PROTECTION OR VIOLATION: CHALLENGES OF REINTEGRATING AND REHABILITATING CHILD VICTIMS OF WAR IN NORTHERN UGANDA (1998-2011)

BY

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DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis is my own unaided work. All citations, references and borrowed ideas have been appropriately acknowledged. The thesis is being submitted for the Masters of Arts Degree in International Relations in the Faculty of Human and Social Sciences in the Department of History Politics and International Relations of the North West University: Mafikeng Campus. None of the present work has been submitted previously for any degree or examination in any other university.

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Dedication

A very special dedication to my sister Tem Sharon, who enabled me have the opportunity to study by sponsoring for my education and being there for me throughout my entire studies. To my late mom, who I know would be very proud of me and all those who made this possible. Thank you all.

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ACRONYMS/ABBREVIATIONS

ACRW	African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child
AIDS	Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
CAO	Chief Administrative Officers
CPA	Concerned Parents Association
CRC	Convention on the Rights of the Child
DDR	Disarmament Demobilization Reintegration
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
GDO	Gulu Development Office
GUSCO	Gulu Save the Children Organization
HRW	Human Rights Watch
HSM	Holy Spirit Movement
ICC	International Criminal Court
ICRC	International Community of the Red Cross
IDPs	Internally Displaced Persons
IRC	International Rescue Committee
LRA	Lord's Resistance Army
NCDDR	National Committee for Disarmament Demobilization and Reintegration
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NRA	National Resistance Army
NUSAF	Northern Uganda Social Action Fund

PSSP	Psycho-Social Support Program
RUF	Revolutionary United Front
SPSS	Statistical Package for Social Sciences
TDH	*Teres des Homes*
UDHR	Universal Declaration on Human Rights
UN	United Nations
UNAMSIL	United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone
UNICEF	United Nations Children Emergency Fund
UPDA	Uganda People's Democratic Army
UPDF	Uganda People's Defense Force
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WFP	World Food Program
WHO	World Health Organization
YSA	Youth Social Work Association

ABSTRACT

The use of children in war is one of the most universally condemned human rights abuses in the world, yet a large number of children are currently believed to be fighting in over 30 conflicts around the globe. While many of them die before they are released, others escape, are rescued or are returned by their captors. These children then face the daunting task of being rehabilitated and reintegrated into society. Despite the broad nature of the issue, and its huge individual and societal impacts, relatively little is known about child victims of war, their time in service and their experience of reintegration.

The Uganda government with hundreds of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO) is assisting child victims of war in northern Uganda, however, there's still a limited impact on the situation. Formerly abducted children still face tremendous amounts of difficulty upon their return to society and remain invisible in policy making and practice. As such, this research seeks to understand the challenges and experiences faced by these children while in captivity as well as upon their return to family and community. Previous research with child victims of war has documented varying outcomes among this group of a war affected society, suggesting that the processes of ending the conflict in northern Uganda are taking place. However, not enough has been focused on building evidence specifically around the concrete reasons and ways in which the government and all stakeholders involved are protecting, rehabilitating and reintegrating the child victims of war.

This research therefore shows how a number of children were abducted and their livelihood upon return. It highlights the resilience of these children in the midst of conflict and their strong will and ability to rebuild their lives.

The thesis describes the experiences of the Acholi and Lango child victims of war within the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA), and upon return to their families and community, and offers a critical look at all efforts made by all the stakeholders involved in the reintegration and rehabilitation of these children. It also provides suggestions and recommendations on how to improve and create successful outcomes in protecting the children of northern Uganda.

Table of Contents

CHAPTER ONE

1. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

1.1. Location and Ethnic Composition

There are 56 different ethnic groups living in Uganda and none seem to have the majority. Independence was granted to Uganda in 1962 and for the past 20 years a series of coups and one-party states emerged. Yoweri Museveni (the current president) wrestled power from Milton Obote in 1986 and has been president ever since. The country, to a certain degree, has enjoyed economic success. One staying in the capital city Kampala, one would think all is well in this country. However, there is a war of terror and intimidation occurring in Uganda. For two decades the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) has waged a war in northern Uganda. The LRA is a rebel organization that came into existence in 1986. This organization is led by Joseph Kony, a charismatic dictator who has no clear ideology other than incoherent statements regarding the rule of Uganda through the 10 commandments (Denholm, 2005).

With the changing nature and proliferation of conflicts following the end of the cold war, children have increasingly become victims of warfare. These children are recruited either forcefully or voluntarily. For the LRA, children have become a ripe recruiting ground from which it grows its ranks. Since the rebellion began, the LRA has abducted thousands of children and forced them to work as soldiers, sex slaves, and bondservants, with many forced to kill loved ones in order to break off family relations and dissuade future desertions. These children are mistreated and forced to commit unspeakable atrocities against their fellow abductees and family (HRW, 2008).

A child victim of war (Boy, 14) narrates, "In the bush, the rebels would beat us; they would even beat all of us without mercy though it was just one person who committed the crime. We would also be made to carry heavy loads on our heads for long distances".

Girl, 16 narrates, "I was raped by two of the rebels in the bush, it was the commander and another soldier. I cried and pleaded with them to stop.... they cut me and they put cocaine inside

the wound, after which they tied it with a cloth..... I felt numb and my head started turning. That is the time the second soldier started raping me."

Various scholars state that a large number of former child soldiers have witnessed someone being killed; killed another person; and/or were involved in abducting other children (UN Chronicle, 2004). Children experience war at a very personal level. They become combatants and as such they not only become fighters on the frontline, but also play other roles such as those of spies, cooks, laborers and messengers, while girls also become sex slaves; child mothers and wives (Veale & Dona, 2007, UNICEF, 2005, Machel, 1996).

The UN chronicle records that while in captivity with the LRA, over one third of the girls surveyed were raped and had conceived children. Children of war are often blamed for their involvement in the atrocities committed, and their psychological recovery and reintegration process can be complicated (UN Chronicle, 2004).

1.1.1. War in Acholi

The war in Acholi land has taken many twists and turns and has lasted for over 20 years. When the National Resistance Army (NRA) under Yoweri Museveni seized control of Uganda in 1986, it ruled the country through a "one –party system" (Lamwaka, 2002). Disheartened Acholi, unable to have a voice in Museveni's government, left the ranks of the military in droves. These former military soldiers started a resistance force, the Uganda People's Democratic Army (UPDA), led by Brigadier Odong Latek. Later that same year the NRA launched an offensive against the Acholi UPDA to punish "those soldiers who had left Kampala with their weapons" Demoralized and having failed to gain any sort of initiative, the UPDA resistance floundered (Briggs, 2005).

As the UPDA declined, Alice Lakwena formed the Holy Spirit Movement (HSM). Mobilizing small groups of soldiers desserting NRA and UPDA, Lakwena began building a small army based on political disenfranchisement, local spiritual ideology and powerful Christian beliefs. Under the guidance of Lakwena, the HSM proved to be a formidable force. By the end of 1986 there were claims of 18000 soldiers under her command (Allen, 2006).

Acholi support for the HSM grew, particularly within the youth of northern Uganda. Religion plays a major role among the Acholi, even when it comes to war. Spirituality and witchcraft were used to seemingly protect Lakwena's soldiers as they fought against the government of Museveni. These precautions and commandments achieved overwhelming initial success. Many believed that Alice indeed possessed spiritual power and she gained strong support (Otunnu, 2006). When soldiers were killed in battle, she explained that they had died because they were impure and had not followed her orders faithfully. The HSM was defeated in 1987 in Jinja. Alice Lakwena and some of her followers fled to Kenya, where she reportedly lived at the dadoob camp in northern Kenya (Veale and Starvru, 2007).

From the ashes of UPDA and the collapse of HSM rose Joseph Kony. He recruited the remnants of the two previous movements and formed his own organization. Kony called his movement the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) in 1991 (Harvey, 2003). The LRA began as a small unit that no one took seriously including the Acholi themselves. The number of LRA fighters varies, since the rebel group is based in Sudan and a couple of hundred cross the border at one time. Suffice to say that they have numbered as low as one hundred to as many as several thousand (Baines, 2007). Early in the conflict, when the LRA presented themselves at villages looking for food supplies, they were driven away by the local populace with stones and agricultural implements. As the conflict waged on, and as many local children were abducted by Kony, the population began to give the rebel force food and clothing when they came to raid villages at night (Akello and Reis, 2006).

By the 1990s, however, the LRA rebellion that had started as a northern movement against the government of Uganda had devolved into a pseudo-mystical terrorist operation. The LRA according to Baines, (2007) was largely funded by the Government of Sudan and sustained itself by kidnappings of children in northern Uganda and southern Sudan. The LRA captured more than 30,000 children in the period 1990-2010. These children have been held hostage as soldiers, sex slaves, and bondservants, with many forced to kill loved ones to break off family relations and dissuade future desertions. To avoid this grim fate, an estimated 35,000 "night commuters" walk miles each evening from their villages to sleep in the relative safety of town centers (Stover et al, 2007).

Allen, (2005), argues that the humanitarian and developmental consequences of the conflict are enormous. The fighting has generated some 1.8 million internally displaced persons (IDPs) most of whom are children and has caused the physical destruction of most socio-economic infrastructure in northern and eastern Uganda. Despite continued efforts to improve social welfare, poverty levels remain high in these regions, in stark contrast to the economic growth and poverty reduction that can be seen in the rest of the country.

Mc Intyre (2001) goes on to argue that the Government of Uganda has employed several means to end the armed conflict using such methods as military campaigns, dialogue with rebel groups, cooperation with neighboring countries such as Sudan, Rwanda and the DRC, and presidential pardons. Although such attempts have resulted in many of these rebel groups being defeated or renouncing armed conflict, others continue to undermine government capacities to enforce law and order, mainly in northern and eastern Uganda. Several peace negotiations under international auspices have yielded little progress to date.

1.1.2. Uganda Government

The government of Uganda has attempted to put down the rebellion in northern Uganda with military power and negotiations. By 2008, the UPDF had launched 6 military offensives starting with "Operation North" in 1991. This operation succeeded in diminishing the capability of the LRA; attacks by Kony against the population were few in 1992 and 1993 (HRW, 2008). Several attempts have been made at a peaceful settlement to the conflict. In 1994 an Acholi minister, Betty Bigombe, was appointed to represent the government in peace talks with the LRA (Allen, 2006). She managed to broker a tentative peace deal with Joseph Kony, which seemed to be promising. However, Museveni quickly gave the LRA an ultimatum to surrender within seven days and turn themselves in to government forces. The LRA did not wait for the seven days to expire; the killings and abductions resumed after 3 days (HRW, 2003).

