a crucially important aspect of its power. The LRA is not something completely alien. Its atrocities are finely tuned.

2.2.2 DATA ON ‘CHILD MOTHERS’

The prevalence of children who are mothers in the population as a whole and also the practice of elopement means that the use of the term ‘child mothers’ for girls raped by the LRA gives a misleading impression. Moreover, the confusion is made worse by the fact that many of those classified as ‘child mothers’ are actually over the age of 18, some do not in fact have any children, and a few did not even have sexual intercourse during their period of ‘abduction’. Such ambiguities in the category make it hard to assess the scale of the ‘child mother’ problem.

In a sample of 238 FAPs whom the research team followed-up and interviewed (or whose immediate family members were interviewed), only 11 women who were classified as ‘child mothers’ (4.6 percent). All but one arrived at a reception center between 2002 and 2005 (about 6 percent of those interviewed in the sample who arrived between 2001 and 2005). Their ages ranged from 14 to 31, with the average age being just over 21 years. The average period of time spent with the LRA was 5 years, with the longest being 10 years. Four women in the group were with the LRA for less than a year. Two or possibly three were abducted as adults (i.e. over the age of 18). The average amount of time they had spent at reception

⁴⁴ For details about HIV/AIDS rates, see Allen, ‘Aids and Evidence: interrogating some Ugandan myths’, *Journal of Biosocial Science*, January 2006.

centers was 150 days, ranging from one who spent 360 days at a combination of KICWA and World Vision to a group of three who spent between 30 and 44 days at KICWA alone. None of them had been followed up after leaving the reception centers, although four of them had attended training courses in tailoring. Two of them used to have a child, but it died. Three of the group were unequivocal about wanting to be with their LRA ‘husbands’, while three were unequivocal about not wanting this. For one the issue did not arise, because her ‘husband’ had been killed. The remaining five either did not say what they thought about their ‘husbands’, or were ambiguous about their intentions.⁴⁵

Some centers, such as the CCF Center at Pader and the Rachele Center in Lira currently focus much of their attention on ‘child mothers’, and the percentage of ‘child mothers’ among those passing through these centers is relatively high (particularly at CCF). The team was also told that Pader was a district in which the numbers of ‘abductions’ of adolescent girls was particularly high, and many of the approximately 140 ‘child mothers’ who had passed through Rachele had in fact been abducted from Pader. Apparently, the reason for the concentration of girl ‘abduction’ in Pader was because the district was an area that the LRA moved through when returning to Sudan from Lira District. However, other centers also have prioritized ‘child mothers’. In Gulu town, for example, World Vision has opened a separate center for them, and many ‘child mothers’ are sent for skills training at St. Monica’s education center in the town, run by the Catholic Church. Adding up the numbers of all ‘child mothers’ that have passed through all centers is not a straightforward task. Ambiguities in the category are a difficulty here, as are the poor records at several centers. Another factor is that concerns about ‘child mothers’ have grown over time, and in the past keeping a running total was not a priority. It was striking that when reception center staffers were asked about numbers of ‘child mothers’ they would often estimate it at much higher than their records actually indicated.

From the available evidence, the total figure of those who have been classified as ‘child mothers’ at all the reception centers is around 1,000. That means that they comprise about 5 percent of all those FAPs who are recorded as passing through the reception process – about the same percentage found in the sample. It may be that there are also some ‘child mothers’ who have not passed through centers, but only came across one case. The incentives for ‘child mothers’ to go to the centers is high, because they are less likely than men to be interrogated by the UPDF, and have become a special category of funding and support. For example, at World Vision those identified as ‘child mothers’ are offered training in ‘micro-finance management’, and receive a donation of 300,000 Ugandan shillings to buy equipment.

2.2.3 RANGE OF EXPERIENCE AND ATTITUDES

In addition to the ‘child mothers’ in the sample, the extracts from respondents met in IDP camps, those at the World Vision reception center for child mothers in Gulu, and a group of seven at St. Monica’s training school in Gulu are presented in Appendix 5. They reveal how attitudes and experiences vary very widely. The following are key points that emerge from them.

First, some ‘child mothers’ do not actually have a child and most are technically adults (although the majority were ‘abducted’ before they were eighteen). Second, several spoke warmly of their LRA ‘husbands’, and would rather go back to them than to their parents or other relatives. Third by no means most of these women appeared to be ‘traumatized’ by their experiences with the LRA, and some seem to have had a relatively comfortable time compared to many other FAPs. Fourth, a few of the women had serious physical injuries, and the possibility of eking out a living whilst carrying such injuries was

⁴⁵ Our sample data may be compared with a data set from CPA Lira (which no longer operates as a reception center). According to this reception center’s records, 32 ‘child mothers’ passed through in total. Their average age on arrival was 22. They had all been abducted as children between the ages of 10 and 15 between 1988 and 2002, and had returned between 1999 and 2003. The average period with the LRA was 3.5 years. The longest period of ‘abduction’ was 11 years, and seven women were with the LRA for a year or less.

daunting, if not impossible. Staff at the reception centers were doing what they could to facilitate appropriate medical care while they were at the centers, but follow-up was poor after they left. As noted above, the research team only heard of one confirmed case of a ‘child mother’ being diagnosed as HIV positive while staying at a reception center. Fifth, the ‘child mothers’ who had passed through reception centers had very mixed experiences of being reunited with their parents and relatives.

With respect to this last point, it is important to note that the mothers themselves have a different relationship to their relatives than the children that come back with them. The women who return are generally accepted back as part of their father’s and/or their mother’s family. If the woman’s parents are still together, she is likely to assume the clan status of her birth and, at least in theory, be able to make a claim on clan resources, including access to farmland once it can again be accessed (i.e. when the IDP camps are broken up) Through marriage, her lineage status would in effect change over time to that of her husband. However, in these cases, the ‘husband’ is an LRA combatant who is unlikely to pay bride price, and who may or may not at some future date claim the children. This places the children in a very ambiguous position.

If they are accepted back into the family along with their mother, the family is effectively accepting them as members of a particular clan, and this potentially gives them rites over clan lands. It also potentially places them in competition with the children of their mother’s brothers. As a consequence, there may well be unwillingness for a family to accept the children as well as the mother. Many of those women talked to who had returned to their families in the IDP camps complained that their children were called names, and even their own family members started to become unfriendly once it was clear that the family would not be receiving lots of additional items from aid agencies. How widespread this problem is cannot be ascertained at present, partly because of the lack of follow-up by the reception centers and also because most of these women have only been sent back to the IDP camps quite recently. It is striking, however, how many ‘child mothers’ gravitate back to the municipalities (the majority of those interviewed by the team were living in Gulu or Lira towns). There is a clear reluctance to take their children back to the camps. A few ‘child mothers’ were explicit in interviews that their children would be persecuted and might even be killed by neighbors.

There is also another factor at play here, too. In Acholi and Langi society there is an acute antipathy to incest and a fear of its consequences. Relatives traced through both the father and mother’s line cannot, or at least should not, be married. Several ‘child mothers’ who shared a ‘husband’ in the bush explained that they wanted to stay near each other so that their children could know each other and could be aware that they share the same father (i.e. so that they would learn that they were siblings). Others, in contrast, were determined to move to another part of the country, and to hide the identity of the father of their children.

2.2.4 CURRENT RESPONSES TO ‘CHILD MOTHERS’

An obvious limitation with current responses to ‘child mothers’ is that the use of the term directs attention away from the fact that so many adolescent girls in northern Uganda are living vulnerable and impoverished lives, and are likely to end up becoming pregnant at a very early age. Those classified as ‘child mothers’ are sometimes very seriously abused people, but by no means all of them are incapacitated or needier than other FAPs. In general, ‘child mothers’ who pass through the reception centers are positive about their treatment, partly because they are aware that they can have more access to assistance than other FAPs, notably in the form of skills training – although none of the ‘child mothers’ we interviewed had yet managed to set up an economically viable enterprise. It was also noted that the reception center staff tended to be more flexible with ‘child mothers’ than with other groups. At the World Vision center they are allowed to come and go, unlike other ‘children’. However, the diversity of outlook among the ‘child mothers’ resident at the same place can be a problem. Those who had been the ‘wives’ of senior commanders can assert their authority over others, and those who have been deeply disturbed by their experiences, or physically mutilated by the LRA, are understandably troubled by being

forced to stay with women who want to be reunited with their LRA ‘husbands’. Conflicts with other residents were mentioned as a bad thing about the center by almost all the ‘child mothers’ interviewed at World Vision.

3. FINDINGS PART 2: THE RETURN PROCESS

3.1 HOW DO PEOPLE RETURN FROM THE BUSH?

The impression is often given in reception center and aid agency reports (and by the UPDF and the Amnesty Commission) that everyone, or almost everyone who returns from the LRA does so through a well established procedure of reporting.⁴⁶

This procedure is:

1. The FAP is rescued or captured by the UPDF, escapes or is released by the LRA.
2. If the FAP escapes or is released, they either report to the UPDF or a local authority who then takes them to the UPDF.
3. The UPDF organizes transport to the nearest CPU where the FAP is fed, given first aid and questioned. A person can be kept with the UPDF for a maximum of 48 hours. Severely ill people are taken to hospital by the CPU and are under CPU supervision there, often jointly with the reception center.
4. The FAP is then transferred to a reception center.

The UPDF insists that this system runs almost seamlessly and that nobody goes straight to a reception center since no application for amnesty is possible without having gone through the barracks. Those who bypass the system entirely and do not report to either UPDF or an LC constitute ‘a negligible number.’⁴⁷ However, this number cannot be so negligible: 5 percent of the 238 FAPs interviewed from the sample said that they had not gone through the UPDF at all. It is important to note that this is five percent of people who have been through reception centers. The percentage of people who have been abducted but go home directly is larger. This is indicated by surveys of self-reported ‘abductions’⁴⁸, but also by the more robust UNICEF data for the period 1997-2001. In the period 1997-2001, there were 28,903 who were recorded as having been abducted by the LRA.⁴⁹ This is more than the total number of people that have passed through all reception centers up to 2005.

- Those from the research team’s sample, who passed through reception centers, but not the UPDF, explained why they never spent time at the barracks. One went straight to the reception center and the UPDF ‘only came and asked me some questions when I was already at World Vision.’ Another went home directly specifically to avoid the UPDF, but then ‘the soldiers went to his home and arrested him.’ Others relied on themselves or community structures: ‘I never passed through the hands of the UPDF or even an LC. My father was advised by his friends to take me to the reception center which he did.’ A group of returnees avoided the UPDF by sticking together and making it directly to the reception center: ‘We used to coordinate among us because we came

⁴⁶ The term ‘reporters’ is generally used for FAPs who have gone through these channels by reporting to the UPDF, but here we stick to the FAP acronym.

⁴⁷ CPU officer

⁴⁸ Notably: International Center for Transitional Justice (2005). *Forgotten Voices: A population-based survey on attitudes about peace and justice in northern Uganda*. Berkeley, Human Rights Center, University of California, Berkeley.

⁴⁹ UNICEF (2001). *Abductions in Northern Uganda and South-Western Uganda: 1986-2001*. Kampala, UNICEF. The survey was only carried out until 2001.

back like civilians.’ Returnees are scared of the UPDF and they rather risk not getting an amnesty certificate than dealing with them. Some have responsibilities at home that cannot wait. Many, however, might not be aware of the problems they will encounter in applying for amnesty without a letter of introduction from a center – but then many might not be aware of the amnesty at all.⁵⁰

- For abducted adults, avoiding reporting altogether is very likely, but the research team came across many children too who had stories of having been abducted which appeared to be true. Reception center staff have repeatedly said that they are aware of a large number of people who stay out of the official system after their escape and CVCs based in camps refer to this as well. In addition, the large number of people who were unaware of the amnesty further underscores that the official channels are not how most people return from the LRA.⁵¹

A typical answer from a camp leader when asked about those who had come home directly was:

‘There are very many here in the camp. ... I said that the formerly abducted children should form themselves in groups. At registration I discovered that some of them have not passed through the reception centers... I reported to the local leaders and they are aware of such children in the community.’

The divergence in the experience of return by FAPs was a subject about which many of the respondents had strong and often contrasting views.

- A problem pointed out by various social workers and community officers was that when FAPs went to reception centers, the ‘community’, and sometimes even their parents, thought that there had been a transfer of responsibility. Many parents, it was claimed, think that once a child has passed through a reception center, the center is now going to take care of the child, even after it has been sent home.
- One CDO said that his office actually discourages children from going to a reception center because of this. ‘When children are taken to new environments ... [the parents and the community] don’t see it as their responsibility to reintegrate or counsel these children...they see it as the responsibility of [the center].’

This view was expressed most strongly in Lira District. On a day that the team was visiting the District Headquarters to interview officials, almost 100 recent reports of CVCs were being collated. All the reports related to returning children (i.e. people under the age of 18). Just 39 had been sent to reception centers (GUSCO, World Vision or CPA), and the remaining 59 had been sent straight back to their families. The research team was told that in Lira, adults were not being registered by CVCs,⁵² but were supposed to go to the RDC or the UPDF.⁵³ As one official put it, this was done to facilitate ‘reintegration’:

⁵⁰ See section on the Amnesty Commission

⁵¹ However, this area needs further research beyond the scope of this study. There are no robust numbers available anywhere on how many people have been abducted and bypassed the system. In fact, there is really no robust data available on how many people have been abducted overall.

⁵² In some camps, CVCs have attempted to register all those who have not been through a center, yet have been abducted, but have had to abandon the exercise because the demands on the CVCs for material support just grew out of proportion.

⁵³ The view taken in Lira District is that FAPs at the centers were said to become used to receiving things without having to work for them. It occurred to us that this view might have been influenced by a local antipathy towards the Acholi at the reception centers. Most clients at the reception centers are Acholi, even including the Rachele Center in Lira town. However, Lira district officials themselves strenuously denied this.

‘We concentrate on the children because of UNICEF, Save the Children etc... but discourage them to go to centers.... Most Langi by-pass the centers... We encourage them to go straight home, where CVCs can handle them, if they have training.... At the centers they learn certain behaviors... They are mixed with children who are already hardened. They learn bad things, and the community accuses them (of being from the LRA) when they come back, and even if they have been given material things and ‘counseling’, they go back to their [disturbed] mental state after leaving.’

In the camps, however, there were very different views about the benefits of the reception center activities:

- While some camp leaders said that ‘there is not much difference between someone who has gone through a reception center and someone who has not, most point out at least a few material differences. People who pass through centers usually come back with some sort of package, and this provides an incentive for relatives to accept them.
- The CVCs were most positive about the relative benefits of going through reception centers. They commonly stated that they find FAPs who have been through reception centers easier to handle: ‘The difference is that talking to those who passed through the reception center is easier compared to those that did not pass through the reception centers. Also behavior alone can differentiate the two. Those who came home directly are rough and those who passed through the center are polite.’

3.2 THE UPDF

3.2.1 TREATMENT AT THE UPDF

FAPs are terrified of the UPDF. Leaving the bush and the LRA is a frightening experience in itself, but surrendering oneself into the hands of the enemy is the worst part for most. Many are convinced that the UPDF will kill them, yet they take the risk and escape nonetheless. One boy describes this situation as having ‘had no fear whether I would be killed or not, because I had decided to come back home and that I don’t mind whatever might happen. However, I thought that I would be killed.’

Many FAPs say that they were first scared of the uniforms ‘because in the bush we were told that UPDF kills’. In the bush, the UPDF is commonly referred to as *Walalo* – ‘the tribe that eats people’. Those who report fears of being killed by the UPDF say that this fear eased once they were transferred from the detach to the barracks, because generally they were treated much worse by the detach, but ‘when I reached the barracks and talked to someone whom I found there, I was strong-hearted.’

Those who reported losing their fear gave very specific descriptions as to how the soldiers made them feel safe. Sometimes it is based on a personal connection (‘The soldiers were from her village and so at first sight they began to cry for the injuries I had sustained from the bush’). But in most cases it is based on the treatment the FAPs experience: warm welcomes and being given biscuits straight after being picked up by the UPDF, being given water for bathing, porridge or other food and soda to drink, being allowed to watch movies even with the other soldiers, receiving wound treatment and general reassurance that there was no reason to be afraid.

This reassurance comes up again and again as a major factor in making people feel comfortable. In general, those who were soon informed as to what will happen to them seemed to feel more at ease: if the soldiers told them that they would be taken care of at a reception center, people lost their fear. Those who reported feeling safe and comfortable with the UPDF usually explained that they appreciated being

thanked for leaving the bush as well as any advice given ('They told me that since I was now out, God has helped me and will continue helping me in the future...They were telling me not to be worried... I am not the only one with such a problem, and I did not choose to go to the bush... We should also not worry because there is nothing wrong that will happen to us.')

While many reported feeling safe in the barracks, others felt threatened and neglected. The questioning process is a difficult experience and not being given enough food (some report 'serious hunger in the barracks'), or not being given a blanket, clothing or medical treatment for obvious wounds, contributes to feeling unsafe. Despite the CPUs, the presence of many soldiers is seen as very intimidating. 'I didn't feel very safe there, because in the barracks you see the guns and there is too much shouting. The people weren't nice to me. You cannot be a friend with a soldier,' said one boy. Another stated: 'I wasn't so safe in the barracks because I was still staying with people from the bush and I was still under soldiers.'

Language barriers are a major contributor to fear. One FAP says that he felt safe at the main barracks as opposed to the detach since he was the only Langi in the detach, but there were some fellow Langi soldiers in the main barracks. Another said that 'other people were very bad to me since I was a Teso, it was only another Teso in the UPDF who helped me otherwise I would have been killed.' The security situation contributes to a stressful or reassuring experience ('I was scared while with the UPDF because the rebels constantly attacked the barrack where I stayed, so I could not feel safe' or 'I felt safe at the barracks because the UPDF were many and I wasn't threatened I could be attacked by LRA.').

3.2.2 QUESTIONING BY THE UPDF

Respondents and reception center staff confirmed that most FAPs are quite intimidated by the interrogation. The questioning process is not a streamlined one. Most of those who recalled the questioning were interrogated by several people in various settings: in the detach, in the barracks, in the CPU. When asked who questioned them, a typical answer was: 'There were very many soldiers, so I don't know them one by one, and I don't know their rank.' Questioning focuses on military and strategic aspects: FAPs stated that they were asked the following kinds of questions. What

are the plans of the LRA? Are they willing to come back? What are the discussions in the bush? What type of gun are they using and how many do they have? Could you tell us the number of rebels in the bush? Have you been to Sudan? Could you tell us how the commander operates the rebel group? How do you get food from the bush? What do the rebels say about the government? Will they fight until they overthrow the government? Where does Kony get his powers? How do the people in the bush behave? How do they kill and how many killings did you witness? How were you abducted, how did you escape?

In special instances, questioning can go on for days, weeks and even months. This happens when a FAP can provide strategic information about hidden weapons or future moves of the LRA ('I stayed in the barracks for four months, because we were always moving to the bushes to collect what we had hidden in the ground, like the guns, and bullets...'; 'The soldiers kept us for so long in Gulu barracks because they also wanted to see how some of us who stayed for long, would cope up. And they wanted to understand whether we do not have the intention of going back to the bush.').

3.2.3 TIME SPENT WITH THE UPDF

Once the children or adults reach the Child Protection Unit (CPU), the maximum amount of time to be spent there – 48 hours – seems to be rarely exceeded in some districts (Gulu, Kitgum, Lira) and more

Average Number of Days Spent with UPDF

Year	Days with UPDF
1995	7
1996	2
1997	18
1998	12
1999	14
2000	66
2001	8
2002	16
2003	8
2004	23
2005	8

often in others (Pader). In either case, those who reach the CPU have in the vast majority of cases already spent a considerable amount of time in the hands of the UPDF. The average amount of time spent with the UPDF⁵⁴ across all districts, both genders and all years since 1998 was 14 days.⁵⁵

Most UPDF soldiers readily admit that the process of getting the child to CPU can be lengthy and is not necessarily controllable by the Child Protection Unit. Most of the time this is due to transportation problems: FAPs are typically picked up in fighting areas, often far away from barracks, the nearest CPU or even an NGO who could provide transportation. Time spent with the UPDF also is based on what kind of information the child might have. Children with rank or those rescued from strategically important battles are questioned in much more detail. This is a clear problem: some children have reported that the only time they were harassed by soldiers or pressured to join the UPDF was during their time with detachments. There have also been cases when returnees were hassled by frontier guards on their way to the CPU.

3.2.4 RECRUITMENT INTO THE UPDF

The UPDF often states that they are very careful about recruiting former LRA combatants. Soldiers working in the CPU in Kitgum or Gulu have said that they do not pressure FAPs to join the UPDF, but some FAPs wish to join out of their own initiative. On the surface, there is also an awareness of the issue of recruiting children into the army – Public Relations Officers are very quick to point out that nobody under the age of 18 is allowed to join the UPDF. However, at one of the CPUs, the research team was introduced to a female soldier who deals especially with female FAPs. While the officer on duty was very happy to point out that they were aware of gender issues, he did not find anything wrong mentioning her age – she was 17 years old.

So there is clearly a gap between publicity and reality when it comes to recruitment into the UPDF. Most people from the research sample, who had passed through the UPDF, were asked to join, but purely as an option: ‘the officer was also saying that if I wanted to join the UPDF I was free to join. But I was also free to go home.’ The majority of people state that they were not pressured and that it was actually made clear to them that they were free to do whatever they wanted. However, in most cases this also means that they were not made aware of other options open to them: The research team found that that hardly any FAPs were informed about the option of applying for amnesty in the barracks.

Others, although a smaller number, reported being persuaded (‘The soldiers suggested that anybody that wanted to join UPDF could do it and that if any one did, they would give him 10,000 Ugandan Shillings there and then’) or pressured (‘They suggested that I join the UPDF since even if I came back home I would be killed.’). The prospect of joining the UPDF is a daunting thing for some (‘The UPDF asked me to join them but I refused and then I escaped from them and I came back home.’). Occasionally there is an emphasis on the virtues of being with the UPDF (‘They told me to join the UPDF because there was no use of us going back home because maybe our parents are even dead now and that UPDF soldiers get good salary...’).

Most commonly, the FAPs did not want to join because they felt tired of fighting (‘I said no. At least let me suffer from home...because I’m suffering from having been in the LRA army and I can’t go back to suffer again.’). Others said that they left their options open, telling the soldiers that since ‘we had overstayed in the bush; we wanted to first go home and see our family members. Then if we want to join them, we would come back later.’ Some received advice (often from parents, sometimes from the

⁵⁴ 124 respondents specifically declared the number of days they had spent with the UPDF.

⁵⁵ This is an average based on rounded numbers. There was an extreme case in the year 2000 of a man who spent over a year in the hands of the UPDF.

reception center) to not stay with the UPDF ('I told them that I still want to pass through the rehabilitation center where my trauma can be removed I then later would join them.').

3.2.5 THE 105TH BATTALION

The 105th is a battalion made up of former LRA combatants and is deployed in southern Sudan and two districts in the north of Uganda. This has been the subject of much controversy, first because it has been suspected that some of the recruits may be under the age of 18 and second because it is questionable whether someone with a track record of human rights abuses in the LRA should be given a job in the army. There are concerns that such a battalion might be used to terrorize populations, because so many of the recruits will have already perpetrated atrocities. The battalion has had a low profile since it was formed, fuelling speculations in the community that the UPDF is in fact using it as 'cannon fodder' in Sudan.

Within the UPDF there is a strongly held view that recruiting former combatants into the UPDF and giving them proper training is one of the most effective mechanisms of 'reintegration'. The UPDF (and the NRA before it) has done this on several occasions, including with rebel groups operating in Acholi area. According to some senior officers, a big problem with recruiting from the LRA is that some of them are underage when they surrender or are captured. Many of them join the Local Defense Units (LDUs) and then apply to join the UPDF, but they have to be turned away if they are not yet 18.

The soldiers interviewed in the 105th Battalion barracks all looked like they were over 18. The barracks itself is located in an isolated spot some 20km from the edge of Gulu town. The Battalion was created in 2004 and after three intakes; the number of soldiers is 912. The research team was told by the UPDF Public Relations Office for Gulu that 180 soldiers would be at the barracks on the day of our visit. This number turned out to be more or less accurate. Welcomed and introduced officially, the research team was shown around the barracks, which looked like many other soldier camps in northern Uganda. The research team was soon allowed to move around freely and to conduct interviews. The soldiers reacted in a friendly, if slightly reticent, way to the research team's presence and questions. All of them spoke the Acholi language and only a few spoke Kiswahili, the official language of the military. A couple of the commanders came from other parts of the country.

The soldiers undergo four months of training, which is referred to as 'refreshment.' If a fighter used to have a rank within the LRA, he is allowed to keep that title. In the Battalion there are about 50 former LRA fighters with ranks up to that of a captain. The battalion commander was a lieutenant when the research team visited the barracks (he was subsequently promoted). Therefore, some of the soldiers in his Battalion seemed to have a higher rank than him. However, the division intelligence officer confirmed that the former LRA officers in the 105th Battalion are paid as privates, and do not fulfill the same tasks as UPDF officers of their rank. After an LRA officer undergoes training, whatever his LRA rank, he passes out as a second lieutenant.

According to the battalion commander, the 105th has a number of achievements to its credit, such as the capturing and killing of senior LRA commanders. He also explained that through their experience in the bush, the 105th understands the movement of the LRA. In addition they know where weapons are hidden, and where the LRA have bases. Challenges, as he explains it, are multiple:

'The soldiers in the battalion hardly speak the military language Kiswahili, they have to get used to the code of conduct and they are still traumatized from the atrocities they have committed.... The community is not yet ready to receive them. That is why the barracks is located where there are no civilians around.'

The UPDF Public Relations Officer for Gulu underlined the problem of behavior: ‘they have to get used to the culture in the UPDF; in the bush they did not have any rules...’ In making such a statement he echoed those of staff we spoke to at the reception centers.

Only a few of the soldiers interviewed in the 105th Battalion could imagine living in the IDP camps. Some concerns were raised about the stigma of being a former LRA fighter, but none of those spoken to said that their families had rejected them. They said that, ‘Life is good here; if you compare it with the life we would have in the camps.’ They also noted that the main difference between being in the bush with the LRA and being in the UPDF is that in the bush they were forced to fight, whereas now it was their own decision. They did not give the impression that being deployed against their former colleagues was a particular problem. One explained that in the barracks they drank soda and ate good food, which they did not have in the bush, and which they would not have in an IDP camp. A woman in military uniform, but with a baby on her back, said that she does not fear her community ‘but only the rebels in the bush.’

3.2.6 LOCAL DEFENCE UNITS

LDUs are locally recruited paramilitary groups whose task it is to protect IDPs and roads allowing the UPDF to have more capacity to move in the bush. In practice, the FAPs told the research team that they are sometimes deployed deep in the bush in places where the UPDF does not want to operate. Their training is usually very poor and their pay scales are low. It was striking that UPDF officers frankly admitted that many LDU recruits are under 18, something that is manifestly the case in some of the more remote IDP camps. The problem of underage recruiting was blamed on the local councils, because they are nominally responsible for the LDUs. However, the LDUs are in uniform, are armed and are under UPDF command.

This set-up is considered dangerous for both the recruit and the community by many reception center staff and agencies working in the camps.⁵⁶ LDUs, as one social worker succinctly put it, are a ‘negative livelihood option’, operating on a circle of voluntary recruitment as a ‘catch-net for under-age LRA fighters’ who are already trained and find it easiest to slip into this lifestyle. There were many accounts of how pressure on FAPs to join the LDUs can be intense, although the research team was unable to confirm them. In the research sample, only one person had joined an LDU. It is likely that the situation varies considerably from place to place, depending on the attitudes of LCs and the local UPDF officers.

3.2.7 AMNESTY AND THE UPDF

When providing the FAPs with next step options, assuring that they apply for Amnesty should be the most obvious commitment. CPU soldiers state that every single FAP picked up by the UPDF knows about the amnesty, yet the former LRA fighters do not necessarily believe that it is real. That is why the CPU invites the Amnesty Commission to visit the CPU to photograph the children and talk to them. The reality is very different. Hardly anybody from the sample heard about the amnesty while still in the barracks⁵⁷ and reception center staff have confirmed that most who arrive in the center do not know about it. A few of the respondents had heard about the amnesty in the bush, but clearly needed more information. Those who learned about the amnesty in the barracks found it reassuring (‘It was only after they told me about the amnesty at the barracks that is when I got courage because I knew nothing wrong was going to happen.’). It made them feel safe.

Why information on the amnesty is not provided more systematically at the barracks is hard to say, but remains an urgent issue. Is it lack of resources and engagement from the Amnesty Commission; or failure to see how important the amnesty is to FAPs? Or is it the belief that most FAPs know about the amnesty

⁵⁶ We heard many stories about accidents with LDU weapons, usually carried by children.

⁵⁷ See section on the Amnesty Commission

because it was their main incentive for reporting in the first place? Or is knowledge about the amnesty used as a bargaining tool in trying to recruit future soldiers who are made to think that they will not be safe if they went back to the community? Possibly it is a consequence of all these things, but the research team was unable to make an adequate assessment. The Amnesty Commission confirmed that their resources are overstretched, but UPDF officers often seemed unaware of the lack of information about the amnesty given to FAPs.

3.2.8 COORDINATION WITH RECEPTION CENTERS

Some CPUs are run in very close cooperation with a reception center; the reception center monitors the CPU, mainly to make sure that people do not overstay.⁵⁸ Theoretically the center is informed about each FAP upon arrival at the CPU (yet, not necessarily upon their capture by the UPDF). The reception center even provides facilities at the CPU in some cases, such as sanitary equipment and clothing. While no center staff is allowed to be present during interrogation, they are usually allowed to meet with the FAPs straight afterwards. This set-up, however, is seen as problematic by some reception centers, as the main concern of the interrogating army officer is inevitably of strategic nature and not child protection. Reception center staff that have pointed this out say that they have no influence on the army chain-of-command and that there is no effective monitoring of the UPDF's work by the center. So if the army says that they have to keep children longer in the CPU for 'intelligence and strategic reasons', the reception centers have no way of enforcing the 48-hour rule.

Another frequently violated rule is that FAPs are supposed to be taken to their home district as quickly as possible. Each FAP is supposed to be in a reception center in their own cultural setting to facilitate rehabilitation. However, the research team came across numerous cases where respondents were taken from their home district to another center without being told why. Reception center staff have complained that it happens regularly that the local center is overlooked by the UPDF in favor of another center. This points to serious mistrust between centers: centers accuse each other of being friendly with the army to ensure that FAPs are taken to their centers in order to keep up numbers - and donor contributions. Without commenting on these accusations, there is an apparent conflict of interest. If a reception center is so concerned about receiving FAPs from the UPDF, will it intervene if FAPs are not being treated well by the army?

⁵⁸ This is quite a recent development in some districts (for example Kitgum), where the reception center took over the monitoring function from the Community Development Officer. This change was initiated because children stayed in the barracks far too long and there were some reports of abuse and even torture to extract information. In Gulu town, GUSCO and Save the Children have a long standing arrangement to monitor the CPU.



For the future, educational facilities are crucial, and not just at primary level (Photo: Tim Allen)

3.2.9 CREATING A CHILD-FRIENDLY ENVIRONMENT

Some UPDF-officers and CPU staff are trained in child protection issues, advised by Save the Children in Uganda and monitored by the reception centers. The CPUs are set out to create a child-friendly environment, but there is flexibility in what that actually means. While the social workers are generally confident that most children are treated in a decent manner (CPUs have been strengthened considerably and returnees generally no longer receive Prisoner-of-War treatment), there are glitches that are often due to lack of transportation, resources or individual behavior.

When asked what their child protection training entailed, CPU soldiers explained that they learned about the innocence of children returning from the LRA, that they are victims of forceful recruitment, that they are ‘Ugandans just like the UPDF soldiers’ and that it is the soldier’s job to protect every Ugandan. They also said they learned the basics of international humanitarian law and principles regarding children in armed conflict. However, as mentioned earlier, there seemed to be no recognition in one CPU about the problems of employing a 17-year-old female soldier in the CPU itself. One problem acknowledged by officers in the CPUs is that not every soldier stationed with a detach somewhere receives this training and that individual’s behavior is often difficult to monitor and control. This is particularly significant as the UPDF acknowledges that FAPs stay with a detach or even in the barracks far too long, because of lack of transport.⁵⁹ When transport is provided, it is often without escorts, and the FAPs ride in military vehicles.

⁵⁹ This is mainly the case in districts where the security situation is still tense.

This too was mentioned as a cause of concern by reception center staff, because there have been incidents where military vehicles carrying FAPs were ambushed.

The CPUs also vary greatly in their set-up. In some, staff make a point of not wearing uniform, in others they are always in military attire. While some CPUs are entirely separate from the barracks, others simply consist of a tent within barrack grounds. When describing their experience at the CPU, respondents from the research team's sample were acutely aware of such arrangements. Usually a strict separation into gender and age groups was appreciated. It is clear from the responses that there is normally a gender division in sleeping arrangements (even though at times it is only through 'a boundary dividing the boys and girls'), but much less emphasis is put on separating adults and children ('We were not separated with the elder returnees, but a female was separated during the night'), especially during the day ('Children and elders were only separated during time for sleep.'). There was not much awareness of the potential problems of mixing children and adults although officers from the CPUs have reported difficulties when FAPs with an LRA rank are kept with others. Usually, they try to keep those with rank separate and even take them to district headquarters since they are usually interrogated much more thoroughly. People with ranks often pose a problem in the reception centers, too – they expect different treatment, tend to bully others, and they generally need more time to adjust to the new life. For several of the respondents, it was always a problem to be accommodated with those with higher rank, wherever it occurred.

But spending time at the barracks or CPU with other FAPs also meets with very different sentiments: while some FAPs point out that being with their friends from the bush was the most reassuring part of the UPDF experience, others see this as disturbing as they encounter people they remember as killers in the bush. Some FAPs insist on their rank: 'The returnees knew me, and they used to fear me and give me respect, because in Juba I was trained among the Arabs in artillery.'

3.2.10 ABUSE BY THE UPDF

Six percent of respondents⁶⁰ recounted being personally abused while in the hands of the UPDF. The severity of this abuse varies. Some report being beaten or threatened with physical punishment while being interrogated: 'I was almost beaten by some soldiers because I did not have the amnesty card, they said I should get mine.' Much of the abuse is name-calling and intimidation: 'Soldiers used to say these are people who stay in the bush, why keep them? They should be killed... Other soldiers were good to us but some of their women called us rebels...' and: 'When I was caught by the UPDF, the UPDF harassed me and threatened to kill me, but one commander said: 'Let's take him to the barracks.' Other cases are more severe and go beyond threat. One girl told about an incident where soldiers lit a fire to burn her and other FAPs: 'Then some civilians put out the fire and rescued two of us, but other FACs got burnt - two girls and six boys got burnt in the incident.'

People report that the soldiers sold food reserved for FAPs, saying that they were killers from the bush and did not deserve proper food. Many report having their personal belongings taken. Most reception centers as well as UPDF burn personal clothing and provide the FAP with something new to signify the beginning of a new life, but this seems to be viewed as theft by some FAPs. Other stories are less prone to misunderstanding ('The UPDF...collected all the money that I had planned to go with back to school.'). There are reports too of ransom being paid for cattle ('Some of the cattle [that belonged to this FAP in the bush] that escaped were found and kept by the UPDF who asked some money for keeping the cattle. I then paid 19,000 Ugandan Shillings for keeping the cattle.').

Some FAPs report fighting between soldiers about how the FAPs should be treated: 'Every one was good except one soldier who never wanted us to be given food but the UPDF leader said we were innocent.' There are stories of neglect turning into physical violence. One boy said that the soldiers kept saying that

⁶⁰ 14 in total

he should be punished for what he did and was hence not given proper food and fainted as a result. The soldiers took him while he was unconscious to be ‘thrown into a pit latrine...but their leader stopped them and said he should be taken back into the house.’ At times, there seems to be little sympathy among UPDF individuals with the FAPs’ situation: ‘They even refused to call my parents to take care of me but luckily enough, the staff of Lacor hospital sent a radio announcement, calling my parents to come after I had stayed at the hospital for one month.’ A few FAPs have more harrowing tales of being kept inside a building in the barracks for days and weeks, sometimes without any explanation (‘They never wanted me to come out of the barracks. They refused to allow my mother to bring me home. I just cried and forced myself to come out of the barracks. I forcefully entered the vehicle of World Vision that collected returnees in the barracks.’).

3.3 AMNESTY AND THE AMNESTY COMMISSION

3.3.1 AMNESTY AS AN INCENTIVE?

The Government of Uganda and many donors view the Amnesty Act as the major incentive for combatants to leave the LRA. It is assumed that most FAPs have heard about the amnesty on Mega Radio or through word of mouth. Hearing former combatants describe a life in peace and security outside the bush persuades active combatants to leave the rebel army.

Empirically, however, information about the role of the Amnesty Commission appears to play little role in coaxing FAPs out of the bush. Only 25 percent of formerly abducted people who have gone through reception centers had received an amnesty card, applied for amnesty or in fact even heard of the amnesty commission.⁶¹ This low number is even more striking considering that the people in the research sample were those who did go through most of the official channels, and certainly went through a reception center.

Of those who had heard about the amnesty, many had a negative impression of what it actually meant. In the bush, LRA commanders tell combatants that the amnesty is actually a government ploy to lure people out of the bush and kill them.⁶² Commanders deny their soldiers access to radios and make every attempt to suppress information. This seems to be the main reason why many FAPs choose to bypass the official system and do not report to the military or any other government body.⁶³

THE AMNESTY ACT

The Parliament of Uganda enacted the Amnesty Act in 2000. It offers amnesty from prosecution for crimes committed in armed rebellion against the government since 1986.

The Amnesty Act established the Amnesty Commission to promote the amnesty law, grant amnesty, demobilize and disarm FAPs, and reintegrate and resettle FAPs to communities of choice.

Children above the age of 12 and adults who spent more than four months fighting in the bush are eligible to apply. They are required to report to the Amnesty Commission or any civil or community leader, armed forces or government officers and denounce rebellion.

Each FAP is issued with a certificate of amnesty and the person is exonerated for crimes in the rebellion. The Amnesty Commission then provides assistance to those with certificates in order to resettle into the community.

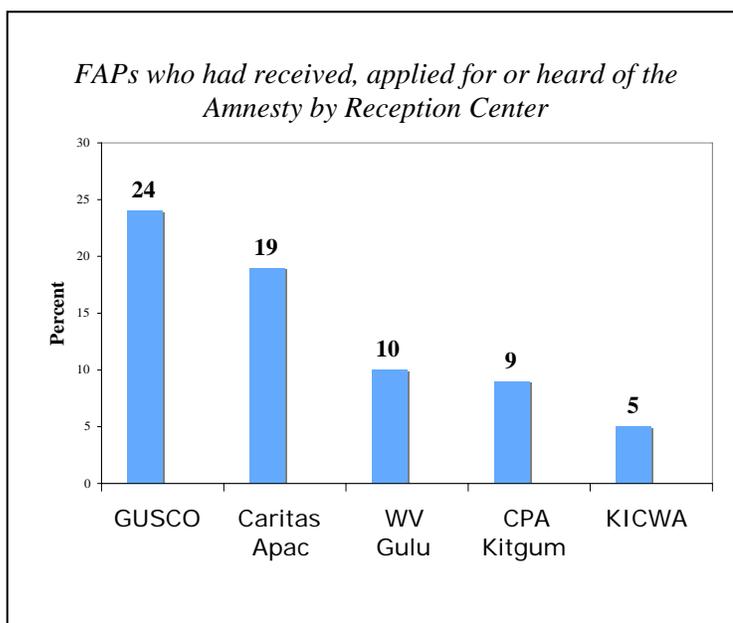
⁶¹ We broadened this category from ‘received amnesty’ to ‘applied for or even heard of the amnesty’ since the number of people who had received their amnesty card was so small.

⁶² In responding to the point that the amnesty does work as an incentive, the UPDF often emphasizes that high ranks are known to have reported as a result of the amnesty. However, using commanders’ return as anecdotal evidence means overlooking that these are the best-informed rebels. It is the foot soldiers that lack information.

⁶³ see section on UPDF

3.3.2 ACCESS TO THE AMNESTY COMMISSION

The first point of contact between a returnee and the Amnesty Commission is most commonly the reception center, although it really should be while FAPs are still with the UPDF. Amnesty Commission and reception center staff confirmed that relations are good. The centers call upon the Amnesty Commission to teach ‘demobilization classes’. In those classes, the Commission provides the FAPs with information about the amnesty law, the value of forgiveness in society, the value of peace versus violence and the value of peace in terms of their personal development and education. The FAPs are told the benefits of being out of the bush, such as bathing with soap or getting medical treatment. However, while both reception centers and Amnesty Commission confirmed a good working relationship it is important to note how few returnees found out about the amnesty while in the center, so while the relationship might be good, information flow still needs to be improved.



There seems to be no access by the Amnesty Commission to FAPs still with the UPDF. Whether this is because of lack of Amnesty Commission staff or for other reasons was impossible to determine – the fact of the matter is that it has simply become the established system that the Amnesty Commission works with the reception centers, rather than with the UPDF.⁶⁴ Since less than 1 PERCENT of the people interviewed in the sample said that they had been informed in the barracks about the legal meaning of amnesty, the UPDF clearly does not put much emphasis on working with the commission. It is possible that ignorance about the amnesty might be a factor leading some people to opt for recruitment into the army.⁶⁵

3.3.3 AMNESTY AND ‘REINTEGRATION’

There is much confusion amongst FAPs about what amnesty actually means: for some it means receiving a package,⁶⁶ others believe that they have been granted amnesty if they have gone through a reconciliation ceremony. Others have lost faith in the amnesty, because they had been consistently turned away from the Amnesty Commission’s offices. The probability of receiving an amnesty package of assistance items is regarded as so low, that many just do not bother claiming it - not realizing that not applying for amnesty could have legal consequences. Being granted amnesty from the Amnesty Commission to obtain legal immunity from prosecution was barely ever mentioned as an explanation about what amnesty means.

⁶⁴ The UPDF, however, has clear guidelines as to how to proceed with FAPs. Confidence building is considered a major factor: one focus is to spread the word that the UPDF and the Amnesty Commission do not kill FAPs. One way is through leaflets distributed before attacks that show pictures of former FAPs to prove that they are alive.

⁶⁵ see section on UPDF

⁶⁶ Staff from the amnesty commission have confirmed that they are on the alert about people not wanting amnesty, but the package that comes with it.

Part of the reason why people do not understand what the Amnesty Commission does is that the terms ‘amnesty’ and ‘forgiveness’ are not distinct in the local languages. The same word ‘*timo kica*’ is used for both. Various activist groups are especially prone to confuse the two ideas even arguing that there is an Acholi system of justice based on forgiveness which is superior to more conventional law making and enforcement. Rather naively, many aid agencies seem to have taken this at face value. Interviews in the IDP camps reveal considerable antipathy to those who have been with the LRA. At present this usually seems to be constrained by social controls exercised in the camps. But formerly abducted people could become vulnerable when the camps are dismantled, particularly where there are disputes over access to land.

Staff we spoke to from the Amnesty Commission said that they needed to communicate general problems regarding ‘reintegration’ to the government and donor community, but they pointed out that the commission itself is not responsible for tackling them. The commission’s task is specifically to issue amnesty cards and provide rehabilitation packages. However, staff confirmed that many applicants do not have a good understanding of what the amnesty law actually means. They confront numerous FAPs at their offices who believe they are eligible to receive a certificate and package, although they do not meet the criteria for being granted amnesty, having spent too short a time in the bush. As a result, the Amnesty Commission has identified the need to go out into the field to educate and inform people more, but this has been impossible to do because of the lack of trained personnel, transport and the security situation. Those interviewed at the commission also accepted that they have not been able to provide much assistance to those who have so far received amnesty cards. The slow pace of granting legal amnesty has been more than matched by the slow pace of disbursement of promised material and financial support.⁶⁷ Even those equipped with packages find themselves resettled into devastating poverty. The 263,000 Ugandan shillings they receive are often divided up in the family and do not support the FAP as expected (such as to pay for school uniforms and scholastic materials).

**AMNESTY COMMISSION
OBJECTIVES**

- To promote awareness of the Amnesty Law and Peacebuilding
- To promote dialogue between potential FAPs and the government
- To receive, document and process FAPs
- To promote the ‘reintegration’ of FAPs into the community by providing material assistance
- To sensitize community leaders, FAPs and other stakeholders
- To seek support and participation of different stakeholders in the peace process
- To ease follow-up of resettled FAPs
- To develop sustainable means of reintegrating FAPs into communities so as to eliminate incentives for future return to armed rebellions

A further major limitation for the Amnesty Commission is that it does not have a viable method of assessing those FAPs who fall outside the official system. While it is not the legal position, it has become practice in the commission that in order to qualify for amnesty, FAPs must provide documentation of having passed through one of the reception centers. However, there are two types of FAPs who have not passed through reception centers: those who returned prior to the inception of reception centers in their district and those who have ‘quietly settled’, bypassing the UPDF/CPU/reception centers’ structure and returning to their communities directly. As noted above, the UPDF insists that the ‘quietly settled FAP’ does not exist at all. Army officers repeatedly said that the only way to return from the bush and be settled in the community is by going through the official channels. But this is not the case.

⁶⁷ Until June 2005, a total of only 217 packages had been awarded in Kitgum since the Amnesty Act was instituted. Between June 16th and August 12th of 2005, 1000 additional Amnesty packages had been distributed in Kitgum as a result of the World Bank-funded Multi-Country Demobilization and Resettlement Programme. There have recently been more applicants for the amnesty, which could mean that the main motivation to apply for amnesty lies in the package, not in the legal implication. The Amnesty Commission in Kitgum, for example, currently has a backlog of approximately 3500 people waiting for packages, which does not include the people who have registered this year.

Those who returned from the LRA prior to the inception of the reception supposedly receive a letter from the district, certifying that the individual formerly fought against the government and returned some time ago. In case of the ‘quietly settled FAPs’, the Amnesty Commission is supposed to evaluate each individual to determine if he or she has indeed been with the LRA. In practical terms this is virtually impossible in the majority of cases, because the commission does not have the capacity to verify a ‘reporter’s’ story. The Amnesty Commission can accept a corroborating letter from the FAP’s local council. However, this raises issues with manipulation or ‘corruption’ (as the FAP may be related to the council member who writes the letter).

Total Numbers of Returnees Through Reception Centers (from all reception center records)

Note: the very high numbers of the period after 2002 reflect the effects of the UPDF operations against the LRA across the border in Sudan

	CPA Kitgum	KICWA	AACAN	KCV	WV Gulu	CCF	CPA Lira	GUSCO
1995					548			
1996					1290			
1997					1462			
1998		241			1420			
1999		93			518			
2000		230			246			
2001		306			263			
2002		507			1002			
2003	1030	1468	780		1580			
2004	528	989	282		2263			
2005	88	145	18		371			
TOTAL/ centre	1646	3979	1080	286	10963	650	850	7504
TOTAL	26958							

In theory, the Amnesty Commission targets all FAPs regardless of passage through centers. But now that more packages have become available, the Commission has encountered ever more problems with people falsely reporting. As a consequence, if someone claiming to be an FAP has not been through a center or reported to an authority figure - and therefore has no documentation - the Amnesty Commission is adamant that no certificate will be issued; otherwise there will not be enough resources to help ‘genuine FAPs’. This position was confirmed to by local Amnesty Commission staff and the research team witnessed that people were turned away without a letter from a reception center. In Kitgum, there is a sample reception letter tacked to the wall with an accompanying note to explain that this is a necessary document to bring.

3.4 THE RECEPTION CENTERS

3.4.1 ROLE OF RECEPTION CENTERS

Reception centers were set up to provide a space for people returning from the LRA. They are supposed to provide a safe area, basic supplies and basic ‘counseling’ to enable the FAPs to return to their community. It is important to recognize that the centers were set up in extreme circumstances because of the manifest acute needs of many of those who were returning to their families after having been abused by the LRA. They were not set up to do social research, and even keeping records was not initially a major concern. They were set up by people who just wanted to help in any way they could. The emergence of the centers was largely a hand-to-mouth response to an atrocious situation. It is hardly

surprising that there have been institutional inadequacies – most of which, it needs to be added, are fully recognized by staff themselves.

Centers have made efforts to establish good practice procedures over time, and there have been some efforts made at coordination between them (although these had not progressed very far until recently). In 2005, the numbers passing through the centers had declined to a trickle compared to the years before, prompting a debate among reception centers and donors about what should be their role now.

The perception of this research team, based on time spent in the centers and in the IDP camps and towns, is that probably the most important service of all provided by the centers is what might be termed liminal space – i.e. a space outside of social life where people are transformed through a process of ‘unbecoming’ and ‘becoming’, like in some initiation rituals.

For very many FAPs the most difficult times they have faced are the period after their ‘abduction’ and the period after their return. During these times they do not know what will happen to them and they may be in serious danger, or think that they are. Once rules of behavior are established and complied with, life becomes easier. The reception centers, for all their limitations, have offered a secure place where FAPs can undergo such an adjustment. They learn how to unlearn being a person who lives with the LRA, and they learn how to be ‘normal’, or at least less conspicuous. They are reassured about possible retribution by the UPDF, and taught how to ‘fit in’.

This research team observed FAPs arriving at the centers in a state of terror, shaking and jumping whenever they are asked a question or hear a sudden noise. Many FAPs are afraid to eat, to sleep, or even talk, and it can take several weeks for staff to develop sufficient connection and ‘trust’ with the FAP to enable him or her to undertake essential activities for their survival. When they leave the centers, FAPs are not like this. Some might well manage this transition on their own, but many others benefit from the assistance on offer. Such a conclusion was also reiterated by interviews with some CVCs in the IDP camps, who contrasted the behavior of those who had been through the reception centers with those who had not (although some of those CVCs interviewed in Lira District gave an opposite view).

The centers also perform other valuable functions. These include the provision of assistance to deal with physical wounds, family tracing, offering access to peer groups and the provision of advice and commodities, which have made the transition from LRA to the IDP camps or the towns somewhat easier.

On the surface, most of the centers offer similar services: basic health provision, a safe space to sleep, food, ‘counseling’ and teaching, entertainment and game-playing (see Appendix 2). They also usually encourage responsible behavior by transferring simple household duties to the FAP.⁶⁸ However, centers differ significantly in their approach to their work and in their resources. Particular individuals may have created smaller centers with a personal commitment to assisting some of those most in need. Others are a product of a broader response to the overall situation by international aid agencies. Some have a strong Christian agenda; others emphasize local ‘traditional’ healing rituals.

⁶⁸ See Appendix on Center Services

Staff at all the centers pointed out that they were unable to provide the full range of services needed by their clients: so while they had a basic dispensary and administered first aid, they were often unable to deal with more complicated medical issues and often lacked the funds for referral. Some center nurses said that while they counsel girls on the theoretical dangers of STDs and HIV, they do not have any way of actually sending them for testing and dealing with the test result. FAPs are treated for wounds while at the center, but do not receive any medical follow-up, leaving them with a half-treated condition after their return to the camps.

Several centers have offered various types of skills training. This is often done only when funds are available and usually consists of a truncated training session, rather than something that can evolve into a viable income generating activity. Overall there was little evidence that any technical skills learned at reception centers have proved adequate to secure a livelihood. A complaint from a large number of those that interviewed was that skills training at the reception centers was largely useless. Where it had been made available, it was not enough to be able to start a viable business. There were also complaints that essential materials and tools were not provided.

AVERAGE DAYS SPENT AT CENTER BY YEAR

(Some years/ centers missing due to insufficient data)

Year	Centre	Days In Centre	Sample Size
2003	CPA Kitgum	17	86
2004		22	41
2005		30	6
2000	GUSCO	195	11
2001		26	6
2002		30	3
2003		30	16
2004		21	12
1998	KICWA	60	20
1999		105	15
2000		60	21
2001		26	32
2002		44	47
2003		31	122
2004		37	81
2005		17	16
1995	WV Gulu	360	10
1996		107	24
1997		92	29
1998		140	28
1999		127	9
2000		11	5
2002		141	18
2003		30	27

The working relationship between centers is often difficult. Although most centers agree that coordination and cooperation has much improved, grievances still define the relationships. Notably, centers accuse each other of keeping children too long, especially children outside their home districts. It is alleged that this has become an increasing problem now that the number of FAPs arriving at the centers has declined, because numbers have to be kept up to sustain funding. There are also many accusations and counter accusations about centers 'stealing' FAPs from one another.