"Operation Iron Fist" (2003 and 2004) was the last major offensive of the UPDF against the LRA. These offensives were launched across the border into Sudan in an attempt to disrupt Kony's base camps. These were met with mixed results. Reports state that although the UPDF

claimed to have liberated about 2000 children during the two iron fist operations, another 5,000 were abducted during the same time frame (HRW, 2003).

The Parliament of Uganda enacted a comprehensive Amnesty Act on 1 January 2000, and this was endorsed by the Government of Uganda on 17 January 2000. Since then, any Ugandan wishing to abandon rebellion will be granted amnesty, without risk of criminal prosecution or punishment in a national court for offenses related to the insurgency (Liu Institute for Global Issues, 2005).

1.2. Statement of the Problem

The rehabilitation and reintegration of children of war has not been properly coordinated and given the urgent attention it deserves. The majority of ex-child soldiers live a life characterized by emotional, cultural, psychological, social and economic hardships. Therefore, there is an urgent need for effective and workable solutions towards the reintegration and rehabilitation of the war affected children of Northern Uganda.

1.3. Aim of the Study

The aim of the study is to examine challenges and obstacles hindering effective reintegration and rehabilitation of child victims in northern Uganda.

1.4. Objectives of the Study

The objective of this study is to determine the success of the current rehabilitation and reintegration programs for former child soldiers in northern Uganda. Success is determined not only by the ex-combatants themselves, but by the other stake holders in the process as well. These additional stake holders include but are not limited to: the general population; the families of children; the international and local organizations involved in the process; and, the community leaders. The study will be framed by two main objectives:

- Examining the experiences of formerly abducted children from the moment of abduction, through captivity and their return to northern Uganda.
- Identifying the best workable intervention practices for reintegration.

The relevance of these objectives allows for the exploration of the reintegration experiences and efforts carried out by each stakeholder involved in the reintegration process. The research objectives will also aim at understanding the complexities of reintegration and rehabilitation that come with the horrendous effects of abduction, violations and general war conditions to which children fall victim.

Key Questions to be asked

The proposed research seeks to answer the following questions;

- What possible measures could be used to enhance the effective reintegration of war children?
- What are the challenges facing the reintegration of child-victims into society in northern Uganda?
- What are the current efforts carried out on the effective reintegration of war victims?

These research questions aim at understanding the complexities of reintegration that come with the traumatizing effects of abduction, violations and general war conditions of which children become a part. The relevance of the basic and subsequent research questions is that the questions allow for the exploration of the reintegration experiences of not only the formerly abducted children at the reception centers, and in the community including schools, but also of NGO workers at the reception centers, parents, members of the entire community and teachers as well. From these objectives, one hopes to build a complete and coherent picture of what is working well within the current programs, what challenges still exist, and identify possible measures towards effective rehabilitation and reintegration.

1.5. Hypothesis

Methods and efforts employed by Ugandan government and its stakeholders remain a challenge in effectively reintegrating and rehabilitating the child victims of war in northern Uganda.

1.6. Significance of the study

The researcher originates from the Northern part of Uganda in Lira district. Lira district was one of the regions in Northern Uganda that fell victim to the attacks of the Lord's Resistance Army.

Her early contact with Children/Victims of war (some of whom were friends and family) has generated an interest in pursuing workable strategies that will enable effective rehabilitation and reintegration issues, and this interest grew tremendously when a very close friend, who studied in Aboke secondary school in northern Uganda, was abducted by the LRA rebels in 1999. Her return from the war in 2008 influenced the researcher's desire and concern to address the plight of these voiceless and innocent victims of war. The abducted girl is just one of thousands of children who were abducted. Just like most of the young girls, she was forced into bearing children at a tender age by the rebels during the war.

The researcher hopes that her academic endeavor will contribute to connecting war child reintegration and rehabilitation issues to the broader agenda of conflict transformation and peace building. As a native of this region, the researcher's goal is to ensure that the plight and voices of the often absent victims is heard with the hope that the government, scholars and policy makers could use these voices in creating comprehensive measures and policies to protect victims of violent conflict.

1.7. Research Methodology

To gain insights into the previously mentioned issues, qualitative research methodology will be used. Pajares (1997) describes qualitative methodology as a design used in order to obtain narrative and rich descriptions. The use of a qualitative research is important because it will examine the nuances of the resettlement experiences of child victims of war, their involvement with family, other social relationships and social cultural activities upon return.

Furthermore, it will also allow for the children's stories to be told in their individual tone, context and affect. By narrating their own stories, the child victims will relate not only to the conflict but also reintegration issues at national and community levels as well as the difficulties and fears about reintegration. In this sense, the child victim's own voice in letting one know their experiences allows for a deeper understanding of their predicament.

1.7.1. Population

Identification of a research population that best corresponds to the study is critical. In view of the current study, formerly abducted children and youth aged between 11 and 18 will be selected for

the study. In addition to the formerly abducted children, a number of key informants will be consulted so as to acquire information on previous return and reintegration processes, and on any challenges facing these local processes. These key informants will include child protection and UN agency workers and community elders.

1.7.2. Sample size and Selection Method

The samples will consist of child victims of war aged between 7 to 18 years in Gulu and Lira districts. These districts represent the majority of the war affected population and exposure to conflict. Child victims below the age of 7 years and the abductees who have not yet returned will not be included in the sample. The inclusion of community respondents will provide a holistic and multi dimensional view of reintegration and rehabilitation challenges. Selection criteria of community members will include community elders, families of the victims, social workers and NGO's. Sample size will be 160 participants.

1.7.3. Data Collection Methods

Qualitative data will be collected through audio taped face–to-face interviews. Descriptive information such as length of time at residence, gender, age and sex will be asked from each participant. An interview guide will be used to encourage participants to tell their stories about the resettlement process, their concerns, practices and rituals related to their rehabilitation and reintegration as well as efforts and actions on the part of individuals within the community. All interviews and discussions will be conducted in the local language.

Individual interviews - the data collected from the study will be supplemented with separate single interviews with the abducted children. During these interviews a series of issues will be addressed. The questions will be designed to explore their experiences of capture, the length of time in captivity, and their subsequent return and reintegration into the community, the type of support they received, whether they lived with family or the reception centers, or neither, any psychological trauma such as nightmares, anxiety, suicidal thoughts, to mention but a few.

Focus Group discussions – these discussions will be attended separately by boys and girls and with facilitators who will help the children address a series of questions designed to explore the

children's experiences of capture, time in captivity, what problems they had encountered and whether and how they had resolved these; the quality of their peer relationships; and any benefits they had derived from their captivity. In addition the children will be asked for their views on reception centers and how they would design a project to benefit future child/youth returnees from the LRA. Further, discussions and interviews with adults in the communities and affected families will also be carried out in order to throw light on the contributions and challenges that they face in reintegrating and rehabilitating the formerly abducted children.

Secondary sources such as journals, articles, books, newspapers and internet sources will be visited for data collection. In addition, a review of documents like reports, publications, international and national laws related to promoting the reintegration of the children of war will also be used. The researcher will seek the permission of relevant authorities in carrying out the research by arranging a convenient time during which the relevant respondents would be available to complete the study.

1.7.4. Data Analysis

Scholars state that data analysis is the application of logic to understand and interpret the data that has been collected about a subject, (Churchill, 2002). As a result data collected will be clustered according to each approach used in order to develop a theory of common roles utilized to influence effectiveness of reintegration and rehabilitation efforts.

Upon return, audio taped interviews will be transcribed to clearly articulate the information provided by the participants. The interviews will further on be coded and emerging similarities within each interview and between the interviews will be looked for. Sample demographics will be summarized and a thematic analysis will be made on the narrative data. Discussions and documented review, the information gathered will be categorized and tabulated to address the purpose of the study.

In order to validate the data and strengthen findings from the study, the system of triangulation will be used. Triangulation uses multiple methods to ensure that each phenomenon is thoroughly examined from different perspectives. In addition, children's views and suggestions for future return and reintegration projects will be highly considered.

For the quantitative information, the findings reported will be based on factual information provided by the respondents. Researcher will check questionnaires for completeness and the data collected and compiled will be subjected to statistical analysis using the statistical package for social sciences (SPSS). Here the researcher will ensure that data presentation and discussion is facilitated by the use of tables, graphs and charts. All information generated from the interpretation of both sets of data will form the basis for compiling the findings.

1.7.5. Scope and Limitations of the Study

The findings from this study will be subject to the following limitations;

- In terms of coverage, two districts will be targeted. These are Gulu and Lira districts; this choice is based on the fact that they hold the highest number of children affected by the war.

- In the above mentioned districts, two IDP (Internally Displaced People) camps in Gulu and one IDP camp in Lira will be visited for data collection. Child protection agencies and community town councils will also be visited for data collection.

- Views will be gathered from child victims of war, child protection/social workers (in the field of reintegration and rehabilitation), community elders and affected families.

CHAPTER TWO

2. LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

INTRODUCTION

This literature review is written to highlight specific arguments and ideas in the current field of study. By highlighting these arguments, the writer attempts to show what has been studied in the field, and also where the weaknesses, gaps, or areas needing further study are. This chapter reviews the literature on the reintegration and rehabilitation of former children/victims of war. Rehabilitation and reintegration programs for former child combatants are a relatively new phenomenon. Yet the literature now demonstrates that the absence of such programs places these children at greater risk of re-abduction by former forces, either voluntary or through coercion. The review will therefore demonstrate to the reader why the writer's research is useful, necessary, important, and valid.

2.1. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1.1 Ecological theory

Social ecology theory emphasizes the interactions and transactions between people and their environment in order to foster healthy interdependency between the two elements (Ungar, 2002). The aim is to assess the resources and opportunities an environment provides for the safety, growth, development and health of individuals and families (Saleebey, 2001).

Weil (2005) suggests the theory describes structures and their functions while examining the processes within and between structures and boundaries with the primary objective of understanding stability. As environment exerts a very strong influence on the individual and vice versa, it is important to understand the type of influence exerted on these young children when they return. This involves an understanding of the experiences, perspectives and assets of the individual, family and community, as well as the political nature of the environment.

Factors which may impact reintegration include: individual characteristics of the child/youth and family, siblings, and peers both former child soldiers and those who were not abducted but who were still affected by war, elders, leaders, etc. Important ecosystem factors could include: the

community, local or indigenous support and services, culture, tradition, religion, IDP camps, NGOs, and international support and services. Influences may include: tribe, politics, the LRA, government, international community, and national as well as international economics.

Although a central tenet and criticism of ecological theory is adaptation to one's environment, and by default promoting the status quo, Weil (2005) suggests that theories focusing on stability and centrality are important in many community practice situations; she writes, "achieving sufficient stability and sense of membership is necessary for a community to act on its own behalf" (p. 93). Promoting stability within the community through leadership and capacity building is essential if children are to be granted acceptance and access to the opportunities that exist for other community members. These children must be given the opportunity to grow and learn like any other child, as well as the opportunity to demonstrate the capacity to actively contribute to the well-being of the community. Overall, it is imperative to understand how each system, and the factors contained within those systems, enhance or inhibit reintegration success.

2.1.2. Empowerment theory

Empowerment means different things to different people. In its simplest form, empowerment is defined by Minkler (1990) as the process by which individuals and communities gain mastery over their lives.

Rappaport (1987) uses a similar definition while adding democratic participation in the life of their community and a critical understanding of their environment. Empowerment links individual strengths and competencies, natural helping systems and proactive behaviors to social policy and social change (Rappaport, 1990).

Empowering child victims of war is an intentional, ongoing process centered in the local community, involving mutual respect, critical reflection, caring and group participation through which people lacking an equal share of valued resources gain greater access to and control over those resources.

Wallenstein (1992) would add that the goals of empowerment would be increased individual and community control, political efficacy, improved quality of community life and social justice.

One of the most important gaps in the literature is the strengths and skills associated with children returning from the LRA. Empowerment theory compels researchers to think in terms of wellness versus illness, competence versus deficits, and strength versus weaknesses (Perkins and Zimmerman, 1995). Empowerment research focuses on identifying capabilities instead of cataloguing risk factors, and exploring environmental influences of social problems instead of blaming victims.

Empowerment research and processes are lacking in northern Uganda. From the literature it is evident that the international community has been focused on providing services and support to returned children/youth and affected civilians, rather than strengthening existing services and supports that will be sustainable once the mandates of the NGOs are fulfilled.

The reintegration of former child-soldiers in Northern Uganda is an urgent imperative. As highlighted by Williamson (2005:185-205) the impacts of war and associated disruptions to normal life have profound effects on children. Many children experience displacement, fear and stigmatization. They also lose access to basic material resources, health services and schooling. Child soldiering damages social networks, impedes peace building and threatens both economic and social stability.

It is, therefore, important to gain a better understanding of how children are affected by their association with armed forces and what kind of assistance will enable their successful rehabilitation and reintegration back into civilian life.

2.2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The reintegration of former children of war in northern Uganda is an urgent imperative. As highlighted by Williamson (2005) the impact of war and associated disruptions to normal life have profound effects on children. Many children experience displacement, fear and loss of access to basic material resources, health services and schooling. Child soldiering damages social networks, impedes peace building and threatens stability. It is, therefore, important to gain a better understanding of how children are affected by their association with armed forces and what kinds of assistance enable their successful reintegration into civilian life.

The issue of reintegration is critical so as to ensure that cycles of violence and conflict are not perpetuated. It is crucial to secure the long-term sustainability of interventions, and to support and invest in the capacity of national and international authorities to assume their lead responsibility in caring for these children.

With regard to the children of war, available literature can be classified into several categories; books, journals, articles, case law as well as online articles dealing with children of war in Northern Uganda and Africa as a whole. For instance, authors such as Mc Kay & Mazurana, (2004) emphasize the importance of rehabilitation and reintegration of child soldiers; to these authors, reintegration is like restructuring the wider society. Sources on child soldiers in general and child victims of war in particular are books by; Akello, Richters and Reis (2006), Wessels (2006), Allen and Schomerus (2006), Annan, Annan et al (2006), Baines, (2006), Odeh and Sullivan (2004) to mention but a few. These authors show concern about the plight of children in post conflict situations placing emphasis on reintegration of child soldiers in general.

A group of other authors, Mc Kay (2004), Mazurana (2004) Carlson & Kasper (2002) and Temmerman (2001) agree with the above school of thought, but they further to criticize the availability of literature or documentation concerning the plight of each particular sex. They submit that systematic collection and analysis of data for each sex is needed to better identify the scope of children worldwide concerning their participation in armed conflict and their specific

needs. However, they do not show the inequality of, for instance female children against males, or older children against much younger ones in terms of educational opportunities and access to other reintegration resources.

Others authors include; Baines et al (2006), Stark (2005) Wessels (2006) Friedman et al (2000), Jareg (2005), Machel (2001), Brett and Specht (2004) and Honwana (2005). This school acknowledges the true scale and horror experienced by children in conflict, the long-term impacts of these experiences and the extent to which these affect their reintegration back into the community. They assert that the problem of reintegration of children of war into society and adhering to civilian peacetime values remains a serious concern. There is a general consensus that conventional reintegration programs have not met their needs. However, they fail to emphasize on the specific rights violated when they are excluded from reintegration programs and governmental commitments to fulfill protection of their rights.

Theoretically speaking, discourse in this area is relatively small. This dissertation hopes to add to the existing literature.

Reintegration is the most difficult phase of any disarmament demobilization or reintegration (DDR) process. Children, especially girls, are not always considered to be full members of an armed force or group nor are DDR staff properly trained to identify them and cater for their needs. As a result, children do not get access to essential services. Sometimes children themselves do not want to be identified as coming from an armed force or group, in order to avoid discrimination against them. Some may not know they have the right to benefit from any kind of support, for instance, children who flee and hide, and consider themselves deserters (Stark, 2005, Machel, 2001).

The challenge is to encourage girls and boys to benefit from reintegration and rehabilitation programs while avoiding any damaging effects. Girls face great difficulties during the process of being accepted back into their families and communities, with girl mothers and their children experiencing the highest levels of rejection and abuse upon return. Girls have complex relationships with men within the fighting forces, including their former captors; during reintegration phases, these relationships need to be dealt with in sensitive ways to ensure that the

girls' rights are upheld and that they remain secure. Many girls want to return to their education or receive training to be economically self-sufficient (Onen, 2005, Lamwaka, 2002).

2.1.1. CHILD VICTIMS OF WAR IN NORTHERN UGANDA

The LRA initially consisted of adults, but as time went on, children were forcefully recruited into Kony's army. It is difficult to ascertain how many children have been abducted. Numbers vary, but estimates of upwards of 25000 children abducted are not uncommon. If one takes into account the children that have come to the World Vision rehabilitation center in Gulu (15,000) and Gulu Save the Children Organization (8000), the numbers of abducted children are staggering (Veale and Starvru, 2005).

The first abductions of children began in 1987 at the Sacred Heart boarding school. In June that year, several girls were taken from the dormitory (Temmerman, 2001). One report argues that upwards of 90% of the LRA soldiers now are children (Briggs, 2005). These abductions were the beginning of a savage and brutal war where children are still being utilized as a tool to instill fear and terror in the Acholi people.

As stated by Allen (2006),

> ".....the abduction of children has been a deliberate strategy- a weapon of choice. Like rape, it has been used systematically and selectively to terrorize the population. Indoctrinating impressionable young people and making them do terrible things, such as kill their own parents, inverts the moral order and shows the power of the LRA".

Raids made by the rebel soldiers of the Lord's Resistance Army from their base in southern Sudan into Uganda hardly register on the global scale of conflict. Instead of these rebels confronting those of their stated enemy (the government of Uganda), they make war instead on the people from whom they themselves come. Rebels arrive in villages in the dead of the night to steal food and clothes and to punish anyone they suspect of collaborating with the regime. Collaborating may simply mean owning a bicycle or being a teacher in the local school. Punishment may mean death or mutilation (Mc Intyre, 2001).

The practice which gives this conflict its unique and most dreadful flavor is that the rebel army survives by feeding on the children of the Acholi people; the children which their cultural traditions demand protection. Rebels abduct children and use them as pack animals to carry their loot. The lucky ones are sent home with warnings that they should discuss their experiences. The others are taken on their journey back to the Sudan. Two thirds of these children are boys who become slaves and conscripts, the cannon fodder of any future raids. Girls may also be given a gun and told to fight, but most are given the title 'wives'. The girl child is a slave sexually and domestically, taken against her will despite her age (Hovil and Quinn, 2005).

Not only that, children who are too young and weak to keep up with the rebels are killed. These rebels kill them with pangas (broad heavy knives) or sticks. With a kind of sick logic, other children are forced to take part in these executions or become the next victim. The rebel's strategy is to entrap the children, implicating them in crimes, to turn love of their communities into hate and fear. They order children to lead attacks on their home villages, kill and select the next child victims, some of whom are their own brothers and sisters. Physically, rebels use these pangas to maim the children; psychologically they use mental torture to separate these children from their communities and hope of return, leaving them with no hope of any reunion with their families (Hovil and Quinn, 2005).

Despite this dire situation, the Ugandan government has done little to ease the suffering of the children in the North, leaving the response to the crisis largely in the hands of UN agencies, international humanitarian organizations, and local nongovernmental organizations (Allen, 2005). Many traditional and religious leaders and humanitarian workers in northern Uganda have long argued that the only way to give children of war confidence to return to their homes and villages is a negotiated peace settlement with the Lord's Resistance Army.

Children who return from this situation are traumatized. They relive the things done to them, they have nightmares. Many are reluctant or unable to talk about what they encountered; others are so frightened by anyone in army uniform. Many girls have sexually transmitted diseases and AIDS while others have war babies. Despite all these hardships that they are faced with, they still have to cope in a society that may possibly stigmatize them.

Approximately 1.4 million children remain displaced and in internally displaced persons camps. The Acholi region has suffered the most. Although Ugandan protection of IDP camps is argued to have improved since 2004, the most recent UN mortality studies reported an estimated 1,000 IDPs dying each week from disease and lack of access to adequate health care and clean water (Suarez and St.Jean, 2006).