The District officials in Lira were particularly incensed by the tendency to send FAPs to reception centers that were not in their home district. They called this 'trafficking in children' and said it was just done to keep the numbers high. It was claimed to be a factor in exacerbating divisions between the FAPs and their families. Officials in other districts shared this view. Interestingly, the majority of those FAPs who pass through the Rachele Center in Lira town are Acholis from Pader or Kitgum Districts, which is a cause of much resentment among officials (and reception center staff) in those places. It is, however, hard to avoid the suspicion that some of the mutual vilification that occurs is motivated by frustration that this center has been able to secure more generous and sustained funding than the others.

Many reception center staff are acutely aware of how limited their role is in dealing with the complex situation in Northern Uganda, but feel constrained to say and do various things because they are deemed appropriate by aid agencies and donors. Staff work within a framework that requires acceptance of various received wisdoms about what is happening, such as that FAPs are all children or like children.

These perceptions affect the kinds of things that go on from day-to-day in the reception centers, but they do not necessarily determine what staff on the ground think. Indeed, several of those interviewed at the centers implicitly or explicitly made a distinction between the apparent or stated guidelines with which they work, and their own experiences and views. For many there is a separation between different sorts of discourse, and some staff are explicitly critical of the very concepts and practices that they are asked to use.⁶⁹ Concepts and realities do not match and the dialogue needed to compare the two and effectively adjust the framework is slow. Staff often find themselves in a difficult position and do not feel that they have the power to criticize the foundation of their organization's approach.

3.4.2 EVALUATING RECEPTION CENTER EFFECTIVENESS

Centers have various accountability mechanisms to their donors, yet there are no established accountability procedures to the centers' target population. Since the role of most centers, until very recently, had been largely confined to the center buildings themselves, accountability required by donors has never expanded much beyond the fence. It is therefore extremely difficult for the centers to evaluate their own effectiveness. Apart from anything else, there is very little information about how particular FAPs have coped after going 'home'.

Lack of outreach also makes evaluations within the centers problematic. There is no established practice, for example, for how long an FAP should spend at a center. As indicated, feelings run high on the issue, but there are no effective methods of making an objective assessment. Although there may be some information about a few cases, in general, reception centers have no means of knowing if keeping an FAP for longer is a useful response to observed difficulties.

In practice, the retention of the FAPs at the centers and the timing of their release depend on the pressure of space at the center concerned and staff evaluation. While there is an underlying concept that determines that FAPs should be returned to their families as soon as possible, staff will also talk about the need to adequately prepare FAPs for life outside the bush, to teach them what is considered 'normal behavior', and to actively assist in their social and psychological healing. A judgment is made by staff about the well-being of individual FAPs, and there is considerable reluctance to release them from the centers if they are deemed to be in particularly acute need or are thought to be mentally disturbed. Length of stay in the centers therefore varies widely, from a few weeks to over a year and often it is not entirely clear how the best interest of the FAP is determined.

The decision about length of stay at the center is also influenced by the idea that the FAPs are lacking in values, notably about the importance of human life and the respect that should be accorded to playmates, elders and teachers. This view of FAPs in practice means that they are entirely left out of the decision about what should happen to them. They are not consulted during the process and staff quite openly admit that an FAP's view on their own condition is not taken seriously. FAPs are seen to be unable to judge their own well-being and their ability to cope with life after the bush.

This a complex ethical and human rights issue. The key issues are whether it is in the best interests of the FAP (adult or child) to remain at a center, balanced with the need for the protection of persons back in the community, and who has the power, responsibility and authority to determine best interest. With children, a directly relevant sub-issue is the degree of involvement the parents or legal guardians have in determining whether or not the FAP should remain in a center or should be back with the family (or, indeed, be somewhere else). The reality is that most centers assume the responsibility to take decisions on behalf of FAPs (although they do not have any clearly defined legal authority) and few involve parents or

⁶⁹ One member of staff at a reception center that had recently been evaluated commented that the process had confirmed that evaluations were really about funding and were not helpful for actually doing the job. She was particularly incensed by the criticisms of one expatriate consultant who was shocked as the lack of toys at the center. She felt that the consultant had a completely inappropriate understanding of what it means to be an Acholi child.

legal guardians in the decisions. As regards adults, centers have actually no authority at all to retain them should he or she wish to leave – but most FAP are unaware of this.

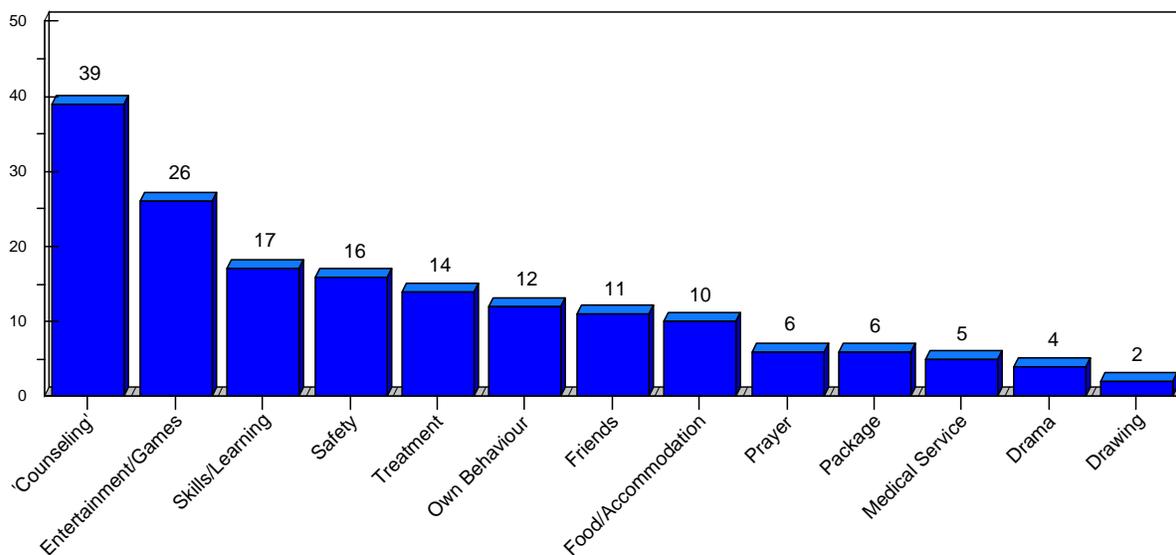
To offer an alternative perspective on the centers, the research team decided that it would be interesting to ask those who had passed through the reception center system what they thought were the best and worst things about it.

3.4.3 THE CENTER EXPERIENCE: BEST AND WORST THINGS

The vast majority of respondents had nothing particularly good or bad to say about the reception centers. This led to some dispute in the team as to what this actually means. While the non-Acholi team members felt inclined to interpret this as ‘the reception center was really not a very memorable place’, The local researchers (part of this research team) argued that this lack of emotions either way actually meant that people felt quite comfortable at the center and considered it ‘a good place’. About 90 people gave a more specific answer. The tables below present their responses. These were not ‘forced answers’ (i.e. the respondents were invited to give any answer they wanted), so the categories used to represent their views are the interpretation of what they said.

Best Thing About Center

(87 respondents, multiple answers)



‘Counseling’ was by a large margin the ‘best memory’ of the center. It is necessary to take a broad view of what ‘counseling’ entails: some described it simply as ‘talking to someone and getting attention’, others pointed out the life skills taught and the actual coping mechanisms suggested by the counselors. Some called it ‘advice’; others called it ‘teaching’, ‘learning coping mechanisms and how to keep healthy’ and ‘how to conduct myself while in the society’. Coping mechanisms are described as: ‘I learned how to be a good child, and ‘how to live in harmony with others.’ General teachings mentioned were the idea of being respectful of others, not quarrelling in the community and forgetting about the past, and that ‘if someone abuses me, I should not answer, or fight’. One boy explained at length how the teaching to be tolerant to abuse and name-calling is still important in his life, and has helped him live like other human beings. The concept of forgiveness is often cited: ‘forgive those in the bush for the time you spent there and forgive those who might abuse you when you came back home’.

The personal nature and the trust relationship of ‘counseling’ seemed particularly important. Often, respondents felt comfortable with one ‘counselor’ who made a point of spending time with the FAP. It was seen as a positive experience that the ‘counselors’ asked, for example, about nightmares. Many saw the role of the ‘counselors’ as almost parental – it reminded them of home how their parents ‘took care of them’.

Most importantly, the teaching/counseling instilled a sense of hope, that ‘things are still possible’, and a sentiment that ‘life is not yet over for you only because you have been in the bush. Just make sure that you take responsibility by staying away from bad people and by staying out of the bush.’ When asked how ‘counseling’ led to behavioral change, one man explained how he used to drink a lot before going into the bush, but stopped when he was told in the center that he was wasting his life.

It is seen as reassuring that the ‘counselors’ could potentially provide more help later in life. Some FAPs left the reception center thinking that they could come back for more ‘counseling’ at any time. Although in practice that has rarely been proven impossible, it seemed to be an empowering thought.

The value given to skills and learning is interesting. That is something that most FAP state they hoped to obtain at centers but were not given, and it was recorded as the second ‘worst thing’ about the centers after ‘empty promises’. Those who mentioned it as a ‘best thing’ tended to add a qualifier: ‘if it had only been more training’, or ‘if I had only been given the necessary tools to work with, I could now use my skills to make a living.’ A few respondents observed that they enjoyed being taught something new, such as a traditional dance and music or even literacy and numeracy. It is possible that some of the responses reflected a hope amongst respondents that emphasizing their desire for training might lead to more courses being made available.

Comments on other responses to ‘what were the best things about the reception center?’ can be found in the footnotes.⁷⁰

⁷⁰ Praying or being taught how to pray is an important source of hope for some. Half of those who answered that prayer was the best aspect of their stay at the center also mentioned that they converted to various forms of Christianity at the center. They still use prayer in their everyday life and feel that this is the best thing given to them at the center.

Numerous times people confirmed that the games, movies, music and dances helped them to forget about the past: ‘Football was the best thing for me because I would feel fine after playing football. I always had a relaxed mind after playing football.’ The opportunity to sit quietly and read was appreciated; drama and drawing are singled out as activities that give confidence. One respondent pointed out that his group won the drama contest with their play about life in the bush; another said he liked drawing pictures of guns and rebels.

Security and feeling safe at the center play a vital role: ‘the center is guarded even at night... it is fenced in or surrounded by a swamp so rebels cannot reach it... being in this safe haven felt like a dream at first...the center was in town and the rebels would not go that far into town.’ Safety was also perceived on other levels: ‘I feel that I should stay only here in the center, because all of us have been abducted, so we don’t stigmatize each other unlike home where people abuse me.’

Many of those who quoted safety as a center’s virtue also mentioned being treated well by the staff. Being given hot water to bathe upon arrival and being treated with human warmth is important. One respondent sums it up by saying: “The care they gave to FACs was the best thing at the center.” Food security and to a lesser extent accommodation play a major part in the feeling of well-being at the center, so is receiving medical treatment: ‘I felt free in the center, because in the bush there were many rashes on my body and the people in the center helped with the medicine.’ Receiving goods - from jerry cans, plates, cups, basins, clothing, soap and razor blades to a mattress - to keep is a fond memory.

Making friends at the center to talk to about life in the bush and after escaping is frequently mentioned – especially if the friends made in the center are staying in the same camp. One man is still in contact with friends from the center and they advise whenever he needs help. The peers become a surrogate family – in fact, one girl even phrased it that way: ‘we socialized with each other as if we were family.’

Many respondents saw ‘behaving responsibly’ and ‘showing and being shown respect’ at the centre as a major achievement. Children and adults felt empowered by being able to show off good behavior, following instructions

Worst things about the Reception Center

81 respondents, multiple answers

Empty Promises	22
Other FAPs	20
Lack of Skills Training	13
Lack of Support	12
Staff Behavior	12
Lack of Follow-Up	10
Unfair Treatment	9
Center Infrastructure	9
Lack of Help with Amnesty	7
Food	7
Lack of Counseling	6
Not Allowed to Leave/ Move around	5
Not Allowed to Stay	4
Unfulfilled Expectations	4
Center Rules	3
Lack of Schooling	3
Own Behavior	3
Sexual Advances	2
Language/ Cultural Barrier	2
Lack of Ceremonies/ Evil Spirits	1
Being exposed as an FAP	1
Center Programmes	1
Loss of Trusted Person	1
Boredom	1
Lack of Communication with Home	1

The vast majority of respondents saw ‘empty promises’ as the worst aspect about the reception center. Respondents were aggrieved in part by the sense of being let down by

- Waiting to be called back to the center to receive a package.
- Having to fill in a form to receive training or tools, but never receiving them.
- Being told that the future would be bright and that there were opportunities to go back to school or receive training.
- Promises to be followed-up by the reception center staff to see how they were coping at home.
- Promises that they would be sponsored for school fees.
- Promises that they would receive clothes.
- Being asked about problems, which were written down, but never dealt with.

Respondents tended to make a distinction between specific promises made by reception center staff, and more general disappointments about their lives. Even without a specific promise, FAPs were disappointed when they found out that the center was not going to pay school fees or find sponsors or provide items that they wanted. These expectations seemed to be based on hearsay, rather than on personal interactions

and by living up to staff’s expectation. People who mentioned their own behavior as their best memory did so because they were given a responsible role as either dormitory captain, head girl, head of games and sports, entertainment master who taught other abductees music or the elder who was asked to give advice to the young ones. Being able to perform visible tasks, such as sweeping the center and weeding the compound are important ingredients to make the people feel valued, along with receiving skills training.

with center staff. Those who expressed their disappointment about being promised a visit quite often also said that follow-up would really help them and would encourage them to cope with life. As one respondent put it: ‘I would like to be told how to live well during follow-up’.

Those who mentioned lack of skills training usually talked about not being given any tools to put the skills learned in the center to work or being taught the wrong skills, effectively rendering the skills training as useless.⁷¹ Boredom in the center was mentioned as an issue, along with feeling useless: ‘I stayed for three months in the center. Sitting and doing nothing for three months was too much.’ Some FAPs felt that they wasted time staying in the center without schooling. There was one suggestion of a special school for the formerly abducted ‘so that we study there to avoid stigmatization from other people both at school and in the community.’ Among the respondents, there was a general feeling that the reception centers are unaware of the problems awaiting returnees at home – most commonly the complete lack of anything to do or generate an income, which, it was claimed, leads to thoughts of suicide in some cases.

A dozen respondents reported lack of help with obtaining an amnesty certificate. Some had lost their reception center letter, which is needed to register for the amnesty (explanations included ‘father hid it’ and ‘hut burnt down’) and went back to the center to get it reissued, were told that they could not receive a replacement and subsequently gave up trying to apply for amnesty. Others complained that their names were not on the Amnesty Commission’s list of people who went through the center and thus their letter was not accepted as proof. Yet when they turned to the center for help with this issue, the center did not help. Many applications for amnesty simply got lost in the long process and frustrations.

Criticism of the center, rather than the lack of the centers’ involvement after reunification, targeted the infrastructure and rules, staff behavior and programs. People criticized lack of space (not enough room for accommodation), sleeping tents (several people mentioned that they would prefer to sleep in brick buildings) lack of proper bedding, lack of security (people asked for better protection from the UPDF), leaking water taps, and poor sanitation.

While all centers make provision to separate the sexes at night, lack of space in particular led to uncomfortable situations for some: ‘What I didn’t like was that some ex-abductees were trying to persuade girls (to have sex)’, said one boy. Another blamed the confined space and the daily interaction between boys and girls in their center at the time they were there as the cause for ‘love feelings among the youth’, and advised the centers to separate girls and boys day and night and to ‘always use different venues for both boys and girls and to expand to have enough space to avoid such bad behavior.’ There were also complaints there was not enough food or that the food was of low quality: ‘At times, the food they cook for us is not well fried and the posho is expired from the stores. We are not allowed to leave it, we should eat it all.’ One respondent noted that ‘when we became many, the services became poor and harsh treatment came in.’

⁷¹ In some instances, those who received training pointed out that it was useless, and another skill would have been more appropriate (a woman who was taught weaving, for example, mentioned that she could only make money from tailoring). Desirable skills mentioned were tailoring, bicycle repair, anything mechanical and brick laying. One girl mentioned that she was scared to ‘advise big people’, but that she thought it would be good if more than one kind of skill would be taught, as she and all other girls at the center were all learning tailoring.

Comments on other responses to ‘what were the worst things about the reception center?’ can be found in the footnotes.⁷²

⁷² Not only in busy times was distribution of resources a major cause of grievances among the FAPs. People did not feel as if everybody was treated equally, but segregated based on ‘periods spent in the bush, period of escape, and so on.’ A common complaint is that some people received gifts and others did not and that such choices depended entirely on staff. Discrimination was seen to be based on age (younger ones get more), circumstance (‘child mothers’ receive a certificate for their tailoring training, others do not’), and home district (‘training was only given to children from a certain district’). A Teso returnee in a Gulu reception center said that the language barrier was the worst thing for him. An Acholi Girl amongst Langi said that she was scared to say anything because ‘I am the only Acholi here, so I can be hurt.’

When staff behavior was criticized, respondents were either referring to a specific incident, person, or general staff approach such as ‘the staff did not like that we were stubborn’, ‘the staff used improper language’ or ‘the staff did not make us comfortable’. Staff are accused of being abusive towards FAPs – calling them names, stigmatizing them, being rude, being incompetent in how ‘to handle people coming from the bush’ or being arrogant. One person describes a dramatic incident during which a member of staff accused the FAPs of eating too much. Apparently this led to an FAP revolt with the FAPs taking their belongings and trying to smash the locked gate until they were begged to go back and settle down by other members of staff. One FAP accused staff of embezzlement – of taking money donated by visitors for the well-being of the FAPs. Staff turnover was difficult for those who had learned to trust a member of staff: ‘I always go to talk to someone from the center, but we normally find that the old staff has been changed or left.’

Some of the rules imposed in the center are not looked upon favorably: burning all the clothes and belongings from the bush (usually described as ‘leaving the past behind’ by staff) just felt like theft to some FAPs. Segregation of children into home districts was criticized and so was the practice of keeping mothers and children apart. One woman explained that she had to sleep in a separate room than her eldest daughter and they were only allowed to see each other during the day. Restriction of movement while in the center was problematic. Some felt imprisoned because the compound was fenced and it made them feel as if still in captivity. Some centers restrict movement out of the compound to Sundays, which, as one man said, ‘oppresses people a lot.’ Others felt that they were made to stay longer at the center than they wanted to (‘I was just being forced by the staff to stay longer. I badly wanted to come back home’) because they rather wanted to go back to school or be with their family. Some simply did not want to be in the center because they did not want to be associated with it: ‘I hated being called an abducted child - especially by the people who visited the center, especially the Whites who visit the center to support it.’

Nine FAPs stated that they wanted to stay longer. Reasons given included the observation that they had made friends or that they felt they were not yet in good health. Others simply wanted to stay for no specific reason, but realized that the length of stay ‘depends on someone’s health, and how the person relates with others.’ One man recounted his problems after returning home: ‘I feel good about being at home but my head, where the rebel beat me, sometimes I don’t know what is happening. Then I start shouting and I don’t want anybody to talk loudly near me. Sometimes I feel like I am mad because I don’t know what I am doing I would like to still be in the reception center, stay there for another three months. Because I was thinking that my head is going to disturb me and I fear to go back home because of that.’ Most centers decide when an FAP is ready to go home, but encourage contact with the family as soon as possible. There have been cases when returnees and reception center staff disagreed on what kind of contact would be suitable: ‘I missed staying with my people and I had no means of delivering messages to them.’ The programs offered by the center were not suitable for everyone. One girl recounts her fear when she was asked to participate in entertainment: ‘I used not to like dancing (disco) because I imagined rebels would come and attack us again. So I could lock the door for everyone not to enter the room.’ Other FAPs said that they needed more care for their particular problem. Lack of ‘counseling’ was not expressed as a grievance as such, but it can be deduced from the situations described. One man, for example, would complain how people stigmatize him in the camp ‘even when it is a small thing that has happened; they say I am possessed with evil spirits from the bush,’ and that he feels like talking to someone at the center about such a matter. Another asked for more teaching on ‘...how I should live. After staying in the bush for a long time I think we need to be taught how to live among people again.’ Others mention problems at home and in the center, because life there is just ‘so different’ from the bush and they do not know how to deal with it. Some recount symptoms of ‘trauma’ after being deemed ready for ‘reintegration’: recurring nightmares, wanting to kill people, drinking and disturbing others.

Three FAPs criticized their own behavior as the worst thing at the center: beating children or wanting to kill somebody in a fight. Interactions between FAPs in the center are complicated. Apart from general criticism that other FAPs at the center just do not behave very well, there are more concrete examples of why people felt even threatened while there. There was theft amongst FAPs, physical violence, fighting, quarrelling as well as intimidation and bullying of younger children and complaints about a lot of noise at night from quarrelling, nightmares and snoring.

3.4.4 APPROACHES TO 'COUNSELING'

It is not surprising, given what has been going on in northern Uganda for so many years, that many people have attitudes and experiences that require mediation, to say the least, before they can re-adapt to life with their families. Staff at the reception centers are well aware of this, and several were observed to demonstrate a remarkable degree of patience and care, although sometimes they can be heard saying things to each other like '*lo tini wig u bale*' (these children are not sound in the head'). From time to time they loose their temper, or express their opinions to FAPs in explicit terms.



Can 'counseling' prepare FAPs for life in IDP Camps? (Photo: Elliott Green)

It would be fair to say that reception center staff are not well equipped to manage the transformation of what are sometimes termed 'stubborn children'.⁷³ As the 2005 GUSCO evaluation put it, the capacity of professional staff to meet the diverse needs of children and young persons at the center 'has been limited in terms of personnel and training in special issues'. Staff at the center themselves drew attention to this

Other complaints from FAPs that were recorded in interviews, but not as a response to the question about 'worst things', included feeling uncomfortable at the center because of meeting people they knew from the bush and had witnessed committing atrocities. Some mentioned the bad spirits (*cen*) other people would bring to the center. The spirits would force them to make funny noises at night. Some FAPs said that they were scared of people who would 'practice witchcraft' in the center and turn into dogs at night. They said that those evil spirits could only have been stopped by a ceremony, which the center failed to perform. There were also complaints about people who were brought to the center although they have never been to the bush and 'yet they are going to benefit from the training.'

⁷³ In one exchange a social worker berated a group of children in the following way:

'Please try to behave, we do not want to look after stubborn children, and stop this habit of threatening people by telling about what you can do to them or whatever you did to others in the bush. Do you think you will manage living in the community if you talk like that? Nobody will want you and you will have nowhere to go but come back here. This is how we will catch those of you who are so naughty and disobedient. Look at those who were good children while they were still here. All the staff like them. It is easy to help such children when they are in need. But if you are disobedient, nobody will want to help you and you will not be liked much because you left a bad reputation behind you.'

issue in feedback sessions, and also referred to the problem of staff ‘burn out’ and the lack of mentoring.⁷⁴ It is a problem that seems to affect almost all the centers, and to be worst at the larger ones. There is also a tendency to assume (or hope) that in the end the families of those returning will manage to provide most of the necessary support, and to gloss over the problem with references to ‘psychosocial’ assistance.

The term ‘psychosocial’ has become a catchphrase amongst agencies working in northern Uganda (not just the reception centers) for just about anything to do with assistance that is additional to giving FAPs food. It appears to have become a prerequisite for funding proposals to mention it. A misleading aspect of its use is that it implies that psychotherapeutic care is being made available. This is not the case.

Although ‘counseling’ is frequently emphasized by reception center staff and in aid agency reports, this research team found that no psychotherapeutic ‘counseling’ is occurring, or at least not in the way that the notion of psychotherapeutic ‘counseling’ is generally understood in, for example, Europe or the US. There are no trained psychiatrists or psychotherapists working at any of the centers on a regular basis, and no facilities or even time for something that might approximate to psychotherapeutic treatment.

A survey amongst reception center staff showed that most social workers had a diploma qualification (41 percent), followed by a Bachelor’s degree (33 percent). Of the social workers, only 41 percent said that they had received specific counseling training, 37 percent were trained in psychosocial support. The same survey showed most non-social workers at the centers (nurses, caregivers, cooks, social worker volunteer) had usually not undergone any specific training for work at the reception center (only 33 percent reported that they had received training in psychosocial support, 30% were trained in counseling). Yet, 52 percent of the non-social workers said that their main activity in working with the FAPs was ‘counseling’.⁷⁵

All the centers offer what they call ‘counseling’, but what this means in practice is talking to the FAPs collectively and sometimes also individually, and offering instruction and advice. At some centers this has a strong Christian component to it, at others it is more secular, or may emphasise local rites of healing. There follows a discussion of ‘counseling’ drawn mainly from observations and discussions at the two main reception centers in Gulu: GUSCO and World Vision and at the small CCF center at Pader. Approaches at these centers and at several others are also summarised in the table insert.

At GUSCO the approach to ‘counseling’ is mostly secular, although some of the staff are very committed Christians and this may affect the advice they offer in an informal way. At World Vision, like other faith-based centers - such as the CCF Reception Center in Pader - there is a much clearer focus on Christian beliefs and values. ‘Counseling’, along with other activities at the centers, is deemed to play a useful role in bridging ‘life in the bush’ with ‘life in the community’. Much of the ‘counseling’ is done in groups. The term ‘group counseling’ does not carry the same meanings as that usually understood in psychotherapy. Rather it is a way of referring to group discussions among FAPs.

At World Vision, a member of staff typically facilitates discussions on topics such as peace, reconciliation, and forgiveness. The topics are not chosen by the FAPs and the purpose of ‘group counseling’ is to (i) ‘enable children to learn from each other’ (ii) ‘to educate them on key topics’; and (iii) ‘to provide them with the opportunity to discuss ideas in an open forum and thereby counter feelings of shame which typically mount in the aftermath of spending time in the bush with the LRA.’ Some group sessions also involve debates. Here, children are encouraged to come up with their own topics; and a social worker presides – with a view to maintaining order and encouraging as many children as possible to speak. A favored debating topic is: ‘Is life in the bush better than life at home?’ Staff noted that many

⁷⁴GUSCO (2005). Evaluation and Lessons Learnt 2002 - 2005. Gulu, Gulu Support the Children Organisation: pages 28 and 97.