In addition, girls and young women routinely suffer sexual and physical abuse. As improving security conditions in parts of northern Uganda allows for the return of some IDPs to their homes, there is an increasing need for the Government of Uganda to guarantee freedom of movement and restore regional security, agricultural and health capacity to create a better life for the victims.

In wartime, child victims not only act as perpetrators, but they are also victims. Extensive and extreme exposure to violent and horrendous acts while in captivity creates psychological trauma; this in turn presents significant risks to the post conflict psychological well-being of former child soldiers. Many former child victims of war struggle with feelings of guilt and shame over their own violent actions and have difficulty coming to terms with their wartime behaviors (Boothby, 2006).

Age influences the perception of children as either warriors or victims. Those who are abducted at a very young age are readily accepted as victims. Humanitarian and human rights organizations working with children generally see formerly abducted children as child victims of war in line with the convention of the rights of the child, adopting a straight "18 years" approach to childhood (CRC). According to these organizations, formerly abducted children are victims even if they had become adults by the time they escaped and returned to their communities (Wessells, 2004).

However, in spite of the above argument, for the thousands of people living in IDP camps, for those families who have suffered losses under the LRA, children are blamed and remain associated with the armed forces as the warriors and perpetrators of crime.

A child victim's perception on the other hand varies according to age and the amount of time spent in captivity. Survivors often see themselves as returning heroes, or brave survivors, which

scholars argue that to a certain extent this perception is a self protection against the stigma associated with being termed a victim. It is often through the context of reintegration and rehabilitation that children have an opportunity to explore and come to terms with their own experiences within the LRA.

As pointed out by Stark (2005), the challenge posed by the above is a definition problem. Definitions of child victims of war beg all the really important questions such as 'what is a child?' and 'what is a soldier?'. While most western countries and international legal instruments, including the Convention on the Rights of the Child identify a person under the age of 18 years as a child, this is not the only way to conceptualize childhood. In many African cultures, for example, adulthood is marked by certain rites of passage or ceremonial acts, (Liu Institute, 2005). These rites of passage signify when a boy becomes a man or a girl becomes a woman, and often occur before the age of 18. Other cultures believe that a child has reached adulthood when he or she assumes specific social or labor roles. What stems from this is that there is a conflict of definitions which are unique to the different organizations trying to help reintegrate these children. These organizations are diverse in their origins, some being western and others local.

In northern Uganda it is argued that at least 25,000 children have been abducted by the LRA since the beginning of the 20 year conflict (UNICEF, 2004). An estimated 12,000 children have been abducted since 2002, in an LRA backlash against President Museveni's "Operation Iron Fist" which was launched in March 2002. A large percentage of LRA's forces comprises of abducted children and youths, not only that, scholars go on to argue that an unknown number of abducted children have also died, either killed in combat, as a result of brutality by the rebels or from disease and neglect. In addition, it is not known how many have been captured by government forces during clashes, and how many of these have been reintegrated into society (UN, 2006).

In northern Uganda child victims of the LRA include hundreds of thousands of children who have died or suffered in squalor in the bush or camps for the past two decades.

Children are abducted on their way to or from school, and some child victims were abducted from boarding school. Others are abducted on their way to or from the fields, fetching water and firewood and in all the places of everyday life. The camps are also unsafe resulting in thousands of children being called night commuters, seeking shelter in nearby towns, at bus stations or church halls, to mention but a few. After abduction, children are initiated, after which they are made to commit atrocities, often against loved ones in order to ensure that they do not return home.

"I did not kill anyone during my first week in captivity and then, one day they asked me to prove that I was not scared. They took me back to my village and ordered me to kill my father. At first I said no, I can't kill my father, but then they said they'd kill us all and they started beating me with a panga. I took the panga and cut him up and then the other children were ordered to do the same to my mother. I felt pain but I could only cry silent tears, as the rebels could not know. They make us do all this so that we cannot return home." (Denholm, 2005).

Children are assigned to a specific rebel commander according to their age and gender, and are ordered to perform a variety of duties. Girls were trained to operate weapons and fight, in addition to performing gender specific roles of cooking, fetching water and serving as wives to the rebels (McKay and Mazuarana, 2004).

The loss of educational and economic opportunities, joblessness, and disabilities that children of war face are fundamental threats to their long-term stability. In northern Uganda, Annan and Annan et al (2006) found that, compared to children not associated with fighting forces, the longer children spent in the captivity of a rebel group, the larger the gap in education outcomes. Further, those who were abducted at younger ages were less likely to return to school after their release.

Research with child victims of war in Northern Uganda suggests that post conflict educational and economic challenges are tightly linked to former children of war, perhaps more so than their experiences with war itself.

Onen (2005) posits that the transition from military to civilian life may be difficult for children, because in spite of the difficulties they encountered, they may have found a defined role, responsibility, purpose and power in an armed force or group.

For children who have been in an armed force or group for many years, it may at first seem impossible to conceive of a new life; this is particularly true of younger children or children in armed forces or groups that have been indoctrinated to believe that the military life is best for them.

McKay and Mazuarana (2004) argue that, an estimated 30 percent of child combatants never enter formal reintegration, either because they are not aware of their rights, or choose to go to places that they recognize as providing safety, or because they are deliberately excluded as is often the case with girls who are victims of forced marriages, children who have fled the armed force or group, and those who went through a demobilization process, but did not receive any support for reintegration. Flexible systems should be put in place to link to other reintegration and recovery procedures and activities, so that children who demobilize spontaneously can also benefit from the care and protection services they need through reintegration (Wessells, 2004:124).

Social, economic and educational opportunities for the children in northern Uganda are very few. Apart from municipalities, there are virtually no secondary and tertiary schools in camps where the majority of children live. Even where there is access, children are often consumed with meeting their basic needs for daily survival. USAID (2000) reported that of the youth in camps, 75 percent argued that food security was one of the most pressing needs they faced on a daily basis.

According to Suarez and St Jean (2006), the children are so pre-occupied with daily struggles and survival that they are not able to develop the skills necessary to become the leaders of tomorrow. Research, according to some scholars, has shown that children are the most likely targets of LRA attacks and abduction, but also of Uganda Peoples Defense Force (UPDF) abuses based on suspected collaboration with rebels (Annan, et al, 2006).

Overburdened with responsibilities of domestic or agricultural labor for their families, children are forced to work in areas such as gardens, trips to water bore holes, collection of firewood to mention but a few, where LRA attacks are most frequent. Not surprisingly, many children succumb to hopelessness, giving in to drinking and other negative coping mechanisms.

In search of economic alternatives, male youth often volunteer to join home guard units (local defense forces) or the UPDF, including boys under the legal age of 18. Girls between 13 and 17 years of age are very likely to drop out of school; some elope with men in the hope of a better life (Leibig, 2005). Others engage in prostitution, particularly with the UPDF, who are among the only ones to have a regular income. Sexual and gender based violence is also very high in the camps, but when a girl is raped, unsatisfactory follow-up occurs by authorities, deterring reporting of abuses. Out of economic desperation parents will frequently try to negotiate a settlement of money rather than press charges (Leibig, 2005).

Children are rarely, if ever, taught life and leadership skills. Nor do they have many opportunities to participate in the political life of their communities. Several entities, including the World Bank, the Acholi Program, and Northern Ugandan Peace Initiative, have sponsored community development projects, but children have usually not been a target beneficiary of these programs (Kingma, 2000).

A handful of organizations, such as War Child Holland, focus on extra-curricular activities for youth. War Child Canada has recently opened an office, with intentions to increase legal services and advocacy for children in the region, although it is too early to tell if it has had any significant impact.

Wessels, (2006), Stark, (2005), Brett and Specht, (2004) argue that one of the challenges identified regarding children of war is the lack of enough data on the dimensions of the problem. It is often difficult to ascertain how widespread the problem of child soldiering is, since identifying child victims of war is so difficult. Night commuting and fleeing villages in a search for safer havens has also made it difficult to identify and gain an accurate number of children involved in the LRA conflict.

Fear on the part of the child victims to come forward has also contributed to the above problem. Identifying oneself as a child of war may place a child at risk of either being re-recruited or make the child a target for stigmatization, discrimination or retaliation for the crimes he or she committed while in captivity. Children who want to come forward may not be permitted to do so by a commander who has been terrorizing and exploiting them.

For all these reasons, gaining an exact count of children involved in a conflict is nearly impossible. Even the figures of child victims of war referred to by scholars are a broad estimate as opposed to a figure that is a result of systematic research.

2.1.2. NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL INSTRUMENTS FOR THE PROTECTION OF CHILDREN IN ARMED CONFLICT

Children in armed conflict who are internally displaced, or are at risk of becoming displaced, have rights just like all other children. These rights are expressly guaranteed and firmly entrenched in an extensive body of international law, in particular international human rights law and international humanitarian law. Human rights are freedoms and guarantees every human being is entitled to enjoy. International human rights law, which consists of both treaty law and customary law, affirms these rights and obliges States to respect, protect, and fulfill the human rights of all persons without discrimination of any kind, including on the basis of age, gender, ethnic origin, religion, birth or other status.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) of 1948 establishes the main civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights to which all persons are entitled. Although not a binding legal instrument in and of itself, many of its principles constitute customary law or have been incorporated into treaty law and consequently have gained binding force. The rights of children are most comprehensively articulated in the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) of 1989. Significantly, the CRC is the most widely ratified international human rights instrument in the world; all but two States, Somalia and the United States are signatories.

Many of the provisions of the CRC also form part of customary law, meaning they apply irrespective of whether a particular State has ratified the CRC. Moreover, the CRC does not allow for any derogation in times of emergency: the full range of rights it articulates apply in all

circumstances. In situations of armed conflict, the CRC's Optional Protocol on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict of 2000 is particularly relevant (Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict, UN General Assembly resolution A/RES/54/263, 25 May 2000).

INTERNATIONAL HUMANITARIAN LAW

The 1949 Geneva conventions do not specifically address the participation of children in armed forces (Article 17, 24 & 26 of the 4th Geneva Convention). However, additional protocols to the Geneva conventions make some provisions for the use of children in armed conflict. Not only that, but under protocol 1, there is an obligation to refrain from recruiting children under 15 but no obligation to refuse their voluntary participation. Protocol 1 further provides that the death penalty should not be applied to war crimes committed by those less than 18 years of age (Smith, 2006).

The use of children in internal armed conflicts is regulated by Additional Protocol 11, which increases the protection provided under common Article 3 of the Geneva Conventions. Article 4(3) of Additional protocol 11 provides that *"children who have not attained the age of fifteen years shall neither be recruited in armed forces or groups nor allowed to take part in hostilities,"* for instance to participate in military operations such as gathering information, looting, transmitting ammunition and food stuffs (paragraph 4557).

INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS LAW

CONVENTION OF THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD AND ITS OPTIONAL PROTOCOL

In response to the support for the Convention of the rights of the Child (CRC) reflected in its almost universal ratification, the development of more detailed standards against the use of children in armed conflict was pursued in the form of a Protocol to the CRC.

The CRC offers the protection of children before, during and after conflict. It is commonly described as the 'centerpiece of children's rights,' (Leibig, 2005). The CRC defines a child as a *"human being below the age of eighteen years, unless under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier,"* (CRC, 1989). It also affirms in Article 38, that *"State parties shall*

refrain from recruiting any person who has not attained the age of fifteen years into their armed forces." Since the CRC is a human rights treaty, it also applies in times of peace.

The Optional Protocol to the CRC provides a more detailed and comprehensive framework regarding the association of children with armed forces and groups. It raises the age of direct involvement in hostilities from fifteen to eighteen and requires that States, "*take all feasible measures to ensure that members of their armed forces who have not attained the age of eighteen years do not take a direct part in hostilities*," (CRC,1989).

ARTICLE 39 OF THE CRC: DUTY TO REHABILITATE AND REINTEGRATE

The article states the following:

"*State parties shall take all appropriate measures to promote physical and psychological recovery and social reintegration of a child victim of; any form of neglect, exploitation, or abuse; torture or any form of cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment: or armed conflicts. Such recovery and Reintegration shall take place in the environment, which fosters the health, self-respect and dignity of the child.*"

Apart from article 39, which deals with reintegration, the Convention has enshrined other provisions, which can be interpreted to imply reintegration. These are summarized in the right to survival, protection, development, and participation (CRC, 1990).

RESOLUTION 1379 (NOVEMBER 2001) UNTITLED

Article 1 expresses its determination to give the fullest attention to the question of the protection of children in armed conflict. Article 8 calls upon all parties to armed conflicts to provide protection of children in peace agreements, including, where appropriate, provisions relating to the disarmament, demobilization, reintegration and rehabilitation of child soldiers and the reunification of families, and to consider, when possible, the views of children in those processes.

Article 11 in addition requests the agencies, funds and programs of the UN to devote particular attention and adequate resources to the rehabilitation of children affected by armed conflict,

particularly their counseling, education and appropriate vocational opportunities, as a preventive measure and as a means of reintegrating them into society.

The UN recognizes the equal and inalienable rights of all its members. It is for this reason that major UN instruments are adopted to promote these rights. It also has Resolutions like Resolution 48/157 on the 'protection of children affected by armed conflicts', among others with the same objectives. This Resolution was established as a response to the request by the Committee on the Rights of the Child pursuant to its power under article 45 of the CRC. Under reintegration, they argue that it refers to the process which allows ex-combatants and their families to adapt, economically and socially, and lead a productive civilian life (UN, 2000).

Reintegration generally entails the provision of a package of cash or compensation in kind, training, and job and income generating projects. These measures frequently depend for their effectiveness upon other broad undertakings, such as assistance to returning refugees and internally displaced persons; economic development at the community and national level; infrastructure rehabilitation; truth and reconciliation efforts; and institutional reform. Enhancement of local capacity is often crucial for the long-term success of reintegration (Lamwaka, 2002; UN, 2004).

Against this backdrop, this study will establish whether the government of Uganda and other stake holders have adhered to their legal and constitutional duties that they are obliged in order to successfully reintegrate the children of war back into the community.

AFRICAN CHARTER ON THE RIGHTS AND WELFARE OF THE CHILD

Based on the definition of the child in the CRC and its Optional Protocol, the African charter on the Rights and Welfare of the child (ACRW) places obligations on state parties to "*take all necessary measures to ensure that no child (under 18) shall take part in direct hostilities*," which allows children under 18 to be involved in support functions. However, it further provides that States Parties shall "*refrain in particular, from recruiting any child*," which should be read to include both voluntary recruitment and compulsory recruitment (Happold, 2005).

This would therefore render the involvement of children under the age of 18 less likely in the support functions to which they are technically allowed to participate.

THE LAWS OF UGANDA AND THE ROLE OF NATIONAL GOVERNMENT

Governments constitute the first destination for action concerning reintegration of child victims of war. They have the most direct, formal, legal and political responsibility to ensure effective protection and provide relief for them.

As stated by scholars such as McKay, (2003), ensuring the rights of children to health, nutrition, and education, social, emotional and cognitive development is imperative for every country and entails obligations for every government. UN Resolution 1612 of 2005 stresses the primary role of national governments in providing effective protection and relief to all children affected by armed conflict. In the same light, it was held that the government must ensure that private persons do not interfere with the enjoyment of rights (Sepulveda, 2004).

CONSTITUTION OF UGANDA

While the constitution does not mention child recruitment or children in armed conflict, the Ugandan National Resistance Army Statute does set the minimum age for recruitment at eighteen. Not only that, the constitution has a provision, which obliges every Uganda citizen to protect children against any form of abuse. It also provides that vulnerable persons especially children should be protected against any form of harassment or ill treatment;

"Children are entitled to be protected from social or economic exploitation and shall not be employed in or required to perform work that is likely to be hazardous or to interfere with their education or to be harmful to their health or physical, mental, spiritual, moral, or social development". (Art 34(4) of Uganda Constitution).

It also specifies that "children may not be separated from their families or the persons entitled to bring them up against the will of their families or of those persons, except in accordance with the law" (Article 31(5).

Good intentions by the international community have not evolved in all cases into the willingness of states to implement and enforce these articles and as a result, there are estimates that over two million children are killed in armed conflict.

Millions of child victims of war around the world do not enjoy their rights and are in conditions of grave risk and extreme vulnerability, deprived of such fundamental elements as safety, access to the basic necessities of life, and to education. Most worryingly, situations of displacement persist, thereby robbing countless children of any semblance of a normal childhood.

National authorities have the primary responsibility to protect, assist and find durable solutions for children. Yet, all parties to a conflict, State and non-state actors alike, are obligated to protect children from the harmful effects of armed conflict. This responsibility includes the obligation to prevent arbitrary displacement, to protect and assist internally displaced persons and to facilitate safe, voluntary and durable solutions to displacement; paying special attention at all times to the particular vulnerabilities and risks faced by the children

In addition, child victims have the same rights and freedoms as all other children in their country. In reality, however, they often face discrimination. In many cases, discrimination along ethnic, racial or religious lines is what causes people to flee. Once displaced, children often find that these forms of discrimination persist and impede their access to protection and assistance. Moreover, many children are stigmatized simply for being displaced. Instead of being seen as people who require protection and humanitarian assistance, child victims often are marginalized and face discrimination, for instance in accessing food aid, medical care, education, civil registration including birth registration, protection from the government, police and military, and even national systems for child protection.

2.1.3. REINTEGRATING AND REHABILITATING CHILD VICTIMS OF WAR

Rehabilitation is understood as an organized process which follows children's demobilization, escape or capture. It is a process of reorientation, rest, recuperation and reflection which needs to take place in a safe setting, interaction of people who have received special training to facilitate the readjustment. With rehabilitation, there will be times of positive progress followed by periods of very slow movement, and also retracing of steps. Indeed sometimes there will be a

complete halt and even active retreat. Fear, grief, anxiety, anger, guilt, shame, to mention but a few, will hamper progress. Determination, health, love and encouragement of others and hope are very vital for successful rehabilitation (Jareg, 2005). Rehabilitation has proven to provide significant benefits to children. Research indicates that children returning home without interim care are bound to be more aggressive, unstable or confused.

Reintegration on the other hand is described as the process of re-uniting a child with his/her family and facilitating their community membership (Humphrey and Weinstein, 2007). Reintegration is a long-term process of a soldiers' transition to civilian life, achieving a viable civilian role and identity. Reintegration is an intensely social process of gaining acceptance, becoming functional in the social context, and developing appropriate relations in families, peer, and civic groups, and niches of work. Far from an individual process, it entails reciprocal growth, a combination of individual and group change (Wessells, 2006a).

Reintegration of children in situations of war is a complex and long-term proposition. It begins with negotiating the release of children and their physical extrication from armed groups. The family tracing and reunification phase of reintegration is often complicated, time-consuming and resource-intensive (Reichenberg and Friedman, 2000). Beyond the practical challenge of locating the families and communities of lost children, successful reunification must also address the less straightforward challenge of spiritually reconnecting children and their communities. This includes dealing with the sense of alienation, guilt or anger that children may harbor against families whom they may accuse of failing to protect them.

At the same time, reintegration programs must also take into account challenges related to the communities themselves being prepared to accept the return of their children, in contexts where atrocities may have been committed by those children in their communities. According to Verhey (2001:25), while demobilization represents the point at which a child leaves military life, reintegration represents the process of establishing a civilian life.

Reintegration programs need to support the child in constructing a new, positive course of development. The child victim's development will have been affected in many ways by his or her experience in armed conflict. The context of their family and community life will likely have

changed because of increased poverty, the death of family members and friends, displacement, and perhaps resettlement.

Reinchenberg and Friedman (2000) argue that the process of reintegration is complex and should include a multitude of inter-related issues: health and basic needs, psychosocial support, a family context, establishing positive relationships, and opportunities for education and income generation. The combination of these elements, balancing social and economic factors is essential.

While the two processes of disarmament and demobilization collect information on weapons and forces, reintegration procedures need to collect data on skills, aptitudes, intentions, and expectations. Reintegration and rehabilitation programs can happen at the same time as other long-term peace building programs (McKay and Mazuarana, 2004:57). On the other hand, reintegration and rehabilitation programs offer assistance such as vocational training and cash assistance for ex-fighters that help and facilitate economic and social reintegration. The goal of these programs is to have "*a component of the national strategic plan for reconciliation, reconstruction, and development*" (Bentacourt, 2008). A successful reintegration process includes the needs of child victims.