⁷⁵ Lorschiedter, A. (2005, unpublished). Evaluation of a Survey Among Staff in Reception Centers in Gulu, Kitgum, Pader, Lira, Apac, Soroti and Katakwi Districts, Martin-Luther Universitaet Halle-Wittenberg, Germany.

of them think it is. The reasons FAPs give include the following:(i) that they were free to walk around in the bush (ii) there were no parents telling them when to go and dig, and (iii), in the bush they did not have to go to school and be with strict teachers.

At CCF, the orientation towards Christian teaching is overt. ‘Group counseling’ is done in so-called ‘domestic discussion’, mainly because it is supposed to prepare the FAPs for their life back home. Some of them were abducted before the population moved into camps and they need to be prepared for that very different life. Girls get special ‘counseling’ on relationships in the family and the role of women. ‘Counseling’ is based on the Bible and the director explained how she has had to defend herself against assumptions that she is recruiting children as born-again Christians. She said that children from the bush sometimes remark that they don’t ‘pray properly’ at CCF. The 90 minutes that are allocated to prayer daily are nothing compared to the ten hours Kony made them pray before a fight.

It is quite possible that being taught to pray a different way or a better way than in the bush is helpful. Many children who passed through World Vision Gulu, for example, highlighted prayer as one of the best things about their time at the center. The main difference between the praying the children experience in the bush and in the center was explained at CCF: ‘In the bush, the children are encouraged to surrender their life to God, since they can never know if they will survive the next day. While at CCF, we encourage them to use the Bible only as a tool in their life.’ A difference from the Gulu-based centers is that at CCF the FAPs are encouraged to go to church outside the center. The director commented that she wanted them to be out and about in a normal setting before they go home.

‘Group counseling’ at GUSCO has a slightly more open-ended quality. Sessions take place in the open, under a mango tree in the compound. According to GUSCO staff, the purpose is to help children at the center address ‘general fears’, which are said to typically include: ‘recurring nightmares and fears of acceptance when they go home’. Common issues raised at these ‘counseling’ sessions are: ‘I don’t have school fees.’ and ‘when are you sending me back home?’ Staff explained to the research team that most children are looking for ‘reassurance and hope’.

Staff members are meant to ‘monitor each child’s contribution closely ... making a mental note of the questions they raise; the responses they give and their overall participation.’ If a difficult, individual issue crops up then these are often followed up with the relevant social worker as soon as the group ‘counseling’ is completed that day. Interestingly, FAPs are not encouraged to talk about their time in the bush during group sessions. Issues arising from this are addressed in individual ‘counseling’ sessions. GUSCO also runs ‘family talk’ sessions. This takes place on a Sunday morning and is carried out with the central administrator. He encourages children to ask them whatever questions they wish and to tell him about the things they do not like at the center (with a view to finding ways to improve or alter them in the future). It is a forum for children to say, for example, that they have mislaid or lost clothes, or that they need more soap etc. Sometimes girls and boys are also invited to discuss issues separately.

The term ‘individual counseling’ also carries different meanings to that usually understood in psychotherapy. The term at World Vision is used to convey the fact that a social worker tries to spend time with a child on his or her own. This is done to elicit the full story of their abduction and time in the bush. These individual ‘counseling’ sessions borrow from some aspects of clinical counseling: they are non-judgmental and every effort is made to help the FAP recognize the emotions aroused by their time in the bush. This is deemed to be cathartic. To quote the director of the center: ‘if a problem is not spoken about, it swells ... counseling is cathartic.’

At GUSCO the team was told that ‘individual counseling’ is not attempted until the child has spent at least two weeks at the reception center. It is not compulsory, but strongly encouraged. FAPs are asked to talk to social workers if they have ‘any problems’. These include: ‘thinking a lot about the past’; ‘problems at the reception center’; ‘problems at home’; ‘a desire to go home.’ Most FAPs go once or

twice a week, and a small number go daily. The aim of the sessions is two-fold: (i) to help children recognize and face their difficulties (and the fears that may go with them) and (ii) to establish a relationship with the social worker that will follow them up on their return to the IDP camps – although individual follow-up has not actually happened in any systematic way for the majority of FAPs who have passed through the center.

Like at World Vision, an important purpose of individual ‘counseling’ sessions with a designated social worker is to encourage the child to talk freely about their experiences in the bush. The assumption is that, however awful their experiences, there is merit in creating a space for FAPs to tell an adult the full details of their experiences and the range of emotions involved (fear, excitement, terror, pleasure or whatever they may be). Staff try to create an atmosphere of trust and to go out of their way to be non-judgmental and to demonstrate an appreciation that human beings, whatever their age, sometimes do terrible and murderous acts, under duress and the fear or threat that they too will be killed, if they do not commit atrocity after atrocity.

One of the research team members who has considerably experience and knowledge of psychoanalytic therapy, asked GUSCO staff if they were sure that what they were doing was really appropriate. How could they be sure that they were not making things worse for the child? How could they be sure that it would not be better to encourage the FAP to forget all the awful things they had had to do in the bush? Was it really appropriate to model sessions, without any appropriate training, on those which have been developed mainly in Europe and North America over many decades, and for people with different backgrounds, outlooks and experiences?

The response was interesting and took this form: ‘we cannot prove in an empirical way that it is effective, but the informal feedback that we get suggests that it is useful. Children returning to their families in the camps often go on to take up leadership positions within the camp; and they are often praised for their outlooks and behavior.’ In response to questions about the reception centers promoting a psychological healing agenda that are overly influenced by Western models, even if they do not replicate Western therapeutic practices, staff typically say ‘but it works’ and ‘the evidence proves that people who talk, move on more quickly’. Perhaps this is the case, but there is no good evidence to confirm it, and there are other reasons why FAPs may feel that talking in a certain way about their time with the LRA is useful or necessary. It is one of the ways in which they can try to secure resources and also make a case for being released from the center.

Insert: Overview of Counseling Approaches in Reception Centers

<i>Center</i>	<i>Approach to ‘Counseling’ and Related Issues</i>
AACAN	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 4 weeks training for ‘counselors’ (basic ‘counseling’, how to calm down a child with flashbacks/ nightmares) • Staff is discouraged to spend too much time alone with a child • Psychosocial ‘counseling’ training provided by TPO based on the following model: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Empowerment of the client / building trust - Attentive listening/ probing / encouraging feelings / giving comfort and support - Work plan / implementing the work plan/ ending relationship to ‘counselor’ • Level of trauma of a child assessed through questionnaire: interactions, response to center activities • Terminology of ‘post-traumatic stress syndrome’ and ‘psychosocial problems’
CCF	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Individual/ group ‘counseling’/ Christian teaching • Group ‘counseling’ is done in ‘domestic discussions’ • Special ‘counseling’ for girls on relationships/ role of women

<i>Center</i>	<i>Approach to ‘Counseling’ and Related Issues</i>
CPA Kitgum	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Take away feelings of guilt, suggesting that time with the LRA was in a different life • Clients are told that even after all that happened, they still have the capacity to have a good life • Girls tend to keep quiet during group sessions • ‘Counselors’ find it difficult to assess the individual’s progress in group sessions • Group ‘counseling’ is playful/ using games • FAPs are taught basic behavioral skills because ‘these are adults who have the capacity of children’
GUSCO	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mental well-being is assessed through observation of interaction: withdrawal is seen as sign of trauma • Length of stay at center much debated: no consensus on desirable length, decided on case by case • Time spent at GUSCO is influenced by the child’s physical, social and emotional well-being • Children are encouraged to talk to social workers about any problems • Staff try to create a non-judgmental atmosphere of trust
KCV	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ‘Counseling’ approach based on behavioral patterns (absent-mindedness, aggressive behavior) • Christian teaching: forgiveness is important • Group discussion, individual ‘counseling’, drama and art
KICWA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Group ‘counseling’/ life skills education • Length of stay depends on how traumatized a child is assessed to be by ‘counselors’
World Vision Gulu	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Guilt and shame seen as signs of low self-esteem • Group ‘counseling’: discussion on peace; reconciliation; and forgiveness • Individual ‘counseling’: non-judgmental, allowing emotions to surface • Christian teaching

Data needed to make a rigorous assessment of the effect of ‘counseling’ at the centers is simply unavailable. However, there are reasons to be cautious to view counseling as equivalent to psychotherapy and the psychological healing associated with it.⁷⁶

Forgiveness and the hand of God underpin many of the responses that staff make to children at the center. Also, social workers go out of their way not to encourage children and adults to dwell on feelings of guilt and self-blame that may be aroused when they talk about their experiences in the bush. Indeed, they are

⁷⁶ While taking into account that many FAPs appreciated the reception centers as a safe haven in which they received personal attention, there are some issues worth considering. How is it possible for a child that has endured many years in the bush to walk into a reception center and pour their heart out about all the things they have seen, witnessed and/or perpetrated? It is one thing for an adult at the center to encourage FAPs to think that they are in safe hands and quite another for them to believe that they really are. Indeed, the evidence points to the contrary. FAPs often have to be coaxed to eat. They fear the staff may be poisoning their food and the only way to convince them otherwise is to encourage them to prepare the food and then eat it with the staff. This response is common among FAPs recently returned from the bush. It follows, then, that FAPs are likely to be skeptical of the ‘trust me’, ‘talk freely’, ‘offload your burden’ scenario. They know they will be returned to their families in the camps and that life in the camps is insecure. Allegiances come and go and how are they meant to know whether the reception center staff are colluding with the UPDF or, come to that, the LRA? The FAPs have had no pre-existing relationship with staff so, how, and on what basis, should they decide that they are only there to help children? The centers will not provide a safe environment in a few weeks time, so what is the basis of their commitment? Staff at the centers are in a position of considerable authority over the FAPs. It is they who decide when a person is ‘normal’ enough to leave the center. Participant observation research at the centers suggested that the FAPs learn to say and behave in the correct way in order to achieve various ends, including release from the center, if that is what they want. We found that many quickly learn that they should tell their stories in particular ways, and we also came across some cases where we were told stories that appeared to have been ‘borrowed’ from other FAPs.

given a clear message that they are not in any way culpable for the awful deeds they may have committed in the bush.

The Director of World Vision provided a good example of this: 'Boys in the bush are sometimes made to lick the blood of those they have killed. Some react in a positive way to this kind of experience and some react in a negative way.' Our researcher asked him if he could say more about what he felt was a positive response. He replied along the lines that the child who felt able to say: 'I licked the blood, spat it out, it happened and life goes on' demonstrates a positive coping mechanism; whereas the child who says 'I feel so bad that I've killed' is not coping well. They will go on to be depressed, drink and even to commit suicide.

Yet is it not a completely reasonable response to want to reflect on one's own agency (or lack of) when undertaking dreadful acts? It is far from convincing that all you have to do to 'heal' is acknowledge that it happened and move on. It may well be that the reception centers do not have the capacity to do more than they are doing, but that does not mean that what they are doing is necessarily desirable.

The research team found that few of those interviewed at the centers had much that was positive to say about 'counseling'. In interviews they rarely distinguished between group and individual sessions, and the most common answer to questions such as 'did you find the 'counseling' sessions helpful?' was 'not really' or 'no'.

However, these responses on counselling were not replicated in the survey of those who had passed through reception centers and are now mostly living in the IDP camps. Those who pointed out a best thing about the reception center were overwhelmingly positive about 'counseling'. They did not necessarily experience it as 'therapeutic', but they found it useful. It was perceived as loving parental-like care and a form of instruction or teaching about how they should live their lives.

Of course, in certain respects this is not dissimilar to the instruction or teaching that they had received in the bush. The information imparted at the reception centers clearly outlines a moral code appropriate to living in the IDP camps, and indicates what FAPs have to do to be accepted. Many IDPs also appreciated having someone show an interest in them, and demonstrate a willingness to take what they have to say seriously.

The research team which mostly spent time at the reception centers have been impressed at the care and kindness offered by some staff members. The team's impression is that this was hugely appreciated by quite a large number of FAPs. Again it is perhaps worth observing that this interest and concern mirrors observations made by some FAPs about life in the bush. Many of them will comment about how things improved for them when a certain commander showed an interest in them. It is striking that a large percentage of the 'child mothers' interviewed would only have positive things to say about the men they had been given to as 'husbands'. This observation may sound more provocative than it is intended to be. The point is simply that in the circumstances that FAPs have lived their lives, a person being sympathetic to them is something remarkable.

When it comes to the decisions made by staff at the reception centers about the state of FAPs mental health, this is more to do with their social behavior than anything else. FAPs have to behave in certain ways to be designated normal enough for release into the community. One reception center staff explained that being 'normal' means not behaving in any way that is considered strange by the staff: not talking at all, keeping to themselves, being rude and disobedient, threatening others, being forgetful or lost in thoughts.

Some staff are quite defensive about their approach to 'counseling'. They are adamant that the 'counseling' they provide facilitates psychological healing and that it is an integral part of the FAPs

‘reintegration’. However, psychological healing and learning how to behave appropriately are two very different things. While the ‘counseling’ that is being offered right now has certainly taught behavioral skills to FAPs, the research team interviewed FAPs who have very disturbing attitudes about their ‘abduction’ experience and time with the LRA – such as openly stating that killing was ‘nice’. ‘Counseling’ has not healed these individuals, and some people who behave in a ‘normal’ way could pose a danger when they find themselves in a stressful situation.

It needs to be added here that there are also different voices within the reception center system about the assertions being made about ‘counseling’ and healing. Like the team members who carried out research in the reception centers on the issue, the Director of CCF was skeptical about the psychotherapeutic discourse. She tries to avoid it at her center. In her view, ‘counseling’ is useful, but only goes so far in facilitating reintegration:

‘The most important ingredient of reintegration is a strong social network in the camp and a liveable economic situation.... Donors build too much on psychosocial well being based on Western concepts. The children become so sensitized towards possible bad behavior they might experience in the community that they go home extremely negative and might at times even incite bad sentiments. The emphasis is at times wrong. Children need to be prepared for a bad life in the camps, but not for a bad community.’

Similarly staff at CARITAS have made the following observations about ‘counseling’ in a recent paper. Counseling, as it is done in the Northern Ugandan context, means ‘in the first place to be a good listener and give the client space to express his/her suffering if he/she wishes to do so. At the same time we stress the importance of exploring and recognizing his/her strength, personal and social resources and opportunities.’ However, ‘pretending to train ‘counselors’ in the course of one or two weeks might at the end not only compromise professional standards, but also risks to harm the so called ‘counselor’ and the counseled clients.’⁷⁷

3.5 APPROACHES TO FOLLOW-UP

Evaluating how effective reception centers are in facilitating ‘reintegration’ is impossible. None of the reception centers has carried out adequate follow-up investigations of those who have passed through, and at the time of this research some of them do not have a database on which to base such a process. Activities performed at the centers have not been judged in terms of data on outcomes. It has simply not been a priority for staff although it has been of more concern to donors. This has led to the adoption of some policies, such as ‘counseling’, by all the centers, without any serious effort to coordinate practices or find out if they have been effective. Most of the centers do not even know where those that they have assisted are currently living. As the numbers of returnees decrease and reception centers have more capacity to tackle community work, the lack of follow-up or the lack of a clear idea about what it is supposed to achieve now tends to be recognized by reception center staff themselves as the gravest oversight in their ‘reintegration’ work. Reasons for the lack of follow-up have included the security situation, as well as lack of transport, staff or funds. Also there were other issues at the centers, which were more pressing.

Centers are now trying to catch up on this, but the very low number of respondents who had actually been followed-up with proves that there is a long way to go. From the 238 interviews of FAPs in the sample and their families, only 31 had been followed up in any way (13 percent). This includes visits from the reception center they passed through; home visits by community volunteers and in some cases also visits by researchers. Some clients reported that a person had been in the camp to look for them while they were

⁷⁷Harlacher, T. and A. C. Obonyo (2005). ‘Psychosocial Work’ and ‘Trauma Work’ in Northern Uganda. Seminar on Psychosocial and Trauma Work. Cologne, Germany.

out digging. Some refer to a visit as ‘follow-up’ when they are collected by the reception center to go back for skills training, others when they were singled out for sponsorship for school fees. Of those who have not been individually followed up, some report that center staff come to the camp to visit, but not to speak specifically to them. A handful of FAPs have been visited by both reception center staff and Community Volunteer Counselors (CVCs).

At the time of this research, there was no clear approach to follow-up, and no agreed indicators that could be used in determining a client’s well-being and living environment. There was also no established program of intervention if problems were detected. While various agencies had in the past carried out ‘home visits’, outreach ‘counseling’ (some even claim to have provided therapy in their follow-up), assessment of an individual’s well-being or provision of other services, little had happened between the collapse in security in mid-2002 up until the end of 2005. However, now that the numbers of FAPs arriving at reception centers has slowed down, there is a renewed focus on the issue, and those involved have been working to clarify terminology and content. Many questions need to be answered: What does follow-up actually mean? What is it supposed to achieve and how can the achievement or even the process be documented and measured? How often should it happen? Should there be a unified methodology to follow-up, subscribed to by all agencies involved? What are the elements of follow-up, such as ‘counseling’, home visits, facilitating communication in the community, and making referrals?

Factors of good follow-up for successful ‘reintegration’ mentioned by various agencies or reception centers were:

- Achieving a livable economic situation/ income generation activity for the client
- Ensuring security (possibly through better cooperation with the UPDF)
- Providing psychosocial support or help in developing a strong social network
- Donor agencies’ commitment to community work/ funding for community follow-up
- Clear definitions of what the problems are in the ‘reintegration’ process, so that solutions can be offered during follow-up
- Facilitation of community communication and parent sensitization
- Providing clients with a perspective that things can get better in the future

These mirror the kinds of response found among FAPs and their families in the camps. There is also now a consensus that ‘reintegration’ requires continued support of those who have been in the bush, regardless of whether or not they have passed through a center. Ideally, follow-up also means giving those who have been with the LRA the resources to generate an income. This is possibly the most important aspect of ‘reintegration’ and it has been overlooked in the past. Both social workers and FAPs emphasize that having hope and expectations for the future is absolutely vital in leaving the experience of the bush behind. Life outside the bush needs to provide a viable alternative to life in the bush.

Case Study: *Follow-Up in Kitgum District*

This case study is based on extensive interviews with reception center staff and several field visits.

The two reception centers in Kitgum have only recently been able to do follow-up because of lack of transportation. UNICEF, offering space in their convoy vehicle, now facilitates transportation. At times, the centers have paid for their own escorts when they were unable to get a ride with UNICEF. This renewed commitment shows that staff places a strong emphasis on fieldwork. Both centers work on a rigid follow-up schedule, devoting a lot of their time traveling to camps to do home visits. This often includes all staff, even the medical staff.

However, the current set-up in Kitgum makes it almost impossible for follow-up to be done in any meaningful way. Travel to camps is only done with escorts or in a convoy. The convoy hardly ever leaves Kitgum Town Council before 10 am or even later. Usually, the delegation arrives at a camp at around midday and leaves the camp at 3pm at the very latest. The delegation only gets a few hours in the camp. These are filled with introductions, locating their clients, gathering community leaders to find out about other cases and problems which may not be known to the reception center, talking to CVCs to get a briefing on the current situation, sometimes reuniting a person with their family and spending time with the clients to learn about their problems and providing some guidance (or what is most commonly referred to as ‘counseling’).

Most staff have an established system of splitting tasks. They branch out immediately upon arrival in the camp, but the tight schedule makes it virtually impossible to devote enough attention to individual cases. It is at most possible to note down a few basic complaints or problems, but it is certainly outside the scope of such follow-up work to provide proper ‘counseling’.

Confidentiality during follow-up is a huge issue. With such little time to do actual work in the camps, social workers have to rely on quick assistance by camp leaders in locating clients. The arrival of the convoy usually draws a crowd and there is certainly a lot of attention being paid to every move of the social workers going through the camps. It is near impossible to not draw attention to those that are visited by social workers or other researchers, automatically singling out FAPs.

Other agencies’ follow-up works with a different set-up, mainly because they do not need to rely on transportation from UNICEF. Some agencies work more closely with the CVCs or other community structures in the camp and mainly process referrals for other services. While such referrals are desperately needed, this structure is far from anything that could be called organized follow-up. Most of the agencies providing services do not share information with the reception centers and are thus not familiar with individual case histories. Also, agencies often simply have to work with incomplete data: in many cases, forms are not filled out properly and thus only provide an incomplete picture of a client’s situation. There has only recently been better communication between agencies to coordinate the work done in the camps.

3.5.1 THE FOLLOW-UP EXPERIENCE

Of the 13 percent of interviewed FAPs in the sample reporting that they had received a follow-up visit, the vast majority had received only one. A few special cases report regular follow-up: One man suffering from repercussions (black-outs, dangerous behavior) of a serious head injury had been visited five times by a social worker from the center, in addition to weekly visits from the CVC. Another woman with medical problems had been visited four times by reception center staff, who told her that ‘if there was no improvement I should go and get a hospital form [hospital bill clearance] from the center so that I can go to the hospital for proper treatment.’ But these were exceptional cases.

Most of those followed-up simply described being visited and not much else (‘I then told him I was okay and that nothing suppressed me’). Others were given some reassurance or advice (e.g. ‘they encouraged me to keep on going and to be disciplined’ and ‘a counselor from GUSCO, asked how often I fought at school.’). But those FAPs who complained about a problem usually see little change after the follow-up visit (‘They asked me how I am coping with the community and I tell them my problem, all my problems [this particular client was very unhappy about staying with his alcoholic brother-in-law]. They wrote it down and said they would come back.’). Nevertheless, simply being given attention, talking with a person was sometimes much appreciated by the respondents, even if they expected no further assistance (‘I told her that I have been having bad dreams but now it has disappeared.’). The problems most often mentioned during follow-up were the lack of things to do in general, lack of income, and lack of schooling.

Often the intention of follow-up does not seem entirely clear to the client ('One man and some women came also to write our names, they said they were sent by KICWA... We were followed up once by some white lady...they took his [the FAP's] picture and asked what problems he is facing from home.'). In many cases, respondents said that follow-up is done as a group exercise. A number of FAPs are gathered to voice their grievances to the visitor ('She told us that she has come to follow-up and see how we are staying so we can tell her our problems. We told them that if we would get any skills training, it would be good.'). Considering the numbers of researchers who have passed through certain camps (including this research team), it is not surprising that the purpose of follow-up visits can be obscure.

3.5.2 FOLLOW-UP AND THE COMMUNITY

'The community now sees as if our culture is eroded because we only have killers among us, hence no proper families. There is no hope for the community because they do not have homes and see any hope in having security.'

—*Volunteer Counselor*

At present, numerous different agencies are doing various bits and pieces of follow-up. This can create tension in a community since not everyone is treated equally. Tension ranges from stigmatization, because of the special attention given to an FAP, to drawing LRA attention to someone in the camp, because of continued visits. At times, problems arise because other families are mourning their losses ('The formerly abducted children are a big problem in the community because their coming back has created tension in the community especially for the parents whose children/child has/have not come back may be they could have been killed or have not come back yet.').

While some respondents report such attitudes, others indicated that communities can also be welcoming. One social worker, in fact, pointed out that a return to the family is in some cases only possible because neighbors provide informal humanitarian services when the family lacks resources.

Reception center staff and IDP officials are well aware that such support networks need strengthening, but that follow-up visits are too random or infrequent to really tackle problems of any kind. There were also numerous complaints that reports are being written and passed on between agencies, CVCs and the CDO's office but nothing seems to happen. It was speculated that they were hardly ever read.

There is now a general move amongst agencies towards a more holistic definition of follow-up: it should consider and evaluate the condition of the individual as well as the community. Such community-based follow-up needs to address problems of all vulnerable people as opposed to an individual that has a connection with a reception center. However, the consensus is less clear when it comes to defining what follow-up aims to do beyond gathering information. This may be because of unclear information about what assistance is available and who is responsible for providing it. If the aim of follow-up is defined as improving the individual's and the community's living situation, how can that be achieved?

Many camp leaders and CVCs point out that there is much need for support of those who have been in the bush but have not passed through a center. However, continued assistance is vital also for those who have received reception center 'counseling' and a package. FAPs return home with the comforting knowledge that someone from the center will come to check on them. They had been told that the centers would be there to support them – and often they are not.

Some CVCs or camp leaders have pointed out that they had been promised further visits by reception center staff to check on problems with the returnee in the community and felt helpless when such visits never materialized. One CVC put it succinctly when she said, 'Follow-up is just a way of making the abductees know that they are loved and cared for by the community so that they feel that togetherness.'

Often, IDP camp officials and community leaders state that they lack status because they have no resources for their work. One camp leader in a camp without any CVCs said that ‘we should organize a kind of ‘counseling’ for these children provided that we [camp leaders] attain some training from NGOs responsible for such...We as leaders need the following things to welcome these children: We need a ‘counseling’ center. We need to give them some gifts after ‘counseling’ but we can’t afford to do so...if we have gifts, food and drinks all the others will come back and those counseled will get well.’ Such a remark seems to reflect that the community feels that the reception center approach should be mirrored after the FAPs return to their communities – in any case, resources are persistently stressed as a prerequisite for being able to act effectively.

3.5.3 COMMUNITY NETWORKS

Various centers have established their own support networks to do social work in the camps to help them identify vulnerable persons. These networks are sometimes based on a particular commitment to the center (CPA Parent Support Network) or a shared faith (CARITAS). Another project which is ostensibly community based and has had a link with GUSCO is the controversial Labora Farm (see Appendix 3).

Many agencies and reception centers rely on the existent network of Community Volunteer Counselors or Caregivers⁷⁸ (CVCs) for their follow-up work for obvious reasons: the CVCs are locally based and volunteering has been a part of community work in Africa in various other contexts, although it is now increasingly challenged as an appropriate response in an emergency context. While the CVC set-up differs from district to district – also depending on which agency originally set up the system, they are generally registered and monitored through the Community Development Officer (CDO) or Community Based Services. Community Development Assistants are also employed by the district to assist the CVCs.⁷⁹ Most CVCs have at some point received some training, often provided through UNICEF, Save the Children, the reception centers, religious organizations or other NGOs. Some of this training dates back years, even before the community moved into camps and refresher training beyond the monthly CVC meetings has been sporadic.