In order to provide appropriate assistance for child victims, it is vital that those involved in peace negotiations, all stakeholders, and child advocates decide what is the adequate rehabilitation and reintegration assistance for the child victims and for how long such assistance needs to be provided.

The reintegration and rehabilitation program is a very important step. All the ex-combatants, whether they are male or female, child or adult, need to be included in this process. Male soldiers, it is argued, receive the most attention in reintegration and rehabilitation. However, research studies show that reintegration is not complete without the involvement of women, and communities will not function well without them (McKay, et al, 2006).

The UN reintegration and rehabilitation program states that the programs must respond to the best interest of the child. Such programs should focus on promoting the self-esteem of these victims. All the activities need to take into account the age and developmental age of each child.

Furthermore, programs should be based on ongoing trust relationships along with an adequate time and resource commitment as well as continuous collaboration among all relevant participants.

Individual factors as well as community factor models have been identified as possible explanations for possible reintegration of child victims of war. On one hand most efforts have been found to focus on the individual children neglecting community support for reintegration and rehabilitation, and vice versa hence the limited success achieved. Akello, Richters and Reis (2006:229), found that failed reintegration efforts of former children or victims of war are often sought on an individual level-such as a child's psycho-trauma that in turn lead to behavioral problems, or a habitual recourse to violence as a survival strategy.

Other explanations are sought on a community's difficulties in accepting the innocence of a child who was forced to kill or who has children by a rebel father that in turn leads to stigmatization and rejection of the child.

Northern Uganda

There are several steps involved in the reintegration of child soldiers. It must be a holistic approach involving humanitarian aid agencies, government and community interaction. In summary, the process is generally as follows;

- Interim Care Centers for former child soldiers to include medical and social counseling;
- Immediate determination of location of immediate or extended families;
- Humanitarian agency begins sensitization campaign with families in anticipation of the return of the child soldier
- Reunification of the children with their families
- Child enrolled in school or given vocational training
- Follow up by humanitarian agency.

Unfortunately there is little in the way of academic literature that focuses specifically on the assessment of child soldier programs in northern Uganda. There are, however, several documents written by practitioners, which discuss the difficulties encountered during the process. For

example, Refugees International has stated that many former child soldiers once reunited with their families end up back in the IDP camps from which they were originally abducted.

Many children fear to return to their families because of fear of retribution from the communities from where the former child soldiers may have committed atrocities (Harlacher, 2006). Another report from the human rights and peace center articulated that the best method of reintegrating the children back into society is through the use of traditional methods and community (HRW, 2003).

There exists a number of documents and literature outlining the means and methods of reintegrating the children of war around the world, and, more specifically in northern Uganda. Yet most literature refers to single sector humanitarian aid, mixed with single level approaches. The "one size fits all" approach does make for a coherent, complete picture of holistic rehabilitation and reintegration (Allen and Schomerus, 2006). These former ex-combatants are no longer children and neither are they adults. They require extended access to trauma therapy as well as education training. Some of these children have to learn for the first time how to resolve disputes by peaceful means. Former children of war represent the future generations of households and the next leaders of their society (Annan et al, 2006).

This chapter provided a framework to this study in which views of prominent authors on the subject of reintegration of child-victims of war were analyzed. It also focused on the concept of reintegration of former children of war as well as its importance in the socio-economic development of northern Uganda. It further explored the concept of reintegration measures, by analyzing various theoretical views also posited, and evaluated their value in light of current measures taken to reintegrate these children.

In regard to the children of war, the literature available in relation to this study can be classified into several categories; books, journal articles, case law as well as online articles dealing with children of war in northern Uganda and Africa as a whole.

CHAPTER THREE

CHILD VICTIMS OF WAR

3.1. CHALLENGES FACING THE REINTEGRATION OF CHILD-VICTIMS OF WAR IN NORTHERN UGANDA

Attempts to analyze challenges of reintegration of the former child soldiers reveal a compendium of problems that need to be grappled with. The first challenge pointed out by Stark (2005) is a definition problem. What is a child? While most (though not all) people would probably agree that childhood begins at birth, reaching agreement about the time at which childhood ends is much more difficult. Childhood itself is a relatively modern concept. In the past, children moved from a sort of limbo status to adulthood very quickly, perhaps as young as age 7 or 8. Since then, particularly with the discovery of adolescence, the age at which children are thought to become adults has not only increased, but has also become increasingly unclear.

Part of the problem is that the age at which a young person may be eligible for military service may be younger than that at which he/she may vote. Often it is left to politicians or the legal profession to arrive at these definitions. This is especially true in societies where political violence exists. In such societies defining the age at which childhood ends in certain spheres can have important political ramifications. No politician wants to be accused of imprisoning children or, worse, killing them. The solution therefore is to invent some other name for older children or even to redefine the limits of childhood itself.

In the absence of any clear theoretical rationale in this area, one would define a child as broadly possible as the period from birth to the late teens. This is roughly comparable to the UN Convention on the Rights of the child which defines a child to mean 'every human being below the age of eighteen years....."(Article 1); the same convention suggests that states should try to ensure that military service does not begin before the age of fifteen years (Article 38).

The problem with reintegration programs in northern Uganda may be the focus on broad-based psychosocial assistance to the traumatized former combatant. An assessment of the impacts of

abduction suggests that the most pervasive and arguably largest impact is on education and livelihoods rather than physical or psychological trauma (Wessels, 2004).

The LRA's recruitment tactics provide a unique but tragic opportunity to identify the lasting impacts of military service and the gaps to be filled by reintegration programs. In most contexts, ex-fighters are a selected segment of the population, including those who chose to join, those screened by the armed group, and those more vulnerable to abduction. Thus a comparison of combatants with non-combatants confuses the impacts of abduction and combat experiences with pre-existing differences (Betancourt, 2008).

Violence, abductions, beatings and torture leave scars on the body which fade but do not quite disappear. Scars in the mind cut as deep and last long. There is no obvious treatment for a child who has experienced horrific events. In an interview with Human Rights Watch (1997), 17 year old Christine said, "*Whenever they killed anyone, they called us to watch. I saw 11 People killed this way. One of them was a boy they found in his home, and called him outside. They made him lie on the ground and they pierced him with a bayonet. They chopped him with the bayonet until he was dead. Seeing this at times I felt like I was a dead person-not feeling anything. And sometimes I would feel like it was happening to me, and I would feel the pain.*"

Sometimes a child's mental health collapses completely due to these kinds of events. Most of the children who escape or those who are captured and brought home feel a sense of excitement at the thought of meeting family and friends; however this is short lived. Their sense of joy is blinded by fear and anger and a loss of confidence in their former way of life (Krijin, 2001).

In addition, most reintegrated children live in fear of what will happen in case the rebels return. Not only that, children live with a memory of powerlessness. They could not control what happened and saw that their parents and community leaders, whom they were brought up to depend upon were also helpless. This created a sense of betrayal on the part of the children as well as feelings of anger, regret and resentment.

Reintegrated children live under desperate circumstances, and many return to find their parents or relatives now living in squalid camps, or to learn their parents have since died. Stigma and discrimination mean that many formerly abducted children lack parental or community support, and must learn to fend for themselves.

Due to psychological trauma, many find it impossible to return to school or to integrate among the local population in camps. For these reasons, many LRA returnees prefer to stay in the towns or even join the UPDF. For those who do return to camps, the humanitarian and psychological support they received at reception centers does not continue in the camps, where little or no follow-up has been conducted (Jareg, 2005). USAID (2000) also argues that in Anaka camp, only 3 of the more than 50 formerly abducted children interviewed had received a reinsertion package from the Amnesty Commission.

Looking closely at these challenges may give a picture that reintegrating children is an insurmountable task. However, various studies reveal that measures are emerging up that provide hope and possible inroads in the challenge of reintegrating former child soldiers into normal civil society. This study will take a thorough investigation of the underlying reasons for the failed attempts at reintegrating children back into society.

Stover (2006) is of the view that the children in northern Uganda and especially the victims of war have suffered terribly over the past two decades and can be seen as the main victims of this conflict. It is estimated that the LRA has abducted at least 20,000 children and youths, although others claim that the figure is far higher. Of these, 46 percent are believed to be children below 15 years. Children living in the camps have limited access to adequate health care. Researchers recently noted that among children under five, 62 percent had reported being ill. Ailments included malaria, persistent coughing or difficulty breathing, and diarrhea daily. Extremely poor children in some camps have gone to school dressed in World Food Program (WFP) food and seed sacks. This grim situation is compounded by the rise in the number of children aged 15 years or less in northern Uganda (Suarez and St Jean, 2006).

The nature and duration of the conflict created tremendous humanitarian, social, and economic costs for all of Uganda, particularly for children. Child protection has not been a priority for governments, despite national and international laws guaranteeing their basic rights for children.

Throughout the conflict, LRA leader Joseph Kony created his army primarily through the violent abduction of children. During the height of insecurity, from 2002-2005, the lack of civilian protection in displacement camps created the phenomenon of "night commuters." Parents felt

that they had no choice but to send their children to walk for several miles to the nearest town to sleep at night, in the hopes of avoiding abduction (HRW, 2003).

Years of conflict have severely impacted on the lives of children in northern Uganda. Not only do they live in terribly insecure environments, they also lack access to education, adequate health care, and basic psychosocial services.

Reception centers have been created to rehabilitate and reintegrate LRA returnees into their communities. Night shelters have been established to provide shelter for thousands of child victims, who leave their villages at sunset and walk to larger towns reportedly to find secure places to spend the night. These initiatives have been a tremendous relief for war-affected children and youth. However, scholars argue that the diminishing number of LRA returnees coming to the reception centers, and the social dynamics attracting "night commuters" to the shelters suggest the need for new approaches to respond to these recent developments. This finding is supported by the preliminary findings of two recent UNICEF studies of LRA returnees and night commuters (Allen, 2005 and UNICEF, 2004).

Another issue is the lack of recognition of child soldiers in most peace talks. A report regarding child soldiers in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) states the need for a separate reintegration program for child soldiers; indeed, child soldiers require special psychosocial counseling and education requirements in order to be properly reintegrated back into society (Boothby, 2006). In Sierra Leone, rehabilitation and reintegration of ex-combatants initially did not recognize or factor in child soldiers as part of the process (Krijin, 2001).
Consequently the UN mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL) was forced to play "catch up" and implement methods to deal with child soldiers. Unfortunately child soldiers who served in the revolutionary united front (RUF) in Sierra Leone, and who were denied the initial reintegration package, fled across the border to fight in Liberia's civil war before the UN recognized its error. A study undertaken in Liberia posits that child soldiers who were not rehabilitated properly run the risk of reintegrating themselves into prostitution or crime or will tend to flee to another conflict (McKay, 2005).

In addition, how to deal with the psycho-social rehabilitation of children of war is of importance. Machel states that rehabilitation programs to support child psycho-social well-being should include an understanding of local cultural practices, and traditions (Machel, 1996). Wessells (2004) agrees that Western approaches and concepts to psycho social healing cannot be effectively implemented in every cultural context. Some scholars state that, in sub Saharan Africa healing must go way beyond western conceptions and thinking, and include local and cultural understanding and practices. *"Formerly abducted children often report that their greatest stress is not the residues of past violence, but their inability to secure an economic livelihood"*, (Wessels, 2004).

Another issue concerns normalcy for children once they are reintegrated back into their respective communities. One of Machel's recommendations to the UN regarding the psychological recovery and social reintegration of former children of war is intriguing. She articulates that, rather than focusing on a child's emotional wounds, programs should aim to support healing processes and to re-establish a sense of normalcy. If the child is to return to normalcy that is to say, the conditions prior to abduction into the war effort, is not the country and international community responsible for continuing the proliferation of child soldiers. Children returning to poverty and a lack of education or economic ability run the risk of being re-abducted or recruited back into the conflict (Machel, 1996).

One of the issues also centers on the importance of prevention. Once rehabilitated and reintegrated, how does society prevent the recruiting of children back into the conflict? Machel states that the most effective way to protect children is to prevent the outbreak of armed conflict. She goes on to say that religious, traditional and community leaders have often been successful at conflict prevention.

Not only that, literature highlights the lack of participation of children and the community in the reintegration process. Akello et al. (2006) state that ex-combatant children are usually not asked about their own perception of their past and their wishes regarding reintegration, and that programs are implemented in a top-down manner. Additionally, programs and research tend to focus on children's weaknesses instead of building upon their strengths and resilience. The most glaring gap in the literature is the lack of research on and programs for children, especially girls,

particularly child mothers and their children (Akello et al, 2006; McKay, 2005; Veale and Dona, 2003; Veale and Stavrou, 2007).

This research intends to address these gaps by specifically researching the experiences, needs and strengths of children who have returned to northern Uganda including those with children born from rebel fathers in addition to the social and cultural context of reintegration.

Unfortunately the reintegration of children of war is, as observed by Otunnu (2006:1). *"In northern Uganda, the government has warehoused two million people in 200 'superdomes',* for the last 10 years, in conditions more abominable than what we witnessed in the New Orleans Superdome. The human rights and humanitarian catastrophe unfolding in northern Uganda is a methodical and comprehensive genocide, conceived and being carried out by the government. An entire society, especially the children, are being systematically destroyed physically, culturally, emotionally, socially, and economically in full view of the international community." Preliminary survey by the researcher in regard to re-integration is in line with Otunnu's (2006:1) observation that the process is not well executed.

NEW APPROACHES TO FINDING REINTEGRATION MECHANISMS

(Western Approaches).

Most of the existing literature focusing directly upon the reintegration processes of children in northern Uganda stresses the impact of Western ideas. The Western belief that children are essentially vulnerable promotes the concepts of innocence and victimhood which underlie reintegration processes (Allen, 2005). Scholars argue that there are three major research themes regarding reintegration strategies. These include: Western influence and presence in providing reintegration mechanisms; discussions of culture and traditions as both impediments to reintegration processes or strengths in building peace and stability; and the invisibility of girls. What follows is a detailed discussion on each of these themes.

International pressure to accept children's innocence is viewed by Akello et al. (2006) as contributing to the poor success rate of reintegration strategies. They state that "*the unwillingness of communities to welcome formerly abducted child soldiers is based on the refusal to accept the idea that such children are not accountable for the crimes they have committed*". The concepts of innocence and forgiveness are also described as barriers to successful reintegration by Veale and Stavrou (2007). They found that reintegration based solely on discourses of peace and forgiveness, without a mechanism for acknowledging identity transitions of returnees, especially for those who were members of the LRA for a long time, may leave them vulnerable to rejection and re-recruitment by armed groups.

Additionally, Allen (2005) discovered that people rarely admitted to wanting revenge or recompense while in public, however, in private they admitted that forgiveness with impunity was difficult. The victims of the LRA interviewed by Human Rights Watch (2005) also did not agree with the prospect of leaders being forgiven; they wanted justice and in some cases, retribution.

Human Rights Watch (2005) believes there is a discrepancy between the opinions of community leaders, who appeal to cultural values such as forgiveness, and victims on the topics of justice, accountability and reconciliation. For McKay (2005), the Western approach of children being victims and lacking agency in the conflict inhibits them from receiving necessary assistance. She

states that despite recent and increasingly robust data detailing children in fighting forces, the international community, governments, and militaries continue to ignore and deny the extent of children's' involvement and offer inaccurate and reductionist explanations for their presence (McKay, 2005).

When children are included in rehabilitation and reintegration programs, McKay (2004) states that Western-style individualistic approaches are usually inappropriate as the community is a central concept to promoting health and well-being. Many NGOs view art therapy as providing the child or youth an alternate avenue for expressing their experiences and feelings as many collectivist societies tend to discourage their members from revealing problems to actors outside of the community.

Edmonson (2005) however, critically states that art therapy used by one international NGO was not used as a personal expression of trauma and healing, but as a means to market trauma in order to attract the attention of the Western world and ensure the organization's self-sustainability. As a result of this international marketing, children were encouraged to suppress their own unique stories, strengths and coping mechanisms.

The Western discourse of forgiveness was highlighted in a quote by a former captive: "Sometimes they say 'forget your past'.... It is important to remember (these) times, the times that made you strong. Like me, I remember what is most important, my strength that kept me alive" (Edmondson, 2005).

In an article describing their experiences of counseling in northern Uganda, Annan et al. (2006) expressed the difficulties of integrating Western-based training with its own culture, its values, beliefs and ways of healing.

Although the authors highlighted the underlying assumption that individuals and collectives have their own resources that they can draw on for survival, recovery, and development, the authors still neglected the strengths and capacities of the children they counseled.

3.3. ACHOLI CULTURE AND TRADITIONS

MATO OPUT – THE RITE OF RECONCILIATION

"Mato oput" refers to the traditional rituals performed by the Acholi to reconcile parties formerly in conflict, after full accountability. It is way of accepting former offenders back into the community once they have acknowledged and accepted responsibility for what they have done (Harlacher, Francis, Carolynne and Ronald, 2006).

Mato oput involves the drinking of a concoction of the blood of a sheep and a bitter root. It is shared between former adversaries only after elaborate negotiation and when compensation has been agreed to as an expression of remorse and indication that the conflict has been resolved. The sharing is done by a representative of both sides of the conflict (Liu institute, 2005). Previously, mato oput occurred only rarely, usually after a murder within a moral community, rather than after a war (Allen, 2006).

During the period 1986 to 1996, however, when the formal policing and court systems had collapsed in Uganda, many victims of crime turned to their local leaders for a means of redress that was more trusted than appealing to the occupying army. Thus mato oput and the traditional justice mechanisms assumed and enhanced significance (Lamwaka, 2002). Murithi (2002) discussed the need to rebuild social trust in northern Uganda in order to promote peace. He highlights the fact that intrastate conflicts divide the state's population by undermining interpersonal and social trust, consequently destroying the mechanisms that have promoted collective action for the community's wellbeing.

The civilians of northern Uganda are divided by their different loyalties, as some want peace offered by the government and others want justice offered to the rebels. Murithi (2002) goes on to promote the Acholi's own reconciliation mechanism, the Mato Oput (meaning the Rite of Reconciliation), as a way to provide conflict resolution and build social trust.

Traditional leaders have been strongly in favor of mato oput. Mato oput is one of the best justice systems in the world because it forgives, and restores broken relationships and creates the process of healing in the hearts of those who have been wounded by violence and death.

Akello et al. (2006) and Veale and Stavrou (2007) also recommend that the Mato Oput be utilized to publicly recognize wrongdoing, as the community is unable to forgive and forget the atrocities the rebels have inflicted upon them. Other research suggests that using traditional reconciliation mechanisms may be complicated by post-traumatic stress and depression (Vinck et al, 2007). The authors discovered that respondents reporting symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder and depression were more likely to favor violent over non-violent means to end the conflict, an obvious implication for peace building (Vinck, Stover, Pham and Weinstein, 2007).

Local cultures, beliefs and social factors may play a role in shaping attitudes and opinions toward peace and point to the need to consider such factors in policy making.

Other researchers have examined the discrepancy between the perceptions of children and the community in regards to the reintegration process. Rodriguez, Smith-Dersen and Akera (2002) found that there is clearly a difference between how the community perceived how they are welcoming returnees and how returnees feel they are being welcomed. Veale and Stavrou (2007) states that while returnees are accepted back, many also experience a silencing and disenfranchisement. In addition, they state: "*There were few roles and practices that the formerly abducted youth could engage in on return that would facilitate transition from a returnee/novice through to being a full participant in an economic and community system*".

This underscores the importance of researchers and NGOs distinguishing between physically reintegrating someone into a community and having that person accepted as a participating member of that community.

Another complicating factor is that children often occupy multiple social identities within their community: son/daughter, survivor and rebel (Veale and Stavrou, 2007). In an adult focus group, parents expressed their happiness of having their child back but also their fear that their child would be re-abducted, that the child was not settled in his or her mind, or that he or she would be rude, ill-tempered or fight at any provocation (Veale and Stavrou, 2007).

In addition, there is merit to these fears as documented by Annan et al. (2003) who led focus groups in which youth confided that they still desired to rape, kill and return to the rebels where they could get what they wanted when they wanted it. In addition, they expressed hatred towards

youth who had not been abducted and intended on getting revenge by spreading HIV/AIDS, as they themselves had been forced to contract it (Annan et al. 2003). The good news is that with counseling, these youth were able to identify with their victims and were empowered to make conscious decisions instead of reacting with violence.