The original concept of the CVC differs much from the current requirements. Originally, CVCs were appointed to provide community support in a war-torn, yet village-based society. Nowadays, CVCs are in many cases supposed to be the social workers in an extremely volatile community with very demanding individual cases. However, the CDOs generally feel that the CVCs are the only option since most NGOs cannot reach communities easily.

CVCs are not provided with any salary, but may receive an allowance for ‘facilitation.’ With the current workload, it is a huge problem that these are volunteers who also need to support themselves. More often than not, they do not receive facilitation for transport to travel to another camp or to CVC meetings. However, it has become known that in practice material gains can be made from volunteering and this has become an incentive to become a CVC. There are cases of people who volunteer for various agencies to receive the CVC package.

How the CVCs are seen in the community varies greatly from camp to camp and even in each district. While in some camps, they are committed and well known to the FAPs and the community; in others they are basically invisible. FAPs have not heard of them and camp leaders did not know they still existed. A few CVCs explained that it is extremely difficult for them to be accepted by the community as a serious resource because in the past, they have not been able to deliver any change or resources. On the other hand, in some cases the community is reluctant to work with the CVC because, as one CVC put it, ‘the

⁷⁸ There is a difference in usage of the term in various districts.

⁷⁹ The CDA are few and far between: 13 CDAs cover 19 sub counties in Kitgum.

community sometimes don't understand who I am. Sometimes they refuse me to sign attendance list in some meeting because they expect me to be demanding money.'

CVCs are used by various agencies for various types of work and this potentially renders them inefficient. Most respondents agree that a vast number of people deliberately bypass the system and go home directly after escaping from the LRA without going through the UPDF or a Reception Center. CVCs are expected to report those returnees to the local authorities, making it impossible to establish trust in the community. When the research team pointed out this conflict of interest, one CDO replied that this was not a problem since most returnees did not know that the CVCs are sending on their information to the sub-county and hence, no confidentiality is breached. Yet in some districts, such as Lira, the connection between the CDO and the CVCs is very strong and the CVCs seem to advise the majority of returnees not to go through reception centers.

While many social workers still support the concept of the CVCs, they also agree that CVCs cannot be the main pillar of follow-up and 'reintegration' work in the camps. There are various reasons for this. The task is seen as simply too big for community volunteers. According to CVCs interviewed, the numbers of FAPs for whom they are responsible range from 146 to 400 per CVC. Often, the CVCs are expected to deal with extremely difficult cases and there is an unwritten consensus that they are not able to provide the level of professionalism needed for such demanding social work. At best they can provide sympathy and a person to talk to. To rely on volunteers in the volatile camps is now seen by many social workers as ignoring the reality of the situation.

In many cases, the CVCs are only in theory part of the information chain. This may be because of an agency's fears that CVCs might demand payment for their work or simply lack of trust. Some CVCs are quite isolated in their work: they feel that centers do not give them enough information about the returnees. Several CVCs pointed out that they did not know who to turn to if there are real problem cases. While the active CVCs were aware of the reporting structure, it often does not work: CVCs complained about writing their regular reports to the CDO without any feedback whatsoever. Most CVCs say that even if they ask for services for a client, it is not delivered. When the team asked a CDO to see these CVC reports, he was not able to say where they were being filed. How closely a CVC works with the reception center varies greatly: it runs from no contact at all to 'a very close relationship with [the reception center] because I am like their eyes in the community here to see what happens and give them the report.' Mostly, the contact seems to be loose and poorly defined.

CVCs receive limited training, which is seen as a problem by all parties involved. While some CVCs answered that they feel well equipped to handle their 'counseling' duties, most pointed out that they need 'more knowledge of handling complicated disorders' and generally more in-depth and ongoing training.

One problem that arises from such limited training is that it does not leave room for nuanced approaches. Most CVCs reported that one of the things that they had been trained in was to 'sensitize' the community by explaining to them that the returnees are traumatized and will be difficult to deal with. This has led to dangerous dynamics, as reception center staff pointed out: the children are told to expect stigmatization, and the community is told that they are receiving disturbed and dangerous individuals. Apprehension on both sides leads to tension and the conflict between the FAP and the community becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. When asked about problems in the community, some CVCs pointed out that "fear" was now a defining factor of society: returnees are scared of the community, the community is scared of the returnees, and everybody is scared for their safety and worried about supplies. Working against this fear with limited resources is considered by most to be a battle they cannot win.

However, there are success stories: the CVCs report that the most rewarding aspect of their work is 'that there are some formerly abducted children who were very stubborn but after consistently talking to them they have totally changed.' The coping mechanism that seems to work best is empowering the FAPs to

form their own support group to ‘develop hope’. In some camps, this has happened without any outside input even among children. Other groups are led by a CVC. One CVC proudly explained that after his advice, 60 FAPs formed a drama group and the ‘money landed are being given to other members. They have also managed to convince more people into their group. It now has 150 members.’

Some organizations run their own networks of volunteers CARITAS in Gulu District for example has Community Resource Persons (CRPs). The challenges felt are very similar to those of the CVCs: too little time to do all the work needed, not enough resources and too many demands from the community. The community relies on the CRPs to communicate their problems (such as hunger, lack of clean water, diseases, no land for cultivation) to donors and other agencies and expect changes in return that do not materialize. In a broad generalization, we found the CRPs to be more aware of what was expected of them in comparison to the CVCs, perhaps because volunteering based on faith is linked to greater commitment. Also the connection to CARITAS is closer than the connection the CVCs have with their CDO. However, a lot is expected of the CRP and we are not able to say whether these expectations are fulfilled from a client’s perspective. We simply did not find a client in our sample who had actually been counseled a CRP. Information from interviews with CARITAS CRPs is presented in Appendix 6.

New approaches are on the horizon. In the light of the growing awareness of the need to support the reintegration of FAPs within a system that also responds to the welfare and protection of a range of extremely vulnerable children in the wider community, district authorities, NGOs and UNICEF are now aiming to build stronger child protection teams based in IDP camps (and the non-displaced population). These will be answerable to the district authorities and technically supported by NGOs, with clear divisions of labor and clearly defined accountabilities. The team heard how CVC systems will be incorporated as an element into these wider teams. Following up with FAPs will be one of their roles. Reception centers and their supporting NGOs are key players in setting these systems up. In Gulu District, for example, the system is being pioneered by World Vision and GUSCO, working with six other NGOs and the district officials.

4. CONCLUSIONS

On Reintegration

- Assumptions about what is happening are not always supported by evidence, and perceptions are shaped by the use of particular categories, such as 'abduction', 'child mother' and 'reintegration', which deflect attention from realities.
- The term 'reintegration' is problematic in northern Uganda. FAPs are being sent to live in IDP camps or in the towns. The conditions they face are often awful. They find themselves dependent on impoverished relatives, and with no viable source of income, let alone land to cultivate.
- Security in the IDP camps may have improved in the past year or so, but it remains poor. FAPs sent back to the camps have reasons to fear that they might be recaptured by the LRA.
- The system of making people live in IDP camps need to be seriously examined. The morbidity and mortality rates in some camps is extremely high (see Appendix 1). Other camps are located at small towns, with a long history of settlement. A concentration of population may remain at some of these places after the war ends.
- Most of those who have passed through reception centers have been sent to live in IDP camps and have remained there. One reason for the relative lack of movement is that they have little choice.

Most FAPs are unable to earn enough money in their IDP camp to travel to other places, and have no relatives who could look after them when they arrive. Even those wanting to register for the Amnesty find it difficult to travel to Gulu and Kitgum towns.

- The family networks to which FAPs return are complex and dynamic. The lack of bride wealth exchange has weakened patrilineal kinship structures. Many FAPs end up living with their mothers or their mother's brothers. Families are not necessarily benign environments for FAPs.
- Some FAPs complained about feeling out of place in the IDP camps, and many seek out each others' company.
- Several FAPs have undergone welcoming rituals and a few have been involved in healing rituals. But the research team did not find that these procedures are as important as some analysts have suggested. Also concerns are voiced about *cen*. Rituals for dealing with *cen* are probably more important than the kinds of rituals that have been given most publicity.
- A complaint voiced by many FAPs is that they find it hard to have a sense of hope for the future.
- By no means had all of those who have spent time with the LRA found the experience to be horrific. There are also those who adapted to it, and quite few FAPs are surprisingly positive about their life in the bush, particularly when it is compared with life in the IDP camps.
- The term 'abduction' does not encompass the range of ways in which people go to spend time with the LRA. People living in IDP camps sometimes have to live with LRA activity in the vicinity, and respondents mentioned many cases of multiple 'abductions', which usually involved short periods with the LRA.
- The involvement of adults in the war has been underestimated, partly because of concerns about the effect of the war on children. Probably the majority of those 'abducted' by the LRA have been adults at the time of abduction.
- Although a large number of those arriving at reception centers are adults (and may also have been 'abducted' as adults), the majority of adults who have been abducted do not pass through the reception centers or report to the UPDF.
- The use of the term 'child mothers' for women who have been impregnated by LRA combatants is misleading. The majority are adults, although most were abducted as teenagers. Also the number of women who give birth or become pregnant before the age of 18 is very high in the general Ugandan population, and it likely to be higher than the national average in the IDP camps.
- The number of women who return from the LRA with children is relatively small. It is about 5 percent of the FAPs who have passed through reception centers.
- The attitudes of women who were 'abducted' and made to become the sexual partner of an LRA commander varies. Several have been deeply disturbed by what has happened to them. However, others express affection for their LRA husband and want to be reunited with him.

On Reintegration Structures

- The Government of Uganda maintains limited ownership of the reintegration process: the Amnesty Commission is not efficient enough to be called a viable reintegration tool and in some districts, district responsibilities such as monitoring of the Child Protection Units are covered by local NGOs.
- Knowledge of child protection principles is spread too thinly in the UPDF. This leads to mishandling and in some cases even abuse of FAPs while in the care of the UPDF.
- Child-recruitment into the LDU is occurring, although the scale is hard to estimate. Currently the UPDF will not accept responsibility for it.
- Social workers see a need for dialogue with the UPDF to address the various issues pointed out here in a more direct manner.
- The Amnesty Commission lacks local credibility. Its existence is not sufficient to convince FAPs that a life outside the LRA can be more promising than one with the rebels.
- A system has been set up whereby the amnesty, which is aimed primarily at adults, is only accessed by a selection of FAPs who have passed through reception centers, which are primarily aimed at children. Obviously there are many adults who pass through reception centers, and the amnesty is available to anyone over the age of twelve. Nevertheless, it is not a satisfactory situation.
- Large numbers of people go unnoticed by research and reintegration mechanisms since they bypass the official system. Evaluating the experience of those is necessary as it could provide valuable insights into community integration mechanisms that may provide guidance for adjusting the institutionalized approaches.

On Reception Centers and follow-up

- Current ‘talk therapy’ teaches behavioral skills, but does not heal psychological damage. While Western concepts of psychotherapy should not be simply imported, it is vital to realize that the current use of the term ‘counseling’ has glossed over psychological problems that many returnees might still have. This is a potential minefield – especially if reception centers believe that they are releasing FAPs who are psychologically healed and need no further treatment.
- FAPs who have passed through the reception centers tend to emphasize the need for individual follow-up and a fair, consistent and transparent procedure for the provision of assistance. Currently neither of these things is done.
- One reason why it is not done is that data collation at almost all the reception centers is poor, making it impossible to make a robust assessment of particular interventions, or indeed to evaluate the overall effects of the reception centers contributions to the ‘reintegration’ of FAPs. It also makes case-by-case monitoring unfeasible without a considerable investment in data management. For some centers the costs of doing this may be too high, and the records in too inadequate a state, to make it a tenable proposition.

- The majority of those who had been through a reception center had nothing bad or good to say about the center which was interpreted as ‘the reception center was a good place’ by the Acholi researchers. However, most of those who did point out specific things said that ‘counseling’ was one of the best things, along with entertainment. ‘Counseling’ was understood as parental-like care and education about how to behave. Being given empty promises for further support was the worst memory for a lot of respondents.
- Without some common understanding of what follow-up entails and aims to achieve, systematic reintegration work through follow-up that assists and does not divide people is almost impossible. At the time of this research, FAPs visited saw little benefit of such a visit if it was not done in a systematic way and with some means to improve their situation.
- If follow-up means gathering information about individual and community needs, lack of information flow is a problem. Not sharing such information between agencies can at worst seriously hinder community work; at best it is a waste of resources as many agencies set out to gather the same information. There is need to streamline information exchange between agencies. At the same time, information about individual cases cannot be freely distributed amongst stakeholders without breaching confidentiality.
- Various approaches also mean differing terminology from agency to agency, making a genuine inter-agency approach difficult. It also reflects that agencies differ vastly in their work and operate under a large set of assumptions, making a standardized procedure difficult and, for some agencies, undesirable. The two sides of the argument are that a standardized procedure will end up as a stenciled approach while various approaches are less efficient and difficult to sustain in the long run.
- Referral mechanisms are inefficient because of the lack of inter-agency work and the often unclear responsibilities of the district administration.
- A lack of information about those who have passed through reception centers is symptomatic of a broader problem. Both national and international agencies involved in assisting the population of northern Uganda have limited connections with the IDP camps. This is partly a consequence of security issues, but that is not a sufficient explanation.
- Meaningful follow-up work in the camps is hampered by the security situation in the conflict affected districts.



IDP camps are very densely settled. Poor hygiene, fires and insecurity are a constant problem (Photo: Elliott Green)

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

- The primary recommendation of this report is that efforts must be made to improve the security situation and provide adequate support to both FAPs and the population as a whole when the IDP system is dismantled. Without improvements in security, it is unlikely that substantial improvements in livelihoods are possible. Donors, agencies, and the government need to work towards this end. Security will not be achieved without the full cooperation of the UPDF. Notion of humanitarian neutrality makes little sense in northern Uganda given the current arrangements. For the situation to improve, the UPDF will need to be fully involved in planning and implementation. Whatever concerns stakeholders may have about this, there is no alternative. If the security problems cannot be resolved locally, as appears to be the case, the Ugandan government should be persuaded to accept the necessary assistance.
- It cannot be acceptable that hundreds of thousands of people must live in IDP camps indefinitely because of a few hundred poorly equipped rebels. It is not an appropriate response to the problem

Aid programs should not be complicit in the perpetration of structural violence. For all sorts of very good reasons, that has effectively happened in northern Uganda. There is an urgent need for a reassessment. Donors must apply the necessary pressures to change the situation.

- There is need for a decision about which IDP camps are seen as permanent and which to dismantle immediately. Those with extremely high crude mortality rates should be broken up as quickly as possible. IDP camps based as small towns might be made a focus of long-term, peri-urban development initiatives. Without such schemes, the removal of population controls is likely to result in migration to the main towns, because it can be expected that many of those who have grown up in the IDP camps will not want to live as farmers. One effect of such migrations can be predicted to be a rapid increase in HIV incidence. Plans should be prepared to avoid such a situation.
- Many interventions in northern Uganda are based on received wisdoms and perpetuated ideas. These tend to miss the reality on the ground. For better interventions it is critical to break away from them, improve the knowledge base and operate with a more balanced assessment of the war. Information flows and connections between actors and people in IDP camps need to be improved.
- Donors should address the problems involved in targeting funding at categories that are misleading and/or too narrow. A more integrated approach requires much better ongoing monitoring, not just of FAPs, but also of social dynamics in the municipalities and IDP camps. The plight of the FAPs needs to be placed in context, and the acute needs of other groups given equal weight. An emphasis on providing assistance and follow-up only to those classified as the most vulnerable excludes too many people who are also in dire need.
- FAPs naturally found peer support groups and these have often been overlooked by agencies working on reintegration. The shared experience of the LRA acts as a form of social capital and many FAPs gain enormous strength and support from such groups. These groups should not be excluded from funding. However, monitoring of such groups is necessary both to ensure that vulnerable individuals are not exploited (including young men as well as young women) and to monitor the security implications (as LRA hierarchies tend to be replicated in these groups).
- The existing procedures of locating children who are FAPs with their parents or extended families makes adequate case by case monitoring a priority for this particular group. Safeguards are not in place for family screening, placement and fostering. 'Best practice' is not necessarily served by locating children with relatives in circumstances in which even basic care is so limited, and in which scarce resources may not be apportioned in the interests of the child. Children born to fathers in the LRA may be especially at risk, and so might unaccompanied children – although reception centers do seem to have procedures in place that should protect the latter.
- New approaches are required for the use of volunteers. Those who are required to do significant amounts of work need to be given incentives. In most cases this will necessitate payment. Currently there are unrealistic expectations of what volunteers should do. It is not adequate to try to plug the gaps in the current system with more registered volunteers. There are already too many 'volunteers'. What is needed is a network of people who can be relied upon to do certain things, and who feel that it is in their interest to be conscientious. However, this should not be an alternative to agency staff themselves being much more actively engaged in follow-up, monitoring and outreach, possibly through social workers that live in the camps.

- While the term ‘psychosocial’ is potentially helpful in that it directs attention at both psychological and social aspects of the situation, its current use is misleading. The term has become a euphemism for just about anything that is done to assist FAPs, and gives the impression that more is being done than is the case. There is very little capacity on the ground in northern Uganda to deal with mental health issues. It would be more appropriate, given the resources in place, to redirect emphasis to a more holistic support for livelihoods. With respect to children, it would be appropriate to give much more emphasis to ‘child protection’, and programming should not just be targeted at particular categories of children. A system is required to make adequate assessments of vulnerability. Certain groups may well be exposed to risk, such as children whose lineage status is unclear, but case-by-case assessment is required.
- Where there are indications of medical problems including those associated with mental health, a system of referral is needed. Untrained staff providing ad hoc first aid and ‘counseling’ is not sufficient. If agencies decide to foreground trauma issues, adequate mechanisms of providing therapy are required.
- The reception centers should be helped to move in different directions. Their existence provides a range of experienced local partners for international agencies. But concentrating on the reception of FAPs passing through the official system is unlikely to be as demanding as it was between 2002 and 2004. The Rachele Center plans to turn itself into a school, and some centers may close down. Others, such as GUSCO in Gulu town, might develop existing activities into new areas. In the case of GUSCO this might involve support for income generating activities in the municipality as a whole. Most reception centers are willing to become involved in targeting all war-affected populations in their follow-up work, but will need significant investment of staff and resources to do so.
- For effective and adequate follow-up work, a coordinated and consistent inter-agency approach is needed. Agencies have different philosophies about interventions and currently the transaction costs for this work are very high as many agencies do similar research and work without exchanging information.
- For effective case-by-case follow-up, case files have to be made available in a useable form by social workers. For some centers the investment needed to do this would be substantial, and it may not occur. Nevertheless, it should be seriously considered. Such follow-up also requires adequate investment in staff training and logistical support (notably for transport and security).
- For the Amnesty to function as a political tool for community reintegration, the Amnesty process requires reorganization. There needs to be better information and access to the Amnesty Commission. Giving out more commodities will increase demands for Amnesty Cards, but there are dangers in appearing to reward those who have perpetrated crimes. Other systems might be more appropriate and should be explored. For example, income-generating schemes might be available to all war-affected people, including FAPs with Amnesty Cards. At present there is no monitoring of FAPs who have been granted Amnesty. It would be appropriate to introduce this for former LRA officers, some of who have a complicated attitude to their lives in the bush.
- Child protection training for the UPDF still needs to be improved. It is also necessary for the UPDF to work more closely with the Amnesty Commission and social workers, even during times when an FAP is being interrogated.

- Lastly, it is understandable that a major preoccupation of assistance programmes is the provision of help to the most needy. The targeting to this assistance needs to be improved, but it is also important to consider the future. Even with adequate assistance, few of those currently most in need are likely to be able to play a leadership role at a national level. An effect of the war in northern Uganda has been to curtail opportunities for higher education. Producing cohorts of well educated secondary school graduates and supporting training at university level will be necessary for longer-term development on the region. At present only a small elite based in the main towns has such opportunities. It is not fashionable for aid agencies to support secondary education, but broadening access has the potential to play a vital role. Model schools can transform more lives than those of the students who are educated at them.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX I.

BACKGROUND TO THE CURRENT SITUATION

The war in northern Uganda has been dragging on for almost 20 years. This is a brief background note on the current situation. Readers interested in a more detailed historical account are directed to the books by Finnstrom (2003) and Allen (2006) or the relevant section of Allen (2005) which can be downloaded at: <http://www.crisisstates.com/download/others/AllenICCRReport.pdf>

The current conflict dates back to the period immediately after President Museveni came to power. A variety of resistance movements resisted his government, most notably the Holy Spirit Movement of Alice Lakwena. Following the defeat of the Holy Spirit Forces near Jinja in 1987, other groups associated with spirit mediums continued to fight, including one led by a relative of Alice called Joseph Kony. This group became known as the Lord's Resistance Army. It has proved to be remarkably resilient, and very effective at terrorising a large region of the country. From the mid 1990s it received assistance from the government of Sudan, and most of its bases were located north of the border. It has also waged war against the SPLA in Sudan, ostensibly on behalf of the Khartoum administration. In spring 2002, the Uganda People's Defence Force (UPDF) undertook a military offensive into southern Sudan called 'Operation Iron Fist.' with the intention of crushing the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) once and for all. However, the initial campaign was a failure. The LRA was able to outflank the UPDF, and retaliated with some of the worst attacks on the local population since the conflict started. Since then, the LRA has continued to operate in the districts of Gulu, Kitgum, and Pader, and in June 2003 expanded its attacks on civilians to neighbouring districts. The escalation of conflict has caused a drastic increase in the number of displaced persons.

During the early years of the conflict, there had been a shifting of the population in Gulu, and Kitgum districts towards the larger municipalities for protection, and from the mid 1990s, this had become an integral component of the Ugandan government's anti-insurgency policy. In some places, anyone who refused to move from their rural homes was forcibly displaced. In early 1997 World Food Program food relief was delivered to 110,000 people in 'protected' IDP (Internally Displaced Person) camps. Two years later this had risen to over 400,000, and by mid 2002 to 522,000.⁸⁰ The numbers then escalated dramatically as a consequence of the LRA incursions during the first Iron Fist offensive, and new IDP camps were established in neighboring districts. Something like 80percent of the population of war affected parts of northern Uganda now live in over 200 camps. The rest live in the main towns. The total number of people living in IDP camps is estimated at over 1.5 million.⁸¹

The IDP camps vary in size, resources and security. Some of the bigger camps are basically small towns, and several are in fact located at places where there have been small towns for a long time (e.g. Anaka and Atiak). Others are new settlements, sometimes in places where a concentration of population is inappropriate (e.g. where the soil quickly becomes water-logged when it rains). Almost all IDPs living in camps have very limited access to land and few opportunities to generate income. Services have largely

⁸⁰ These figures are from WFP and UNOCHA sources and are quoted in Dolan, C. (2005). *Understanding War and Its Continuation: The Case of Northern Uganda*. PhD. thesis. *Development Studies Institute*. London, London School of Economics, London University.

⁸¹ This figure is probably an overestimate. Numbers in some camps have been declining for some time, as the security situation has improved in certain areas. Also there has always been a tendency for numbers to be inflated to increase demands for food aid. In Lira District, we were told by district officials that they had checked one camp at night, and found only a third of the registered number of people living there. However, this may be exceptional. In Gulu, Pader and Kitgum districts, camp populations appear to be more stable.

collapsed. There is virtually no civilian policing, inadequate water supplies and sanitation facilities. Health care is minimal, and primary schools are massively congested and under resourced. Secondary school education is only rarely available, mostly in the municipalities. Camps are also over-crowded with huts spaced close together, compounding sanitation problems and making fires a permanent hazard. The displacement, the LRA's violent assaults on civilians, and the strategies that local people use to search for safety, employment and income combine to create a complex web of vulnerability. The highly visible, war-related human rights abuses – abduction, night commuting, sexual and gender based violence – are part of a much broader spectrum of serious human rights violations exacerbated by war. With each year spent in the IDP camps residents become increasingly dependent on food relief and more despondent as they watch the familial and cultural fabric of their lives deteriorate. The situation for civilians is desperate with frequent rebel attacks, looting, destruction of property, abduction of children and brutal killings. Perhaps the most thorough investigation of camp life describes the whole system as a system of 'protection as violation'.⁸²



Overflowing pit latrine at Agweng IDP Camp (Photo: Elliott Green)

In general, the worst public health situation is in the newer camps, which can have extremely poor sanitation. However, outbreaks of cholera are not confined to these. Atiak is one of oldest camps, but continues to have outbreaks. A survey of new camps in Pader and Lira was carried out by MSF-Holland

⁸²Dolan, C. (2005). *Understanding War and Its Continuation: The Case of Northern Uganda*. *Development Studies Institute*. London, London School of Economics, London University.

in 2004.⁸³ It found a ‘severe acute malnutrition rate’ of 4.4 percent and a ‘global acute malnutrition rate’ of 8.28% amongst children aged 5-59 months.⁸⁴ These figures are comparable to other areas of northern Uganda. But the survey also collected mortality and morbidity data. The overall Crude Mortality Rate (CMR) was 2.79/10,000/day (a rate above 1 is generally categorized as an emergency) and the under-five mortality rate was found to be an astonishing 5.4 (in one camp, Agweng in Lira District, it was found to be 10.46). The main causes of reported morbidity were malaria/fever (47 percent), respiratory diseases (28 percent) and diarrheal diseases (21 percent) – all closely associated with the living environment. ‘Malaria’ was the main reported cause of death, followed by ‘diarrhea’. In July 2005 a further survey was carried out, this time under the auspices of the World Health Organization (WHO). It was designed to be representative of all IDPs in Gulu, Kitgum and Pader Districts. The CMR for all IDPs was found to be 1.54, and the under five CMR was 3.18.⁸⁵

Several reports have also addressed the incidence and prevalence of HIV/AIDS, with some claiming that rates have been exploding as a consequence of the war and concentration of the population. This has become a piece of received wisdom about the region. However, evidence for the claim is weak. Not all bad things necessarily go together. Anti-natal rates recorded at Lacor in Gulu, among other indicators, suggest that rates have been declining steeply since the mid 1990s. It may be that the very constraints on social life in the IDP camps, which are in so many respects unacceptable, have had the effect of limiting the spread of the virus. But this may not last. It is very important to recognize that those at highest risk for HIV infection in Africa are migrants to urban areas. If the IDP camps are broken up suddenly, and thousands of people make for the towns, HIV rates can be expected to soar.⁸⁶

Illustration: Districts of Northern Uganda Affected by the LRA

Total IDP population (April/July 2005): approximately 1.5 million living in over 250 IDP camps (excluding unregistered IDPs)

Breakdown by districts

Districts with a predominantly Acholi population

Gulu District: total IDP population (July 2005) 460,226 living in 53 IDP camps

Kitgum District: total IDP population (July 2005) 310,111 living in 22 IDP camps

Pader District: total IDP population 283,781 (April 2005) living in 26 IDP camps

Districts with a predominantly Langi population

Apac District: total IDP population (July 2005) 98,193 living in 15 IDP camps

Lira District: total IDP population (July 2005) 350,828 living in 40 IDP camps

Districts with a predominantly Teso population

Katakwi District: total IDP population (April 2005) approximately 140,000 living in 82 IDP camps

⁸³MSF-Holland (2004). Internally Displaced Camps in Lira and Pader, Northern Uganda: A Baseline Survey, Preliminary Report. Uganda, Medicines sans frontieres Holland.

⁸⁴These data are based on anthropometric assessments. The findings from such surveys are useful, but can be very misleading if they are not linked to mortality assessments. Malnutrition figures of the levels found in camps in Pader and Lira might indicate an ‘acceptable’ situation, in that similar levels are found in other places. However, this may disguise the number of children who are dying. A high mortality rate for small children will mean that more food is available for those who survive. From the mortality data collected by MSF-Holland, that would appear to be the case in this instance.

⁸⁵WHO and T. R. o. U. M. o. Health (2005). Health and Mortality Survey Among Internally Displaced Persons in Gulu, Kitgum and Pader Districts, Northern Uganda, World Health Organization. These findings have been questioned by the Ugandan Ministry of Health, even though the ministry was involved in the data collection. The report has added to pressure being brought to bear to break up at least some of the camps.

⁸⁶These issues are discussed in detail in Allen, T. (2006). ‘AIDS and Evidence: Interrogating Some Ugandan Myths.’ Journal of Biosocial Science.

Soroti/Kaberamaido/Kumi Districts: total IDP population (July 2005) approximately 18,000 living in 22 IDP camps
(Source: OCHA, 2005)

A particularly deplorable aspect of the conflict in northern Uganda is the abduction of children for the purpose of forced conscription and sexual exploitation. With the start of Operation Iron Fist, human trafficking by the LRA is said to have increased dramatically. UNICEF estimates that since the start of the conflict 20,000 children have been abducted. 10,000 of those have been abducted since the escalation of LRA raids in June 2002. However, these data are not based on a well-established system of reporting, because monitoring in general has been extremely difficult, due to the security situation. Large numbers of adults are also known to have been abducted.



Abducted people, including children are often forced to commit atrocities against their families and communities and to serve as soldiers and/or ‘wives’ of rebel commanders. The LRA has commonly taken children to its bases in southern Sudan for training. This life can be especially brutal for the girls who are not only used as porters and soldiers but are also ‘given’ to rebel commanders as ‘wives’ sometimes before they reach puberty. UNICEF uses the term ‘formerly abducted child’ to refer to persons who are under 18 at the time they return from the LRA. However, it should be noted that several thousand persons who were young adults when they escaped the LRA were children when they were abducted. In this report the term ‘formerly abducted person’ FAP is mostly used.

It is generally thought that almost all abducted children and adults who escape from the LRA or who are captured pass through the hands of the UPDF. The UPDF have established Child Protection Units (CPUs) in Gulu, Kitgum and Pader, ostensibly to create a more child-friendly environment for debriefing. From the CPUs children (and adults) are passed on to reception centers, which have been established for both children and adults. The reception centers provide basic medical screening and treatment, perform family tracing, give ‘psychosocial counseling’, and prepare FAPs to return to their families and communities. Often girls return as ‘child mothers’ with children they have had as the ‘wives’ of LRA rebels. The situation of this group has recently been complicated by a number of high-level LRA commanders reporting to take advantage of the Amnesty Act. These commanders are requesting to be reunited with their ‘wives’ and children. Military activity also leads to unaccompanied infants being rescued after their mothers have been killed.

The reception centers were created as a response to a need felt by the communities, families and local politicians who were receiving their children from captivity. Concerned parents and community members created NGOs to respond to this need, and through the support of international NGOs and the donor community, created reception centers or transit centers to meet the needs of these children and adults. The first of these centers, the World Vision Center in Gulu, opened in 1995, but most of them have been set up at the time when large number of FAPs returned after the Iron Fist offensive of 2002. Currently, there are centers operating in the districts of Gulu, Kitgum, Pader, Apac, Lira, Soroti and Katakwi. Thousands of FAPs, many of them children, have passed through the centers. It is hard to say exactly how many, because of double accounting and poor record keeping, but it is over 20,000.

APPENDIX 2.

RECEPTION CENTER PROFILES

Action Against Child Abuse and Neglect (AACAN), Soroti

Founding Year

- Established NGO working in advocacy before opening a reception center in June 2003 as a reaction to the fighting that took place in the Teso region

Infrastructure

- Small gated compound on the outskirts of town, brick building, latrines and washing facilities, large tent, small gardening patch, dispensary.

Staff

- Permanent counselors, staff nurse

Role/ Vision

- Recent change in administration, now administered by the Community Administration Officer. Its current role is hard to determine. Conflicts between AACAN, agencies and donors over funding, responsibilities and approaches have marred all areas of work: tracing, reunification and most of all, follow-up. Current practices are considered unacceptable by all parties involved.

Services

- Treatment of minor health problems but no lab access for testing
- AACAN has occasionally taken in street children
- Currently no skills training

Tracing/ Reunification

- Tracing and reunification work marred by the conflicts between AACAN, the Probation Office and the CDO; responsibilities are not entirely clear to the parties involved

Follow-Up

- Follow-up is done by various agencies, similar problems as with tracing

CARITAS Apac

Founding Year

- Opened in May 2004 due to numbers of people abducted in Apac (first and only RC in the district).

Infrastructure

- Located in the countryside behind the large Catholic church
- Three main buildings plus the kitchen
- Volleyball field next to school

Staff

- 3 social workers

Role/ Vision

- Exchange FACs with CARITAS Pajule RC and others

Services

- CARITAS prepares parents of FACs with one day of counseling, as some don't immediately accept their children back as they think that someone coming from the bush will be difficult. Some spend longer here than others: between 14 and 45 days, sometimes longer when they are sick

- Tailoring training
- Package of a mattress, blanket, basin, jerry can and saucepans; child mothers get one kit for themselves and another for their baby
- Money is given to children for transport to return home.

Tracing/ Reunification

- Staff has found that parents and children often lied about where they were located so that their child would spend longer in the RC, rather than being returned to the IDP camp

Views on Reintegration

Follow-Up

- conduct follow-up visits after 1 month, 3 months and 6 months
- say that they are quite good at sticking to this schedule due to the small number of people coming through the center
- not enough resources to carry out all of their activities

Community Networks

- works with CARITAS and through Catholic parish networks

Christian Counselling Fellowship (CCF), Pader

Founding Year

- In 2003, Alice Acan set up a center in her home Pader – her initial idea was to run a center for child mothers, both from the bush and from the camp.

Infrastructure

- Fenced-off plot located in the center of Pader Town; three round huts, three tents and two sheet-metal huts.

Staff

- 16: Program Coordinator, Center Manager, Administrator, Field Coordinator, Nurse, 7 social workers, accountant, 3 caregivers

Role/ Vision

- CCF hosts children, child mothers and occasionally orphans from outside the bush
- CCF works in a very volatile security situation with very little resources and basic services
- Providing more versatile and creative training in the camps is what they aim to do in the future.

Services

- Very limited health services, major cases are referred to hospital
- No structured skill training

Tracing/ Reunification

- Tracing is done through CCF social workers

Views on Reintegration

- “Reintegration needs a strong social network in the camp and a livable economic situation.”

Follow-Up

- Not enough funds for systematic follow-up
- Social workers go out to the field when possible
- CCF would like to see a uniform approach to follow-up that should be shared by all agencies

Community Networks

- Work with CVCs, but feel that people volunteer hoping for material gains

Community Work

- Children are encourage to attend church outside the center
- Secured some funds for interventions to secure economic livelihoods

- Other educational programs in camps: proper use of condoms, life skills, risky behavior, youth groups
- Setting up peer support networks for child mothers: child mothers from the community come to the center a few times a week to talk to the child mothers in the center

Concerned Parents Association (CPA), Kitgum

Founding Year

- 2003

Infrastructure

- Gated compound, several brick building (administration, men's sleeping quarters, kitchen, recreation center), sleeping tent for women

Staff

- 13 RC staff: manager, 2 field officers, 2 counselors, documentarist, accountant, store keeper, 2 cooks, 2 watchmen, driver
- 26 night commuter project staff: facilitators, social workers, drivers

Role/ Vision

- Interest in advocacy and night commuter project

Services

- Little skills training (lamp making)
- Referral to other agencies

Tracing/ Reunification

- Done in cooperation with Parent Support Group and the CVCs, who also assess the family's living situation

Views on Reintegration

- "Healing is not done, even in a year. The reception center cannot heal trauma, but take the level down a bit."
- The center operates under the assumption that proper repatriation into society and the healing that goes along with it can only take place at home
- Currently, the community lacks economic stability for reintegration and there is limited funding for community sensitization
- Biggest problem during reintegration is enforced idleness.

Follow-Up

- About 60 field visits a month since spring 2005 when UNICEF began providing transportation
- Staff says that follow-up falls short of what it should be because the time spent in camps is too short and the approach is not systematic enough

Community Networks

- Much of the center's community work rests on the CVCs, although they do not document the visits for CPA
- Other field work is based on (mostly dormant) Protection Warning Group, facilitated by CPA's Parent Support Group. The Protection Warning Group aims to identify vulnerable persons: FACs who have not gone through the system, child-headed households or households headed by grandparents.

Community Work

- The center is anxious to rededicate itself to an organization that treats more than the symptoms and provides community care.

Concerned Parents Association (CPA), Lira

Founding Year

- CPA was in operation as a reception center from June 2003 through January 2004.

Infrastructure

- Shut down as a reception center when Rachele Center opened in Lira

Follow-Up

- Follow-up only done in town due to security problems elsewhere
- Currently no funds for follow-up

Community Networks

- Parent support groups in every parish which CPA helped to set up, which have details of children returned, abducted, etc. According to the CPA these groups are still working, although the research team could not find a representative.

Gulu Support The Children Organisation (GUSCO), Gulu

Founding Year

- GUSCO has its origins in a 1994 initiative by a small group of concerned parents and other local citizens
- GUSCO acquired DANIDA funding in 1997, and established its first reception center

Infrastructure

- Large walled compound; tented accommodation; several brick buildings used for teaching; counseling sessions, administration, small dispensary; play area

Staff

- 6 trained social workers, 2 social work volunteers and 3 trainees, two nurses and one teacher

Role/ Vision

- The main focus remains formerly abducted children (although many of those arriving at the center are adults). The philosophy of the center is to be inclusive, avoid institutionalism, recognize the rights of the child, and to take an holistic approach to rehabilitation.

Services

- Basic skills in tailoring for girls
- Basic skills in bicycle repair, carpentry, bricklaying
- Children are brought back to the center for training
- Trained staff for nursery and Montessori schools in Palenga, Paboo, Amourou and Awach camps

Tracing/ Reunification

Views on Reintegration

- Staff at GUSCO encourage/ facilitate cleansing ceremonies

Follow-Up

- Follow-up on all formerly abducted children at schools (group discussion with children identified as FACs by teachers), in the camps and children that have passed through GUSCO

Community Networks

- Work with CVCs

Community Work

- Visit IDP camps to 'sensitize the community' on issues involving children returning from the bush
- Hold meetings with stakeholders (traditional leaders, LC1's, parish chiefs, CDO's and CDA's)

- Micro finance: helping child mothers, parent support groups and orphans or victims of HIV/AIDS

Katakwi Children’s Voice (KCV), Katakwi

Founding Year

- Katakwi Children’s Voice was registered as an NGO in May 2000. Four concerned mothers and three men from the area started the organization in 1998.

Infrastructure

- One building, no fence, sleeping and sanitary facilities

Staff

- 10: center leader, administrator, 3 social workers, 5 volunteers

Role/ Vision

- Keen to re-position itself as a focal point for child protection, rather than a reception center

Services

- Basic medical check-up
- No skills training, have a list of 60 children waiting for training

Tracing/ Reunification

- Done by KCV social workers
- Also have a network of volunteers in various areas of Katakwi but logistics are challenging part
- Reunification often happens without a social worker present

Views on Reintegration

- “We are doing children a disservice by not being able to provide them with a package for proper start-up.”

Follow-Up

- Staff says follow-up is inadequate due to lack of transportation

Community Networks

- children are sometimes followed up by a volunteer who lives close by

Community Work

- Community outreach program consists of meeting with the local council, visiting schools, parish chiefs and opinion or religious leaders
- KCV gives advice on child protection, handling a war-affected child and on how to facilitate reintegration from the community side
- Aim to provide services for all children affected by the unstable security situation and the general problems in Katakwi which can be summed up as LRA, Karamojong and poverty.

Kitgum Concerned Women Association (KICWA), Kitgum

Founding Year

- 1998

Infrastructure

- Gated compound, brick administrative building, kitchen building, several round huts and an open-walled meeting house, basic sanitary facilities, small playground

Staff

- 15: manager, admin, 2 head social workers, 2 nurses, clerk, 4 counselors, 2 cooks and 2 watchmen.

Role/ Vision

- KICWA sees itself as a transition point, not the focus of reintegration or provider of skills training
- It is the centers' experience that families transfer their responsibility to the center. They think that once a child stayed in KICWA, this is KICWA's child and hence KICWA should care for the child
- Follow-up is considered the major challenge now – including other aspects of community support, taking away the focus from the emergency level
- Major challenge ahead is seen to be the transition from camp life back to village life, renewing a spirit of independence and cultural identity.

Services

- First aid, referral to hospital, referral for testing (but not involved in counseling about test results)
- Referral for school fees and training

Tracing/ Reunification

- With KICWA social workers

Views on Reintegration

- Focus should be on community into which the individual is reintegrated

Follow-Up

- Only recently more opportunities to do follow-up: visiting clients, identifying problems, talking to community leaders, school visits

Community Networks

- Original idea of the CVCs is seen as good
- But consensus that proper social work cannot be done by volunteers in an extremely vulnerable and poor society
- CVCs and LCs point out problems with people who came back straight from the bush; KICWA then suggests referrals.

Rachele Center, Lira

Founding Year

- Opened in October 2003, set up with a three-year lease, to be turned into a school in 2006

Infrastructure

Staff

- 10 social workers on staff, 4 nurses, one clinical officer

Role/ Vision

- Sponsoring Children Uganda pays school fees for 2500 students, only 400 of which came through RRC.

Services

Tracing/ Reunification

- Staff said it is easy to find the children's home as they all know where they come from

Views on Reintegration

Follow-Up

- First follow-up conducted 2 ½ months after reunification
- Focus group discussion with family and immediate community and others who see the child on a daily basis
- Claim to have a minimum of 3 follow-ups per child
- Much of follow-up time involves finding children for sponsorship

Community Networks

Community Work

- Train teachers in psychosocial counseling and an all around approach to handling children

- Goal is that teachers will impart knowledge to other teachers who were not trained

World Vision, Gulu

Founding Year

- March 1995

Infrastructure

- Three centers: children, adults, child mothers
- Child center: walled compound, brick administrative buildings, open building for ‘group counseling’, circular banda, sleeping tents, basic sanitary facilities
- Child mother center: gated compound with trees, brick administrative building, sleeping tent, basic sanitary facilities, cooking area, small playground, small gardening patch, netball hoops

Staff

- 24 staff at the child center: 6 counselors, 5 outreach facilitators; 1 outreach co-coordinator; a matron; a nurse; a nursing assistant; a warehouse assistant; 3 accountants; 2 drivers; a gateman; a central administrator; the manager

Role/ Vision

- World Vision is a Christian, international NGO, and runs the centers as part of its Uganda programme.

Services

- Restoring physical health

Tracing/ Reunification

- Facilitate re-unions between children and adults at the centers and their respective families, preceded by visits from staff to the camps with a view to informing and preparing them for the return of their relative.

Views on Reintegration

- Reintegration is a long process and it is not possible to successfully reintegrate into life in the camps without first proving a capacity to talk in an open and multi-dimensional way

Follow-Up

- Not possible to retrieve any follow-up data

Community Networks

Community Work

- Makes visits to some IDP camps, but mostly supports IDPs in the Gulu municipality. However, the World Vision centers, like several of the others, have been developing a new outreach approach, using a support network based in the camps.

APPENDIX 3.

LABORA FARM – AN ALTERNATIVE APPROACH TO ‘REINTEGRATION’

Labora Farm has been put forward as an alternative to locating FAPs with their relatives. It is located near the road between Gulu and Opit. It is a large farm, which is supposed to be run on a commercial basis by former LRA combatants. It is an approach to supporting ‘reintegration’ that has received support from the UPDF and Gulu District government officials. It has also been endorsed by senior government officials (it is said to be the brain child of the Minister of Defense) and has been funded under a scheme supported by the World Bank. It has, however, been very controversial. In many respects it builds on approaches to ‘reintegration’ of former combatants used in other countries, such as Zimbabwe. Those experiments have been mixed. Many failed to be profitable and collapsed. But the reasons for the concerns expressed about Labora Farm from aid agencies and human rights activists working in the region derive from the use of ‘child mothers’ as laborers and the fact that it was initially run under the auspices of Kenneth Banya. Banya is a former LRA Brigadier who had many young ‘wives’ himself while with the LRA and has sought to continue the unions after his capture and receipt of the Amnesty. For many of the aid agencies working in northern Uganda, it is impossible to support a scheme that is associated with such a man. Two years ago, when the farm was first being proposed, there was the suggestion that it would establish the model of the ‘reintegration’ of the majority of LRA veterans and their ‘wives’. This caused considerable dismay in some quarters, but the project has now become much less ambitious.

The team visited the farm on two occasions to see how it operates and talk to some of those who have become involved. The scheme is now run as three small-enterprise projects under the World Bank funded scheme (known as NUSAF). Each project has a chairman, all of whom are middle ranking LRA officers. The following is taken from an interview with one of them, who was a former major in the LRA.

‘The farm is designed to help ‘formerly abducted children’ (FACs) who stay in town but lack jobs. The Farm consists of ‘community workers’ who are not paid but get a part of the produced food and of ‘paid workers’ (*leja leja*) from the nearby IDP camp. The food the ‘community workers’ are given is the same, independently from the size of their family. Therefore little is remaining to be sold normally. Female returnees additionally get food from WFP. I have wives myself and children. GUSCO and World Vision pay school fees for the children, the rest I have to provide on my own somehow. The main aim of Labora Farm is to make it possible for FAC to resettle and provide a ‘future perspective’.... The harvested crops at Labora Farm this season will be sold to WFP. After two years, the money earned by Labora Farm will mainly go into micro finance for the community members. The aim is, to enable the community to start its own business after two years of work at Labora Farm. The area used to be a governmental project. The Minister of Defense came up with the idea to start a farm for the many FACs. To get NUSAF (i.e. World Bank) funding, the project has to be suggested by the community itself.’

He implied that the government had then invited FAPs to come together and have the idea of a farm. NUSAF projects start with facilitated workshops to ‘sensitize’ people, and to suggest a project that then will be funded.

‘Initially 360 were involved in a meeting to suggest a project, but currently there are only 120 people working in three different projects that do the same thing here at Labora Farm. In the workshop, which took place at GUSCO, there were different suggestions for farming: piggery, cattle, crops etc. The NUSAF funding was only enough for three groups. Those three groups couldn’t do what they actually wanted... NUSAF is funding the costs of labor, seeds and transport from town to the farm. The store here

had a new roof funded by NUSAF also. We are waiting for a second payment to build the facilities to stay at the farm, and to train the community members in large-scale farming. At the moment, the traditional way of farming is being done. But the young members lack knowledge to do farming properly.... Each project has a chairman, secretary and treasurer plus 6 other members.... Banyu is the commander. He normally visits the farm regularly.... After two years, the community workers will get a loan and try to make their own business. The project will end then unless it is expanded or restarted. Many people are waiting to join the project. There are many FAC willing to join and the hope is to expand the project with our own finance.'

The research team also spoke to the chairmen of the other projects, and was given slightly different accounts. There was some confusion about the number of FAPs originally involved, those who are still involved, and the members of the three groups. It was not at all clear what some laborers would be paid. Those coming from the local IDP camp were paid the normal (very low) daily rate for farm labor. But in theory the FAPs were paid nothing except food, although they had some sort of stake in a possible development of the scheme. Exactly what this would involve was vague. There was also ambiguity about the position of Banyu. The other chairmen claimed that he was no longer in charge. When this was later checked with Gulu District officials it was confirmed that he had officially stepped down. Apparently this was because the World Bank had insisted. He nevertheless still has an influence on proceedings. It was also striking that the chairmen of the projects were all former LRA officers. As in other situations, such as mutual support networks and in the 105th Battalion, the former LRA hierarchy was replicated.

One of the major concerns that have been raised about Labora Farm is that the young people who go to work there, including 'child mothers' are being exploited. Fears have been expressed that this might involve sexual exploitation as well as exploitation of their labor. Another concern is that the concentration of FAPs in such a project separated them from the rest of the population and thereby hinders 'reintegration'. However, the research team did not find any evidence of this during the visits to the farm. On the contrary, the young women met there, some of them with their children, seemed happy to be associated with it. Two of those interviewed said that they had known Banyu in the bush. They said that they were not afraid of him. He was 'alright in the bush unless you misbehave, then you have to suffer.' They additionally said that they liked being with other FAPs. During the same visit, the team interviewed other women who said much the same thing. What was particularly interesting was that a couple of young women were known by one of the team. They both told stories about their 'abduction', but apparently they had really never spent time with the LRA. They seemed to be claiming to be abducted so that they could be part of the group that might have some involvement with the Labora Farm project in the future. They wanted to be more than daily laborers. It was not the only time that the team came across people wanting to be classified as 'formerly abducted' as a coping strategy.

APPENDIX 4.

ACCOUNTS OF LIFE IN THE IDP CAMPS AND LIFE WITH THE LRA

This appendix presents extracts of interviews with FAPs about life in the IDP camps and with the LRA. Here is an example of an FAP who said that she does not like living at home. She was one of many FAPs who talked about being treated badly by close relatives, and who commented on being abused because they were associated with reception centers.⁸⁷

D: ‘Do you still talk to your friends about your time in the bush?’

P: ‘No I do not, because it just reminds me of what was happening while I was there. And sometimes some women give me such a hard time by talking about my being in the bush and abusing me that I sometimes feel I should go back to the bush.’

D: ‘Really? Which women are those?’

P: ‘My mother is one of them. Any slight thing I do she brings my having been in the bush in it. Even my neighbors do the same so I just keep quiet or walk away, and yet if I walk away they say I am bigheaded and disobedient and she beats me up. Sometimes from school the same thing happens. You hear comments that some children make or even the teachers, sometimes I cannot help but answer back because it is painful that they find us funny or make jokes at our expense. When you answer back, you are punished so we are supposed to take all these insults from them. When we left GUSCO they gave us these small black bags that have ‘duk paco’ on them. [*Her voice catches as she speaks*]. Everybody knows those bags so when we pass they point at either our bags or at us and they snigger or make funny comments, then they laugh. It is so much harder to stay here than it was in the bush. At least when we were in the bush no one laughed at us and we were the same community.’

D: ‘What do the neighbors say about this?’

P: ‘They are not any better, maybe even worse. Sometimes a child does something and you knock their head even playfully, but when the neighbors see that – they shout at you, they like saying things like, ‘look at the wives of the rebels, I am not the one who sent you to the bush so do not bring what you carried from the bush here. If ever you touch my child with that ‘*cen*’ you have in you I will kill you’. So sometimes even if you have done something very small you get a torrent of words, a lot more than you deserve. It is worst when they have been drinking. When I think about it, life in the bush was much easier, we had food to eat, there was no worry about being abducted and no one yelled at you if you carried out your duties.’

Cen is an issue of concern for many of the returning people as well as those they live with. It can be an explanation for various kinds of misfortune, including illness and death. Concerns about *cen* are voiced quite frequently and seem to affect the sense of self worth of some FAPs, limiting their capacities to socialize. Here is an exchange with a teacher, reflecting on her experience of dealing with returned children.⁸⁸

D: ‘What do you think of this attitude the children have of themselves and towards life in general?’

Teacher: ‘I have spoken to many of them; a few want to go back to school, especially the younger ones. Others feel that school will never help them in any way so they just want to go back to their

⁸⁷ The interviewer was Doreen Alaro, and the interview took place in the Acholi language.

⁸⁸ Again the interviewer was Doreen Alaro.

homes and cultivate land. Then there are those who were taken when they were quite young, about seven or eight and are now eighteen or in their early twenties. Those ones feel like their life is useless, they cannot make anything of it.'

D: 'Why do you think they feel that way?'

Teacher: 'Well, when they see some of their friends who are now in the university or are working or have made something of themselves, they feel worthless and become very bitter about life and the unfairness of it all. Actually, some of the children refuse to go back to school and others continue with the very atrocities they were committing while in the bush, like stealing, fighting, torching peoples' houses when the feeling of worthlessness returns. Many of these children do not fear death and it is a pity to see a person so young talk about death the way they do. Then there are children whose parents feel they have '*cen*', and thus feel they are accursed.'

An issue that often became apparent in the course of the interviews in the IDP camps and among returned people living in the towns was that they often tended to spend time with each other rather than their relatives or childhood friends. They would sometimes comment that their former age-mates had moved on with their lives, while they had spent months or years away. Often, they just seemed more comfortable in each other's company. Here are some examples of statements by LRA veterans living at an IDP camp.

'During our participatory observation, we got to know four young LRA veterans living at an IDP camp. One of our team members lived with each of them for several weeks. Here are some remarks from them about socializing and living in the camps. The comments were all made in the Acholi language.'⁸⁹

'The feeling of being a stranger here is there, especially when I am alone at home. Because somebody may come and ask something I don't know. There's nothing I can say. Maybe a relative comes and I don't know him. When I am with friends and we are busy talking, that feeling goes away.'

'You cannot tell your friends here in the camp 'I have been in the bush'. If I am engaging a girl to be my 'wife' (i.e. to have sexual intercourse) and she finds out I have been in the bush, she says 'O those people used to do very bad things...' The girl will think that I will kill her. I cannot tell her about my past.'

'Formerly we knew the boundaries, where to play. The different families knew their neighbors and that they were not having witchcraft. But now we are in the camp, you don't know the immediate person who is next to you, they may be from another parish, another village. They may come with witchcraft. And when something happens, you cannot even imagine who is responsible. So we just fear.'

'The community in the bush is very strong. Everybody had the same laws and the same order. Here some people think to be more equal... In the camp, there is no appreciation. You are digging your own garden, nobody is appreciating that. In the bush there, you go to battle: maybe you are successful, and they appreciate you for that. Life here, there's nobody who appreciates.'

'If I would have gone home to my original home, I would have got used very fast, because with my own people, my own clan's mate who knew me, I would have been free to easily adapt with life. In the camp it was very difficult to get used to things. Like when I came, I got a lot of

⁸⁹ The researcher who carried out the participant observation research from which these quotes are taken is Ben Mergelsberg. A paper presenting some of his findings is B. Mergelsberg. 'Crossing boundaries' available at www.mergelsberg.de.2005.

neighbors who talked about me: ‘this one has just come back from the bush...’ Even my own brothers, we could not talk freely in the way we used to talk. And sometimes I can even stay one whole month without meeting my brother who lives in another camp. Getting used to this is very difficult.’

Unlike most men, women who return from the LRA have the possibility of marrying and moving into another family. But this may not be easy, even when they have not come back with children that were born in the bush (i.e. a so called ‘child mother’), as a local council officer women in Anaka IDP camp said about those who have come through a reception center.

The women go looking for husbands here at home [they look for men to live with]. Their activities are dangerous. They fight with men, and when they fight it is a war. People fear them. They cannot re-marry after being in the bush. They join the UPDF or the LDU... People fear them because they are polluting. They will not greet you by shaking hands. They are not friendly with us and do not trust us. In the bush they covered themselves in oil. If people have not been anointed like that, they do not greet them. If they do greet you, it is only out of fear. Some were living with the LRA for 10 years or more. They have that wild mentality.

Finally, here are some quotes from young men, all in their teens, who have spent several years with the LRA, and have passed through reception centers.⁹⁰ Obviously they are a particular sort of FAP. But they are particularly interesting because they have had to come to terms with, and make the best of, both life in the bush and life in an IDP camp

‘Do you know, I think life in the bush was a lot easier than living in the camp with my mother. At least we had proper food, it is only when we have to move that we might not eat much but even that is not for long but at home you have to wait for WFP to distribute food and sometimes they miss out your names.’

‘Life there (in the bush) was just like that, I did not feel anything bad about killing. Not until when I started listening to Radio Mega (the FM radio station broadcast from Gulu town). They were having programs with music, and with people sending greetings... about peace, called Come Back Home... I actually heard over the radio, how we used to move (i.e. what the LRA was doing). We burnt homes ... and I started to think: are we really fighting a normal war? That is when I started realizing that maybe there is something better than being here in the bush. And that is when I started learning that ‘Oh! So this life is bad’. I started feeling that some of these orders are not genuine. I am trying to fight for liberty, for the people. But now if you are killing the same people, whom are we going to rule?’

‘Only when you are still in the bush, the Holy Spirit has power over you. When you come back, you are now like a civilian, there’s nothing which happens to you.’

‘While I was in the bush, the rules helped me to be very obedient; I would follow the order all the time. This brought meaning to my life and helped me.’

‘You are taken to the bush as a fighter. But when you reach there, you also have to struggle to get food for your survival. When I was taken to the bush, the type of life was different from that of home. The place where I was living was far from home, so I felt as if I was in a different world all together.’

⁹⁰ These quotes are from the participant observation research carried out by Ben Mergelsberg. See B.Mergelsberg. ‘Crossing boundaries’ available at www.mergelsberg.de, 2005.

‘What makes it very easy to kill, is the gun and the uniform. That will make you strong hearted, feeling to be a military. But now here, I don’t have a gun, I don’t have a uniform; killing would be something very difficult.’

‘Fighting was very good for me, because it was part of my work. And if I had stayed for maybe two weeks without firing, I would feel something was missing, something is not very normal.’

‘I was striving so much to get a rank. That is why they sent me to go and lay an ambush: I would go. I was given difficult tasks. I would perform them, because I was striving to get the rank and that was how I got it.’

‘Killing in the bush: to the commanders it was fame. When a commander orders killing, he becomes famous.... Everybody would struggle to get a rank or to be famous’.

‘Fighting was very nice for us, especially when we were on the winning side. If you go and find you have killed many of your opponents you are very happy. It was not bad, we felt it was nice.’

‘This was like fame to us: if we didn’t want people to move along a certain road, we didn’t want a vehicle to pass that road and actually the vehicle didn’t pass, we would feel very proud and strong. When we arrested (i.e. abducted) somebody, we used to say: we told you if you had come to join us we would have overthrown the government. Do you see this road: are there vehicles moving? So it made us very happy and we felt famous.’

‘We were living in the bush like people who had closed their eyes. It was as if we were being used, we couldn’t reason, we couldn’t look any further; just like somebody whose eyes have been closed. You are moving and you cannot see where you are going. All those things are painful, but now after reopening your eyes you can see something. It is painful when I am reminded.’

APPENDIX 5.

INTERVIEWS WITH ‘CHILD MOTHERS’

The attitudes and experiences of women categorized as ‘child mothers’ vary widely. Some have very negative feeling towards their children; others are like ‘normal’ loving mothers. Some are very bitter about what they were forced to undergo, but several are keen to return to their LRA husbands when the war ends or if they surrender. To give an impression of the range of experiences and attitudes among FAPs categorized as ‘child mothers’ at reception centers, here are a few examples. Of the first five extracts, four are taken from the research team’s sample interviews and the other from an interview at CCF Pader. These are followed by extracts of interviews with ‘child mothers’ at the World Vision Center in Gulu town.

1. A ‘child mother’ who is still under the age of 18, and who fits the model of a sexually abused child.

‘Life was very good in the center. I forgot the past by then but when I came back I started dreaming of what used to happen in the bush. No ceremony was done for me when I came back. In the bush I was given to a man called Okot and I produced with him one child (a girl) who is now almost two years old. He did not have other women, but I don’t know where he is these days.’

2. Another ‘child mother’ under 18. She has not yet given birth, and was interviewed at the CCF reception center. According to staff at CCF, her date for going home had been set, and she would be followed up by the reception center nurse and brought back to hospital in time for delivery. It is worth noting that this is much better antenatal care than that available to other women in the IDP camps.

‘I like staying at CCF... My friends are here help me and the workers give me what I like. I am not scared of going home because I know my mother supports me. At CCF I spend a lot of time talking about the time in the bush with my friends. Mainly, we talk about the kind of food we ate.... We rarely, if ever, talk about the bad things that happened.... I feel a lot of pain whenever I think about the bush. Although we don’t talk about it among ourselves, we all know what everybody else has been through out there... I think about two things in the future: I want to learn tailoring and I am scared of the delivery. When I was in hospital for check-up (in Gulu), I heard the women scream from the maternity ward... I plan to give the child to my mother and will go back to school. When I came back, I had an STD with a lot of discharge.... That makes the thought of delivery even worse.’

3. A woman in her 20s whose child died, and who loved her LRA ‘husband’.

‘Life at home is good but people call us rebels. I tell people or friends about my life in the bush, but I sometimes get angry when people say I’m from the bush. At times I forgive them, but my family will leave (gives name of IDP camp) next year... I am scared because where I live...they always say I am a rebel. They caught me once (i.e. people in the camp attacked her) and I never went back to that route again. It was the husband of my sister who saved me. My neighbors are good. They like me. They said I shouldn’t mind about the stigmatization... There was a party, traditional cleansing and prayers when I first came back.... I don’t know where my husband is. I escaped and left him in the bush. If he comes back and wants to stay with me, I will stay with him. I love him because he used to love me too. I was happy about my child but unfortunately I lost her.’

4. A woman in her 20s who has had difficulties returning to her family, but has no interest in being reunited with the father of her child.

‘I have friends here who I was with in the bush. They are renting near us. Life at home is difficult because people keep saying that we are rebels. Even if you take your child to school, they say the child has gone to kill their children. Most of the time, I stay indoors because of fear. They came to know that we were abducted after being taken home by the center vehicle, and because we who are renting houses have got to explain to our landlords the type of person we are. I don’t tell the community that I was abducted. I only stay with those who were also abducted. I get angry when people say I’m from the bush. People should not keep on saying it because I’m already back home... I don’t know where my husband is. We were four women and two of us escaped. I don’t feel like staying with him, but I am happy about my child.’

5. A woman in her 20s who admits to having killed in the bush, and who wants to be reunited with her LRA husband, even though she now has another sexual partner.

‘I killed one man when I was in the bush. I beat him to death with a stick. I am scared now, because when I sleep at night, I see the picture of that person whom I killed. Sometimes at night I see him kicking me and when I wake up I feel that it is very painful where he kicked me... My parents were pleased that I came back, and I had a ritual of stepping on eggs... I was pregnant from the bush with a child from (one of the senior LRA commanders) and I delivered the child at home. It is a baby girl. It is staying with my mother. The neighbors like my child. If my husband could come back from the bush, I want to stay with him because he is still my husband. But I have a new husband now... but he is not a good man. He disturbs me every day by fighting or quarrelling. He likes my child from the bush. But I would leave him if my first husband came back.’

The remaining interviews were all made at the World Vision reception center for ‘child mothers’ in Gulu town. These eight women were interviewed individually. They were all in their 20s, although with one exception they had been abducted before the age of 18. One had a child, but he had died. Another had a child who was born while she was staying at the reception center, but the father was her former husband in the IDP camp who had abandoned her after she had her face mutilated by the LRA. Five of the women were adamant that they wanted to be reunited with their LRA ‘husbands’. Another group of seven women were interviewed at St. Monica’s training school in Gulu. This is a place at which ‘child mothers’ are taught skills in tailoring and cooking. The average age of the seven was 20. Three of them wanted to be with their LRA ‘husbands’. One was a ‘wife’ of Kony. One liked her LRA husband, but he had died. One was not impregnated when she was with the LRA, but was abducted with her baby, who was killed by a land mine. Just one said that she would not stay with her LRA husband if he returned, although she also said that he was ‘good’ to her in the bush.

The first is with a woman of 19 years. She had been abducted at the age of nine and had spent 10 years with the LRA. At the time of her abduction she had completed five years at primary school. She had been captured/rescued by the UPDF. Like the woman above, she was pregnant with her first child, but was over the age of consent. She was nevertheless still categorized as a ‘child mother’. She had been at the reception center for two months. The interview was short, reflecting the woman’s reluctance to talk. It also became apparent that she had several close relatives still fighting with the LRA in addition to her ‘husband’.

‘I think if the war ends then I would like to be re-united with the father of my child... I hope to go back to school after the baby... My father was very happy when he heard that I had come out of the bush, but he is sickly and weak and cannot help me ... I would like to go to tailoring school...’

I cannot tell how my relatives will treat the child but, for sure, I shall be responsible for the child ... and I shall have to make sure that the child studies... There is no need for the child to know that he is a child of the bush ... Its needs will be the same as all the other children in the camp ... I will only tell my father and close relatives exactly what happened... There is no need to tell everyone ... my 'husband' has one other wife who also has a child. He is still fighting in the bush....'

The following quotes are taken from another 'child mother' who is over the age of consent. She is 21 years old and had spent six months at the reception center. She had two children: one is 5 years old and the other is 6 months old. Her first son was born in the bush and has never known a world other than the bush and the reception center. Her second child was also born in the bush and was only 5 days old when he came to the reception center. She spent about 7 years with the LRA.

'My husband helped me to escape ... I was caught two times trying to escape... My husband warned me that they would kill me if I tried to do it again... But he helped me. No one else knew my plan.... The day I escaped, I met some hunters in the bush. When they saw me, they started to run.... Fortunately, I met some women who helped me find the UPDF barracks in Awach. I went to the CPU where I stayed for 4 days. I was then taken to the reception center [*gives name*] where I was given clothes, blankets and mattresses... I wanted to escape because the UPDF were pursuing us ... it was too much carrying our things with our children.... My husband did not escape with me because he feared he would be killed ... but he is watching what happens to Banya [*a well known former LRA Brigadier who has accepted the Amnesty*] and plans to come in 2006.... My plan is to see my children have an education and to set up a restaurant in Gulu. I can't go back to my parents in Pacho camp... they drink too much... [and] I would like to stay with my husband in the future as there is nowhere else to go ... I need to stay in a place where I can be peaceful and forget ... if I go home, I shall be provoked ... My husband has two other female children but the wife of these children died... They are still with him at the moment... Life at the reception center is really good... We are taught how to be friendly, and how to respect others. I have learnt how to write my name.'

The next woman is another 'child mother' who is both over 18 and also does not actually have a child. She did have a child when she was in the bush, but it died from malaria. She was about 16 years old at the time. She is now 20 and has been at the reception center for 2 months.

'I was abducted from Pader while I was visiting my grandmother. They came at night while I was sleeping with my mother... and they took me to Sudan. There were more soldiers there than abducted people.... I stayed in Sudan until 2004.... In the bush, we lived as a group of 50 [but] we divided into groups of 10 when we were fighting. I can assemble and disassemble a gun ... So long as Kony is still in the bush, this war will not end ... Kony talks well/good, but sometimes his orders are bad and destructive. Whatever he does, he is not under his own control but under the influence of spirits.... One day, he just announced that we should stop eating meat.... I met Kony in 2004 ... He is a tall and light-skinned person.... There is nothing I miss about life in the bush.... How did I escape? We were in the bush ... the UPDF were dropping bombs ... many people died and my husband was shot dead. I left shortly after that ... at the reception center, they tell me not to think about the past, ... that the bad things that happen are part of war. ... That I am still young and I have a bright future.... 'Before being abducted, I planned to get a job in an office, just like other ladies. I now feel that I can't make it at school ... it is too late ... I would like to do a tailoring course... I shall go and live with my uncle... My parents are alive, but I don't know where my father is. I have met with my mother, who lives with someone else now so I cannot stay there. My brother is 16 years old and he lives with my uncle ... it is possible that I might be abducted again, but I don't think that they will come looking for me in particular. They will always know that I have been in the bush. I will say that I was injured ... otherwise they will kill me...'

The following case is about the same age, and also had a child who died in the bush. She was abducted at the age of 13 and spent seven years with the LRA. She is partially sighted as a result of war wounds. She has no vision in her right eye and very limited vision in her left eye.

‘I escaped ... there was crossfire between the LRA and the UPDF ... the UPDF were dropping bombs and everyone scattered ... so I took my chance and escaped.... I did not plan to escape ... it was just God that helped me... It is nice at the reception center... There are no battles ... We are being counseled and we are being taught, but a cassette player and a TV would make it better ... I don’t know when I will leave the center.... They are trying to raise money for an operation (apparently two million Ugandan Shilling are needed to cover the cost of removing a bullet lodged in her eye).... Both my parents have died.... My ‘husband’ is still in the bush in Sudan ... He will never come back as he is certain that he will be killed if he returns. He has 10 other wives in the bush ... I don’t miss him... He refused to come back ... Why should I miss him?... He had 7 children altogether ... He told me that he just joined the LRA and that he was not abducted. He comes from Pader. He is a fierce man ... but there is no soldier that is cool.... He claims to be 35 years old, but I think he is older.’

The next example is of a woman of 27 years who was not impregnated by an LRA combatant, but by her own husband in the IDP camp. However, he refused to accept her back as his wife after she was caught and mutilated by the LRA. Her lips were sliced off and her ear removed. She subsequently gave birth while staying at the World Vision reception center, and has two other children who stay with her mother.

‘There were six of us in the garden in Paicho ... Four were killed, one was captured and I was tortured. They tortured me, and released me on the same day.... They did not kill me because they want to terrify the civilians and show that it is not good to tell the UPDF where they [the LRA] are ... They hacked them to death with sticks and the butt of a gun. I was pregnant at the time [so] they did not want to kill me, as it would have brought them misfortune.... One of the women who died was my co-wife, the other three were neighbors ... After the attack, I ran but I was bleeding so much that I collapsed. A man on a bicycle stopped and rang for a car. Then they took me to Gulu hospital where I stayed for a week. World Vision subsequently collected me from the hospital and brought her to the child mother center until I delivered my baby... They then took me to Mulago hospital, Kampala where they gave me a large number of stitches and tried to re-shape my face (they used plastic surgery for her nose and the ear that had been removed)... When I came back from the hospital, the door of my house was locked and my husband was gone ... I am deformed [so] I cannot be his wife ... whenever he sees me, he turns his face as if he doesn’t know me. He was not really my husband, because there was not enough money for bride wealth payments. ... I was 17 ... I eloped with him... My father died three years ago but her mother is still alive. My father died at the same time as two of my brothers. They were killed by the LRA in Paicho ... The rebels came at dawn. They were asleep and they killed them with a log. I was with my husband at the time, and they only spared my mother and young children ... It is difficult to know why they left them.. it is just God ... My mother is responsible for my children ... My husband doesn’t help at all. He has taken two new wives....’

In complete contrast, here is a woman 22 years old, who had been abducted at the age of 15. She loves her ‘husband,’ who is still fighting with the LRA, and also has a brother in the UPDF. She has one child, who was born in Sudan. She had much to say, spoke very quickly, and was sometimes quite hard to follow.

‘I was digging with my father in the garden ... they came from nowhere ... they began a ritual on me ... and after the ritual, we went on the road which goes from Lira to Kitgum. We were taken to meet Kony at 3.00pm near Kitgum... then we started the journey back to Labor ... we went back to

the original point [Kitgum / Lira road) that we started from ... then we went to the mountains. Kony went one way, we went another. We took a month doing all of this in Uganda, but Kony said he wanted to see us in Sudan ... by then, some had swollen feet, some were killed and some collapsed and left.... In Sudan, we were trained in marching and how to assemble and disassemble a gun. Then we were taught how to march with a gun; and then we were subjected to many tasks like carrying heavy tins of bullets to the Sudan/Uganda border and hiding them there; cutting grass; working in gardens in Sudan ... growing sim sim and other crops for Kony.... Only when you are pregnant, then there is not much work, except when there is a battle. Then you are expected to fight.... In 2004, things got worse ... the Ugandan army used bombs to hit us. It was painful to see my friends die ... So too was the thought of going home to find my parents had died too .. and the thought of having to start life all over again.... It is hard to escape as we heard that the UPDF would rape women and then kill them ... My husband released my co-wife, so I asked to go too and he agreed to the idea.... However, he was worried about our child's life.... So he took the child to his sister in Ajulu, Gulu District... I escaped 5 months later.

Interestingly, the father of the child wrote a letter, which was sent to Mega Radio and read out on air. It said that the child should be taken to the mother's family (i.e. her father's home) until he could be reunited with her. The mother's family heard the message and tried to claim the child, but the father's sister refused to give him up, saying, 'this is our child' (i.e. the child belonged to the clan of the mother because no bride price had been paid). The UPDF became involved, and would not allow the child to go to the mother's family (which would have been a recognition that the parents were married, rather than the mother abducted and raped). Eventually the child was brought to World Vision where he was an 'unaccompanied child' for 4/5 months. As the mother explained:

'I knew about the whereabouts of the child during this time, and felt he suffered a lot. He used to cry a lot and frequently asked to return to the bush. In fact, he used to make guns out of sticks and carry them around on his arm ... Sometimes he disturbed the night watchman at dawn by saying 'I'm going back to the bush'. He still misses his dad and misses carrying his dad's gun around.... In the end I escaped....there was bombing ... people scattered and a UPDF soldier came over and picked me ... I spent 4 nights with the UPDF... On the 5th day, they brought me to World Vision ... My husband is a captain in the LRA. He has one other wife, with whom he has had two children, but one of them died. My co-wife now lives in an IDP camp (gives name). She was abducted at the age of 15 and lived in the bush for 7 years too.... I have many loving feelings for my husband.... When the war ends, I would like to be re-united with him because he loves me ... he tells many people that he loves me ... that is why he did not release me before. I am not interested in any other person.... I am told that he is looking for me ... I want to talk to him so that he knows that I am alive.'

The woman went on to say that her husband will not come out of the bush while Museveni is still in power: 'He is determined to fight, even if there are only five of them left.' At this point the research team member asked her about the International Criminal Court and the possibility of warrants being issued. The member of staff at the reception center who was translating then stopped the interview, stating that this woman cannot be asked or told about the ICC, because she might be an LRA spy. It was however possible to ask the woman about life in the reception center, and about her future.

'I am very grateful to God who spared my life ... and to all the people who have helped me ... I want to do a business, to learn how to do bakery and how to sell things....I want to make sure that my child has a good education.... The counseling is strange ... we are told such different things to the things we are told in the bush. We are taught how to start afresh and to be hopeful ... I love playing here, and I love the things they teach us ... [However, among the women] there is a lot of quarrelling and abusive language which is not good ... My mother is fine about the child.... She says

‘my greatest love (joy?) is seeing you alive. But my father is an alcoholic ... and my brother is in the UPDF. I think my mother will accept the child, but I think our neighbors will see things differently. They can plant evil on my child, as it is a child of the bush; and they can do bad things to my mother, as they will not like the fact that she has come to help her. In the future, I would like to rent a house and stay with my child in Gulu town.’

The quarrelling mentioned between the ‘child mothers’ is perhaps not surprising given the fact that this woman was sharing accommodation with some of the others who were interviewed, including the woman with the mutilated face. The next interview is also of a woman who loves her LRA husband, although in his case he has surrendered and joined the UPDF. She had spent almost a year at the reception center, although for much of this she has actually been staying at the hospital, because of her bullet wound. Initially, she went to Pader hospital, then Gulu hospital, and then Mulago, Kampala. She has been told that there is nothing more they can do for her. The bullet is lodged in her throat and the doctors have told her that they are afraid to cut her throat to remove the bullet in case they kill her. She has one child of about 12 months, who was born in the bush shortly before she was captured by the UPDF. She is 18 years old and spent about 6 years with the LRA. Her parents are still alive, and she has many siblings, although one was taken by the LRA and died in the bush. She was asked about how she came to the reception center and about her future.

‘The UPDF were pursuing us. Many died in the battle and a bullet hit me in the throat. I was then captured by the UPDF. Now I can only talk in a hoarse whisper as the bullet is stuck in my throat ... and it is still painful.... Two months after my capture, my husband left the bush. He joined the UPDF straight away. He knows that I am currently at the center [*gives name*] and visited me only yesterday.... I want to stay with him because he has not abandoned me ... I miss him a lot... If I am to plan going home, I think it would be helpful to be given some money to start a business... I do not fear to return ... they will welcome the child.’

Lastly, here is an extract from a woman of 19 years, who has an 18-months old boy, born in the bush. She too had been at the reception center for almost a year. She had been abducted in 1997 at the age of 11 years.

‘It was mid-day and Aida was in the market place of Paicha, an IDP camp. The LRA opened fire and the UPDF retaliated. The LRA ran away, but returned later in the day and abducted 5 girls. I was one of the five and we were taken to Sudan. I stayed in Sudan for about 7 years – farming and digging. There was no fighting until I returned to Uganda in 2003/4.... I decided to escape because the UPDF were pursuing us ... my child was crying a lot and giving me a lot of grief ... The child’s father was in Sudan at the time. He has three other wives: but one was captured (she was pregnant at the time); one was released (with her two children); and one is still in the bush.... On arrival at the reception center, I was given a package of clothes, soap, a mattress, oil, slippers, a blanket, a cup and plate, and a sweater for my child... There is good teaching/counseling about: health; how to stay in the community, how to forget life in the bush ... they are teaching us good morals... But I want to go ... I have spent a long time in the bush and I want to be with my family.... [I am] waiting for an amnesty card; a letter from the RDC and some training’

APPENDIX 6.

EXPERIENCES OF CARITAS COMMUNITY RESOURCE PERSONS

As it was explained to us by staff at CARITAS and CRPs, CRPs are trained by CARITAS to provide community services to all members of the community. The list of CRPs is quite extensive and many camps in Gulu district have at least one assigned CRP. While the CRPs are an important part of CARITAS follow-up work, their contribution is not seen as sufficient for systematic follow-up. CARITAS states that ‘due to the bad security situation and financial constraints, we have not been able to implement our follow-up activities as we had planned. To be frank and clear, most of the returnees are thus left on their own after reunion with no further assistance.’⁹¹

CRPs have various reasons for becoming involved, but the most common reason given was a strong grounding in the Christian faith (some of the CRPs were training to be catechists when they were approached about becoming a CRP). Others cite their own history of abduction or general concern with the community:

‘The...reason that made me to become a counselor, is looking at how the children who are returnees behave. This puzzled me, then I decided to be come a counselor. Seeing parents whose children have been abducted made me to become a counselor. Seeing people who are suffering in the camps with hunger, sickness, problems of accommodation, lack of water, problems of death and burial grounds, the problem of education in general; all the above reasons made me to go to CARITAS to be taught, get training to become a counselor, so that I can help people.’

The CRPs receive training, described by the participants as ‘seminars, which takes some time, like one or two weeks, but it is always frequent. We would have training three times in a year. And the whole training took three years.’ CRPs mentioned that they received refresher courses from CARITAS and have also worked ‘together with CVCs and social workers. For example...World Vision called their resource persons for a briefing, and they called me too.’

During training, CRPs are taught to: ‘...welcome people well. They train us to be patient and listen to a client. We are taught how to talk to a person, how to ask questions, because if you carelessly ask a traumatized person, he or she will keep quiet and not answer you.’ There is an emphasis on continuous support for problematic cases ‘to follow our clients, especially clients whom we have counseled. The client may say ‘I am now okay’ but as a counselor, you have to follow and find out whether the person is really okay. If you find that the person is okay, then you can just have some conversation with the client.’

CARITAS uses their CRPs during the tracing process: CRPs are provided with the child’s and the parent’s names to find the family. There seems to be little involvement of the CRP during the reunification process. Most CRPs report not meeting the child or family prior to the child’s reunification. Family preparation is left to CARITAS: ‘when a child is being brought home, they [the staff from the reception center] meet the parents. They have to tell the parents what the child likes and dislikes...so that when a child is brought back, the parents know how to handle the child.’

⁹¹ Harlacher, T. and A. C. Obonyo (2005). ‘Psychosocial Work’ and ‘Trauma Work’ in Northern Uganda. Seminar on Psychosocial and Trauma Work. Cologne, Germany.

The CRPs are seen as responsible for community sensitization work: ‘when the child returns home, we as counselors have to inform the community that this child has not done anything bad. He has been forced to do it, or another person did it.’

After the child is reunited, CRPs do the follow-up work. The frequency of follow-up visits varies greatly: some report going back to the child every day for the first week, others make their first home visit after three days or even a couple of weeks or months if they feel that reunification went well and ‘the person is coping up.’ Some returnees take initiative and seek out the CRP. This usually happens when there are problems and children want to return to the Reception Center.

Working with FAPs is referred to as ‘counseling’ and gaining the trust of the client is considered a challenge: ‘I first have to ask questions, introduce, socialize with them, before I begin the exact issue. Approach is really very difficult. I normally spend two hours in my work [each time he counsels people], because of the approach...If I please them they tell me about their lives in the bush, but this depends on the questions someone asks them. Most times they like keeping quiet.’

CRPs are not trained specifically for follow-up work with FAPs: ‘I do my work with everyone, that is the formerly abducted, the rest of the community...from anywhere. Not only in the camp. I do my work irrespective of religions or denomination.’ Much of this work is based on education and counseling about such issues as ‘defilement, street kids in the camp, drunkenness and theft problems.’ Most CRPs pointed out that marriage counseling and family conflicts takes up a lot of their time as they do individual sessions with each partner first and then attempt a ‘group session’ with both, or even the entire family.

Most CRPs feel that they cooperate well with CARITAS and that they are taken seriously as a resource: ‘I asked CARITAS to always consult the community when they want to do their work or make decisions’ said one man who was asked to describe how much influence he has on the work CARITAS does in the camp. CRPs are confident that they have back-up support from CARITAS and are not expected to solve every problem: ‘we are taught that in a case where we cannot handle a problem, we should not say ‘I must manage it.’ We have to refer to other people, who are above us.’

CARITAS say that each CRP is equipped with the FAP’s case file to be able to follow the progress, however, while some CRPs confirmed receiving detailed files about each child, others had not received a single one and had to request individual files of children if problems occurred. All CRPs are asked to keep detailed records and most of them are aware that they are expected to do so. How well documentation actually works and whether reports are then used for further intervention is impossible for us to say in the scope of this case study.

Just like CVCs, CRPs are not paid for their work, but seem to more regularly receive a token payment or other items. Items mentioned were bicycles and even cash for bicycle repair, mattresses or clothes. Some say that they have not received anything, not even paper to write their reports. It is thus not surprising that most cite office equipment as their biggest need. There is a clear sense here that the CRPs would like to have their position to be made more official through an office, ‘all the stationery, office equipment, and furniture to welcome our clients’, a ‘room for my client’ and even ‘uniforms to show people that we are really a counselor, like t-shirts and IDs. People will recognize us better if they see these things.’ Others speak of more sophisticated equipments, such as ‘a video screen for demonstration of our activities, i.e. defilement is bad, war is bad, prostitution is bad’, or ‘little things to give to clients like soap, sugar or clothes.’ This is seen as a way to ‘make our clients understand us better.’

APPENDIX 7.

STATEMENT OF WORK

A REVIEW OF LESSONS LEARNED BY RECEPTION CENTERS ON EFFECTIVE INTERVENTIONS FOR FORMER ABDUCTEES IN NORTHERN UGANDA

BACKGROUND

The war in northern Uganda has been labeled ‘the hidden conflict,’ ‘the forgotten war,’ and ‘Africa’s most brutal conflict.’ USAID/Uganda has responded to conflicts in Uganda since the 1980s and from 1998 to 2001 funded a Special Objective for Reintegration of Northern Uganda, which supported food security, psychosocial and community conflict prevention and mitigation activities. USAID is currently funding the Community Resilience and Dialogue program, which provides funding to several reception centers and supports reintegration activities. UNICEF is the main UN agency supporting child protection. UNICEF has recently increased staffing in the conflict areas by placing international Child Protection Officers in Kitgum, Gulu and Lira and is intending to recruit three more protection officers for information collection and advocacy.

In Spring 2002, the Ugandan army undertook a military offensive into southern Sudan called ‘Operation Iron Fist.’ This action sought to put an end to the conflict in northern Uganda. The Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA) retaliated with the most severe violence the region has seen since the start of the conflict 18 years ago. The LRA returned to northern Uganda, resuming fierce attacks on Ugandan civilians and abducting greater numbers of children. The LRA has sustained its warfare in the districts of Gulu, Kitgum, and Pader, and in June 2003 expanded its attacks on civilians to the neighboring districts of Lira, Katakwi, Kaberamaido, and Soroti. The escalation of conflict has caused a drastic increase in the number of displaced persons. The Uganda People’s Defense Force (UPDF) responded by moving people to largely unprepared camps in order to cut off the LRA food supply. Currently approximately 1.4 million people are living in internally displaced persons (IDP) camps, a reduction from a peak of nearly 1.8 million in May 2004. This displacement figure illustrates the rapid growth of the camps when compared to 500,000 displaced prior to the initiation of Operation Iron Fist.

The displaced living in camps comprise 80% of the population of the five most conflict-affected districts in northern Uganda. IDPs have limited access to land and few opportunities to generate income. Services have largely collapsed; there is virtually no civilian policing, inadequate water supplies and sanitation facilities, limited access to health care, massively over-congested primary schools and no access to secondary education in the camp setting. Camps are also over-crowded with huts spaced close together. All the social problems that exist in other parts of Uganda (high numbers of HIV/AIDS orphans, domestic violence and sexual abuse and exploitation) distress the war-affected population, intensified by conflict, displacement and camp life. The displacement, the LRA’s violent assaults on civilians, and the strategies that local people use to search for safety, employment and income combine to create a complex web of vulnerability. The highly visible, war-related human rights abuses – abduction, night commuting, sexual and gender based violence – are part of a much broader spectrum of serious human rights violations exacerbated by war. With each year spent in the IDP camps residents become increasingly dependent on food relief and more despondent as they watch the familial and cultural fabric of their lives deteriorate. The situation for civilians is desperate with frequent rebel attacks, looting, destruction of property, abduction of children and brutal killings.

A particularly deplorable aspect of this conflict is the abduction of children for the purpose of forced conscription and sexual exploitation. With the start of Operation Iron Fist human trafficking by the LRA increased dramatically. UNICEF estimates that since the start of the conflict 20,000 children have been abducted - 10,000 of those since the escalation of LRA raids in June 2002. Abducted children are forced to commit atrocities against their families and communities and to serve as soldiers and/or 'wives' of rebel commanders. The LRA generally takes children to its bases in southern Sudan for training. This life is especially brutal for the girls who are not only used as porters and soldiers but are also 'given' to rebel commanders as 'wives' sometimes before they reach puberty. UNICEF uses the term 'formerly abducted child' to refer to persons who are under 18 at the time they return from the LRA. However, it should be noted that several thousand persons who were young adults when they escaped the LRA were children when they were abducted.

Almost all abducted children and adults who escape from the LRA or who are captured pass through the hands of the UPDF. The UPDF have established Child Protection Units (CPUs) in Gulu, Kitgum and Pader, ostensibly to create a more child-friendly environment for debriefing. From the CPUs children (and adults) are passed on to reception centers, which have been established for both children and adults. The reception centers provide basic medical screening and treatment, perform family tracing, provide psychosocial counseling for the children, and prepare them to return to their families and communities. Often girls return as child mothers with children they have had as the 'wives' of LRA rebels. The situation of this group has recently been complicated by a number of high level LRA commanders reporting to take advantage of the Amnesty Act. These commanders are requesting to be reunited with their 'wives' and children. Military activity also leads to unaccompanied infants being rescued after their mothers have been killed.

The reception centers were created as a response to a need felt by the communities, families and local politicians who were receiving their children from captivity. Concerned parents and community members created NGOs to respond to this need, and through the support of international NGOs and the donor community, created reception centers or transit centers to meet the needs of these children and adults. Currently, there are centers operating in the districts of Gulu, Kitgum, Pader, Apac, Lira, Soroti and Katakwi. About 15,000 formerly abducted children have either escaped or been rescued by the army since 1995, and most of these have gone through the centers. It is assumed that most are now resettled with their families.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

To best meet the needs of the abducted children and adult men and women forced to fight in LRA rebel forces, USAID and UNICEF are commissioning an independent study:

To examine the assumptions made when dealing with this target population;

To review the services provided in the child and adult reception centers;

To review the reintegration challenges facing formerly abducted children, including child mothers and infants born in captivity, and

To review the reintegration process of former adult combatants in the Ugandan setting and identify the interventions and methods that most effectively facilitate family and community reintegration of children formerly associated with the LRA.

This study will use a wide variety of sources to develop a report which recommends sound practices for reception centers and the reintegration process within the Ugandan setting allowing USAID, UNICEF, other donors, and implementing partners to better respond to the complex needs of returnees.

Abducted children are exposed to traumatic events beyond the normal boundaries of human experience and as a result many show stress reactions. In response, current programs provide immediate psychosocial

support to enable them to return to as normal a family life as possible under these stressful circumstances. Their families and communities are provided with preparation and support that will enable them to accept the children back and treat them as valued members, and the future of their community. USAID and UNICEF believe that sustainable, age and gender-appropriate solutions need to be developed to strengthen community based coping mechanisms and support to the children who have lived in captivity of the LRA. The challenges that young (and older) adults face on return may differ in degree and substance from those facing children. This study will provide recommendations for improving current interventions.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Under what key assumptions do the reception centers operate and what assumptions are made during the reintegration process?

a) Compile an exhaustive list of basic assumptions under which the reception centers were established and operate. These may include, but are not limited to, the following: the family structures can support the return of a formerly abducted child; the best place for the child and young adult is with the family and back in the community; the communities will be accepting of the people; there are economic opportunities for the formerly abducted child once they are trained in a vocation; all children (including those returning as adults) who were abducted are traumatized, vulnerable and need counseling; clinical counseling is necessary; clinical counseling is not necessary; young adults can be treated the same way as children (the term formerly abducted children and associated response is used/is not used to include all persons who were children when they were abducted); centers should work as transit centers holding the children and adults for short periods of time; centers should hold children and adults for longer periods of time until they are fully 'healed'; children fear re-abduction; the child and adult will be willing to live in a displaced setting in order to be with their family, and; children and adults are staying with their families after reunification.

b) Analyze the relevance of the assumptions to the reception centers and reintegration process (different reception centers may operate under a different set of assumptions). What are the consequences, if any, of the assumptions identified?

2. What are the roles of the UPDF (including UPDF CPUs), reception centers and organizations and authorities involved in family tracing and how do they meet the needs of the formerly abducted children?

Review all stages persons returning from the LRA (children and adults) go through after reporting or after being captured by the UPDF. Assess the treatment of the children and adults once received by the UPDF, and follow it through the reception centers. Be sure to include the time spent with military units before being transferred to the Child Protection Units, all stages at which they are questioned and by whom, and next step options provided to the former abductee while in the care of the UPDF. The report should discuss whether the CPUs are achieving the objectives of creating a child-friendly environment for children while they are with the UPDF and are contributing to reducing the length of time it takes for the transfer of children from the military to civilian reception centers. It should also assess the extent to which CPUs are used by the UPDF to facilitate the processing of adults, if so whether this poses problems in terms of child protection and what alternative channels, if any, are used for adults.

Identify at what stage adults and children who wish to apply for amnesty get access to the Amnesty Commission and how this takes place. How does this differ from district to district? What access does the Amnesty Commission have to persons still held by the UPDF? To what extent is the Amnesty Commission able to maintain civilian oversight of returnees while they are in UPDF hands?

Describe the intake procedures and support services provided at the reception centers and transit centers and assess the appropriateness, adequacy, and quality in relation to children's needs. Describe and assess the role, functioning, and services of each center, including their support systems, programs, and the tracing and reunification process. Division of roles and responsibilities, coordination, timing, practices and methods, and information exchange in the family tracing process should be reviewed. Evaluation of the quality of care and counseling the child receives from the centers should be analyzed as well as how the centers determine when

a child is ready to return home. Describe in detail the factors that determine how a child's length of stay at the center is determined, and ask center staff for statistics on the average length of stay and the range (shortest to longest) of length of stay at the center, identifying the factors that determine length of stay. Centers should also be examined on how they are accountable to their target population, the receiving communities, their funders, and to government. Describe the nature, extent and purposes of the contacts of each center with other centers assisting formerly abducted children.

3. What lessons can be learned from the current reintegration process to establish recommendations for sound principles for reintegration of former abductees in the Ugandan context?

a) Assess the needs of the formerly abducted children, the receiving community and identify what is necessary for the receiving community to successfully welcome the return of children and adults. Identify steps and measures that appear to have facilitated successful reintegration. So far as possible, where reintegration has not been successful, try to identify factors that appear to have contributed to this result. Solicit feedback from center staff, family members, reintegrated children, community members (e.g. leaders, neighbors of reintegrated children) representatives of local social structures and those who play a significant role in reintegration such as teachers, the District Probation and Social Welfare Department, psychosocial practitioners and community volunteer counselors. Where possible, ask informants to list the various factors that contributed to successful reintegration, then ask them to rank the factors mentioned in order of importance (This method may work with some and not with others. Only pursue it where it seems to be productive). Ask informants about the importance of religious practices and traditional cleansing or healing ceremonies as a factor in reintegration, and gather information about what such ceremonies involved and who participated in or observed them (examples of issues include whether ceremonies contributed to family acceptance, community acceptance, a feeling of acceptability or transition on the part of children, whether there appeared to be any negative consequences, etc.). It should be noted that all abductees do not go through reception centers. This study should include a review of the reintegration process for those individuals who received no formal care.

b) Analyze the current reunification and reintegration process and packages, its successes and challenges in the Ugandan context basing on reception center guiding principles. Special consideration should be given to child mothers, infants (accompanied and unaccompanied), reintegration of formerly abducted children into a conflict-affected area, reintegration of ex-combatants into a war-time economy, and reintegration of the abductees into a displaced setting.

c) Analyze the reintegration of child mothers and infants born in captivity, and special concerns related to their acceptance into the Acholi community. Also review their needs and desires as related to their returning 'husbands' who may have been high-ranking LRA commanders who are now reporting to take advantage of amnesty. Also consider the needs of the child mothers whose 'husbands' are high-level officials still fighting with the LRA. This analysis should include a cultural as well as a legal assessment of the norms and rights of the child mothers and the fathers of the children born in captivity.

d) Analyze the options open to adult men and women and which paths they most often follow and why.

e) Examine the issues related to follow-up with children and adults after they have returned to their families and communities, highlighting approaches and aspects that appear to contribute to effectiveness (or negative outcomes), and ability of the centers to reach the children with adequate follow-up, the frequency of follow-up, innovative approaches, etc. Seek to identify factors (both personal characteristics and actions of the children and action taken by others) that appear to contribute to the resilience of formerly abducted children. Note whether any respondents report negative attitudes or actions resulting from the attention and support given to formerly abducted children as apposed to other sub-sets of the population who may be vulnerable. Identify if current methods of supporting formerly abducted children and adults actually facilitate reintegration or whether they inadvertently create barriers between children and the rest of the community. Identify lessons learned or policy recommendations regarding how follow-

up should be done, by whom, and provide creative ideas for reaching this population during time of insecurity.

f) Analyze the specific coping mechanisms used by the formerly abducted children and adults such as night commuting, living in town centers and not living with family for fear of re-abduction.

STUDY METHODOLOGY

The researchers are expected to visit, as security allows, and review the key reception centers in northern Uganda. These include the following;

GUSCO in Gulu town

World Vision in Gulu town (one center for children, one for adults, and one for child mothers)

World Vision in Kalongo, Pader District

KICWA in Kitgum town (for children)

Christian Counseling Fellowship (CCF) in Pader District

Rachele Center in Lira town

CPA in Lira town

Concerned Parents Center (CPA) in Kitgum town, (for adults)

As time allows, the following should also be visited:

CARITAS center in Pajule, Pader District

CARITAS center in Apac District

Action Against Child Abuse and Neglect (ACCAN) in Soroti

Katakwi Children's Voice in Katakwi

The majority of the data is expected to come from former abducted child and adult returnees themselves, their families and the people who live in the community around them and the researchers are expected to visit children and adult returnees and their families living in IDP camps and municipal areas. The researcher should conduct interviews with those former abductees pursuing a military career or planning to join a local defense unit. The researcher should interview members of the UPDF 105 Battalion in Gulu (if possible). This battalion is made up of LRA ex-combatants. Follow-up in the receiving community should include an assessment of skills training provided to the teachers and others working with the returnee population, a review of the community volunteer counselors should also be included. Former abducted children and adults will be interviewed on their life skills training and their ability to cope with their current situation. Neighbors, religious and traditional leaders, extended family members including in-laws should be interviewed to assess their attitudes toward those abducted by the LRA.

The consultant's methodology will be based on the following:

Information from secondary sources and the contractor's knowledge of the reception centers and the levels of the conflict situation in the northern Uganda;

Reviews of relevant documents, assessments, and reports;

Interviews with USAID/Uganda, UNICEF staff and other key informants;

Interviews with reception center staff; administrators/designers;

Interviews with a significant number of formerly abducted children and adults who vary in the amount of time spent in captivity, gender and their role in the LRA;

Interviews with the brothers and sisters of formerly abducted children, classmates, their parents and other older relatives, neighbors and community members;

Interviews with other donors who are supporting institutional development of the centers, local governments staff in the area, district CSO networks, local CBOs and NGOs working with the focus population; and

Other methods deemed appropriate and proposed by the consultants.

The report will be a sizable research paper that will analyze the situations in the reception centers and the reintegration process to develop a listing of sound practices for successful reintegration of formerly abducted children and ex-combatants in the northern Ugandan within the LRA context. The researcher will be required to do a desk review of available literature. The final report will be a compilation of existing materials and field research.

DELIVERABLES

The following are the deliverables expected from this study:

USAID, UNICEF and the National Psychosocial Core Team (NPCT) are expected to approve a study outline, research plan/instruments prior to the start of the field research.

The study methodology should also be outlined and rigorous to address the study questions.

The key component of this contract is a report, which will be reviewed and approved in draft form by USAID, UNICEF and the NPCT. It is expected that the contractor will give a presentation of the report to USAID/Uganda, UNICEF, the U.S. Embassy Kampala, donor technical groups, NPCT, the field offices and reception centers, and possibly to USAID/Washington.

Listing of lessons learned and recommendations for the way forward and/or improving the current status of reception centers.

There will be a special section on the child mothers, the challenges they face while in captivity, how the reintegration of themselves and their infants born in captivity differs from the other abductees, and how they are managing to provide for themselves and their children.

The Consultants shall produce a report (no more than 60 pages of text in the body of the report (exclusive of the Executive Summary and annexes) addressing the questions listed above. The report shall focus on evidence required to answer the questions posed by this SOW. The report shall also include a list of recommendations as to how UNICEF and USAID Uganda on how their programs could more effectively support the reception centers and reintegration process. The Consultants shall provide seven hard copies and three electronic copies (in Microsoft Word, Times New Roman 12 point font) of the final report.

STUDY INFORMATION SOURCES

During the performance of this assignment, the following are some of the information sources that the consultants should review/consult:

‘Amnesty Commission Sub-Committee on Reception Center Minimum Standards – Center Workshop: Final Report’;

Dyan Mazurana, PhD and Susan McKay, PhD, ‘Girls in Fighting Forces in Northern Uganda, Sierra Leone, and Mozambique: Policy and Program Recommendations’, June, 2003;

‘Good Practice Principles of Working with Formerly Abducted and Other Vulnerable Children in War-Affected Areas of Uganda’, National Psychosocial Core Team, September 2004 (draft copy);

‘Northern Uganda: Understanding and Solving the Conflict’, ICG 2004;

‘An Investigation into the Psychosocial Adjustment of Formerly Abducted Child Soldiers in Northern Uganda’, International Rescue Committee, March 2002;

‘Draft Trip Report – Kitgum, Northern Uganda’, Marie de la Soudiere, Director, Children Affected by Armed Conflict Unit, International Rescue Committee;

‘Behind the Violence: Causes, Consequences and the Search for Solutions to the War in Northern Uganda’, Refugee Law Project, February 2004;

‘UNIFEM/UNDP Fact-finding Mission to Gulu, Northern Uganda’, 15 – 17th November 2004;

‘Associazione Volontari per il Servizio Internazionale (AVSI) Interim Evaluation of Community Resilience and Dialogue (CRD) Program’, June 1, 2002 – August 27, 2004;

‘Psychosocial Baseline Survey for Kaberamaido, Katakwi and Soroti Districts’, Transcultural Psychosocial Organization (TPO), November 2004;

Workshop on Reception and Reunification of former Abductees in Kitgum District, February 14, 2005, Workshop Findings;
'Nowhere to Hide: Humanitarian Protection Threats in Northern Uganda', CSOPNU December 2004, and;
Other studies/documents as identified by the consultants.

STAFFING

The USAID funded Monitoring and Evaluation Management System (MEMS) contract with Management Systems International (MSI) will assist the research team to carry out the special research project. MEMS, with the assistance of USAID and UNICEF will identify the primary international researchers who are experts in the field of child combatants, demobilization and reintegration and anthropology. It is expected that the staffing will be one or two international consultant(s) matched with a group of local researchers. USAID and UNICEF will require approval of all local and international staff used for field research. Local organizations in Uganda such as the NPCT, The Refugee Law Project or Isis-WICCI can assist in identification of a local partner to assist with the research in Uganda. International staff selected on the basis of their skills and knowledge who have previously worked in Uganda should have the opportunity to nominate local staff on the basis of prior work relationships.

USAID and UNICEF are envisioning a research team made up of an international anthropologist, a psychosocial expert, and perhaps a gender specialist all with experience working with -- or analyzing the work of -- reception centers and reintegration. If there is no gender specialist on the international team, it is expected that a local researcher with gender expertise will be included. The research team is expected to work with psychosocial practitioners and the National Psychosocial Core Team in developing a report that will reflect the many years of experience acquired through the reception centers, NGOs and CBOs working in the north with this target population – as well as, most importantly, the experience of the target population itself.

COORDINATION

The researchers will provide the technical expertise in their field while MEMS will be responsible for providing evaluation and review technical support to the researchers, coordinating the research process, and meeting the USAID requirements for the project. UNICEF will provide logistical support when the researchers are in northern Uganda, and both UNICEF and USAID will review requested drafts and the research plan to ensure a study of extremely high quality. MEMS and the researchers will be expected to coordinate closely with the NPCT, the reception centers, NGOs supporting reception centers, UNICEF, USAID and its implementing partners and civil society organizations. The researchers will have the technical capability and expertise to perform the research and the reporting function. MEMS will be expected to provide office space and general office support to the researchers.

ESTIMATED PERIOD OF PERFORMANCE

It is estimated that the performance period will be 60 days total research time (based on a 6-day work week) total writing time, including revisions of drafts. USAID and UNICEF require that the researchers perform a desk review of recommended literature prior to their arrival so that field research can begin April 1, 2005 as a target starting date. Due to the draft and review process the deadline for the final report will be August 15, 2005.

CONTRACTOR SELECTION

Primarily USAID and UNICEF will make recommendations to MEMS for the international and local researchers, where appropriate. MEMS will make a recommendation for the research team based on skill, availability and past research experience working with the target population. USAID and UNICEF will provide final approval of the team. USAID and UN regulations must be considered when evaluating the

cost of the contractors. MEMS should competitively bid the process of researcher selection in accordance with USAID regulations.

TERMS OF PAYMENT:

The Consultants assigned to work on this study will be paid in accordance with their individual contract with UNICEF or MEMS, but in no case will final payment be issued prior to USAID and UNICEF's acceptance of the final report.

ILLUSTRATIVE REPORT OUTLINE

Cover Page (standard format, identifying the title of the study, the date of the study both recipient's name and those of the members of the study team)

Preface or Acknowledgements

Table of Contents

List of Acronyms

Lists of Charts, Tables or Figures [Only required in long reports that use these extensively]

Executive Summary [Stand-Alone, 1-3 pages, summary of report. This section may not contain any material not also found in the main part of the report]

Main Part of the Report

Introduction/Background and Purpose: [Overview of the study. Summarizes the development problem addressed and the kind of assistance provided. Covers the purpose and intended audiences for the study and their main concerns as identified in the SOW.]

Study Approach and Methods: [Brief summary. Additional information, including instruments should be presented in an Annex]

Findings: [This section, organized in whatever way the team wishes, must present the basic answers to the questions, i.e., the empirical facts and other types of evidence the study team collected. This section must include the 3 key elements of the report, the assumptions, roles of the receiving organizations and centers, and the reintegration process.]

Conclusions: [This section should present the team's interpretations or judgments about its findings. This section must include the 3 key elements of the report, the assumptions, roles of the receiving organizations and centers, and the reintegration process.]

Recommendations: [This section should make it clear what actions should be taken as a result of the study.⁹²]

Lessons Learned: [In this section the team should present any information that would be useful to people who are designing/manning similar or related new or on-going activities in Uganda or elsewhere. Other lessons the team derives from the study should also be presented here.]

Special Section on Child Mothers: [This section should include an analysis of the special concerns and challenges facing child mothers. Recommendations should be included for proper intervention and support to this population.]

Annexes [These may include supplementary information on the study itself; further description of the data collection/analysis methods used; data collection instruments; summaries of interviews; statistical tables, an other relevant materials.]

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