In their article Annan et al. (2006) also discloses the difficulties in working within Acholi cultural norms. For example, the authors note that women and children are not to express their feelings, an outsider should not involve him/herself in another family's affairs, a younger person should not counsel an older person, and a woman should not counsel a man (Annan et al, 2003).

Another significant barrier to reintegration mechanisms within Acholi society is their belief in 'cen', which is described as a spirit suffering a wrongful death which haunts the wrongdoer by entering their mind or body in the form of visions or nightmares resulting in mental illness and sickness until the wrong is made right (Akello et al, 2006). 'Cen' not only affects the individual but anyone who comes near it through illness, misery and mysterious deaths (Akello et al, 2006). This has important implications as family and community members reject children who are experiencing symptoms of cen.

Akello et al. (2006) suggest symptoms of 'cen' are actually the result of a second traumatization from systemic exclusion and communal isolation. Unfortunately, some children experiencing 'cen' sometimes rejoin the rebels where they are socially included, resulting in the disappearance of the symptoms of 'cen'. This is a great example of why westernized approaches to reintegration may not succeed.

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 (Hovil and Quinn, 2004).

It has even been argued that this is not only a mechanism through which child victims of war 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 .

For example, a study suggests 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".* (Hovil and Quinn, 2004).

The various initiatives attempted in search for a solution to the northern Uganda conflict have provided useful lessons in efforts to pursue peace and reconciliation. Of significance is the profound desire for fostering a culture of dialogue. After years of brutal and costly military activity, the conflict has not yet evolved to a state whereby one approach can be said to hold the key to a final resolution. Therefore, peace initiatives need to be persevered with, and not squandered or marginalized, in efforts to bring the suffering of the children and the Acholi community at large to an end. All actors and stakeholders should demonstrate that they have learnt the lessons of inclusiveness and flexibility, and thus respond accordingly.

Not only that, the crucial role played by Acholi traditional and religious leaders should be recognized and promoted. Effective resolution and solutions to the challenges being faced are most likely to take place outside the formal dialogue processes and might involve the child victims themselves, members of the community and families together, with religious and traditional leaders. These members are very vital in the search for practical and more realistic and durable solutions for securing a long lasting peace and reconciliation.

3.4. EFFORTS BY STAKE HOLDERS (GOVERNMENT, DONORS, NGO'S, HUMANITARIAN AGENCIES AND COMMUNITY) IN REINTEGRATING CHILD-VICTIMS OF WAR INTO SOCIETY

There are many partners and stake holders involved in reintegration and rehabilitation of children and assisting them along the path to some modicum of normalcy. Some play a major part in the rehabilitation and reintegration process, while others provide services on the periphery. This section examines the various stakeholders involved in the reintegration of children of war.

Reintegration is carried out by both government and non-governmental agencies. These programs deal with special care required for the children as they psychologically break away from the influence of their former commanders (Annan and Blattman, 2006). This special care is a long-term process, the end goal of which is to provide the children with a viable alternative to their direct involvement in conflict and to resume their life in the community. Key areas for successful reintegration include: counseling; family tracing and preparation of the community for the return of the child. Furthermore, vocational and educational opportunities are to be afforded to the children as well as a mechanism to follow up and monitor the progress of the child (Betancourt, 2008).

In spite of twenty years of war and government negligence, northern Uganda is fortunate to have a dynamic and growing network of national and grassroots organizations comprised of community and traditional leaders, activists, humanitarian relief workers, and volunteers. Many of these organizations are working to improve the situation of war-affected children and youth in the region. Yet they face tremendous obstacles.

AMNESTY COMISSION

The Amnesty Commission Act 2000, in section 9, stipulates the functions of the commission, some of which are; to consider and promote appropriate reconciliation mechanisms in affected areas; to promote dialogue and reconciliation within the spirit of this Act.

After protracted lobbying by various activists, the Amnesty Act was passed into Ugandan law in 1999, and was enacted in January 2000 (Allen, 2006). President Museveni announced that he would accept amnesty for all those fighting against the government of Uganda. The president

stated, *"I am under strong pressure...because of the numerous crimes they have committed, I have never supported negotiating with this particular group. But I have agreed to amnesty. They will not be prosecuted for the crimes they have committed"* (Temmerman, 2001).

Prior to the enactment of the Amnesty Act, President Museveni went to Gulu in late 1999. He stated that he had agreed to the Amnesty Act, but made no mention of dialogue. This caused most people in northern Uganda to believe that the government of Uganda preferred the military option to reconciliation with the LRA.

Amnesty, as described in the Act, involves pardon and forgiveness. But unlike amnesties in other post conflict societies, the Amnesty Act was conceived primarily as a means of ending the conflict, and not, as it has been in other places, as a means of dispensing justice, or very cleverly choosing not to (Russell, Lorea and Elzbieta, 2006). It is an act of reconciliation, in that the people and the government wish to reconcile with the insurgents.

In addition, all LRA rebels were offered amnesty by the government of Uganda through the Amnesty Act of 2000. The amnesty Act protects from prosecution or any form of punishment all those who, since 1986, participated in combat or who collaborated with or aided the perpetrators of war or armed rebellion. This exemption takes effect provided the rebels or any party to the conflict report to the authorities and renounce their association with the conflict (HRW, 2003).

The government and the LRA signed the Agreement on Accountability and Reconciliation on 29 June 2007. It set out a national framework to address serious crimes, human rights violations and adverse socioeconomic and political impacts of the conflict and to promote peace and reconciliation. The agreement provided for the prosecution in Ugandan courts of those who bear particular responsibility for the most serious crimes, to be complemented by traditional justice and other informal processes and reparations to be established in law.

The parties subsequently agreed to negotiate an annex to the agreement to set out elaborated principles and mechanisms for implementation. Human rights organizations emphasized that national trials in Uganda would not represent an alternative to the ICC unless certain benchmarks were reached, including fulfillment of the conditions that the trials were credible, impartial and

independent, applied appropriate penalties and were consistent with international fair trial standards.

The Uganda government provides services to child victims of war and their communities in liaison with the northern Uganda Social Action fund (NUSAF), a peace, economic, and community development program serving all the districts in northern Uganda, including the LRA affected region. Under NUSAF, communities or groups can apply for funds for a variety of projects and programs, including conflict resolution services, vocational training, enterprise development and livestock restocking. Beneficiaries include, but are not limited to, victims of war. The program is notable for being the largest program in the north aimed at promoting employment among vulnerable youth (Bentacourt, 2008). Programs directed at youth only began in earnest in 2004 and 2005, however, and cover a relatively small proportion of the population. While it has been an important complement to reintegration programs in the north, it has not been a substitute.

The lack of national commitment to the problems in northern Uganda makes it difficult for nongovernmental and community-based organizations to secure the necessary assistance to implement their programs. Many organizations lack human and financial capital.

Ambushes by the LRA often make travel difficult and dangerous to the IDP camps, which are home to millions children. Most organizations lack the capacity to collect and integrate evidence-based data into their decision-making activities and to launch and sustain long-term programs. Community-based women's and youth groups play a vital role in sustaining the social and economic fabric of the camps, but they work virtually on a volunteer basis and lack the capacity to undertake long-term projects. Coordination between national and international agencies is generally poor and non-existent in some remote areas (Vinck et al, 2007).

LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND NGO'S

At the local government level, the Gulu Development Office (GDO) coordinates the rehabilitation and reintegration of former child soldiers for the entire northern region. The GDO's Psycho-Social Support program (PSSP) is the infrastructure through which all other organizations cluster to deliver psycho-social support. The Gulu PSSP coordinates its efforts

through a loose partnership of religious institutions, local government agencies, volunteers and international organizations. In northern Uganda it is known as cluster coordination (Amnesty Commission, 2006).

In addition, UNICEF and Save the Children Uganda provide the bulk of funding for the PSSP. UNICEF is involved in a number of activities, ranging from program reviews to capacity building at the local level. This is done to mitigate the impact of conflict on children in northern Uganda. A substantial amount of money provided by UNICEF and Save the Children goes towards support for community based recreation and cultural activities, both of which are critical in psycho-social healing (UNICEF, 2004). The International Rescue Committee (IRC) facilitates counseling and support to abducted children as well as orphans. Action Aid assists in primary school education for formerly abducted children. The Gulu PSSP meets approximately once a month to discuss the ongoing support in the district. Synergies and gaps are identified and those that need to be strengthened are handled through a coalition based effort.

The attitude of policy makers and the public in addressing the after-effects of war on children is critical to finding ways to reintegrate these children back into society.
There is very limited literature on the finding of attitudes of policy makers on the reintegration of children into society. Children of war experience a process of socialization in armed conflict.

As some scholars explain, child soldiers have been "socialized into a polarized existence of hostility." They are deprived of the normal culture and moral values of socialization usually gained from family and community. These elements have to be restored during the reintegration process (Deng Deng, 2001).

International agencies and local NGOs exercise their influence in the content of the CRC and other treaties that aim at protecting the rights of children in general. However, their sincere commitments and efforts have gaps due to scarce resources, inadequately trained manpower, and lack of cooperation from government and other bodies (Reichenberg and Friedman, 2000). They also promote ratification and implementation of treaties and advocate for national law reforms and campaigns to sensitize communities. The role of NGOs in fulfilling the right to development will be, for instance, to provide supportive services where female child soldiers can avail the

same opportunities as boys and help in making education a meaningful experience (Deng Deng, 2001). Scholars support this view when they assert that NGOs can lobby and advocate against the exploitation and abuse of child soldiers in various forms.

Vinck et al, (2007) submit that peace building requires not only justice but also the support of resettlement and reintegration of children of war into civilian life. This can be fostered by international organizations. The UN has been very successful in assisting transitional societies in terms of consolidating peace and development. This has been possible according to Jareg (2005) through international organizations that have been involved in advocating for the rights to reintegration, especially of female child soldiers. They include; UNICEF, United States Agency for International Development (USAID), International Community of the Red Cross (ICRC), Coalition to stop the use of child soldiers, World Health Organization (WHO), World Vision and World Food Program (WFP). They all have common objectives; to trace families, fund local NGOs, provide educational and vocational training, provide distinct health facilities to girls, especially girl mothers, and provide support for psychosocial needs, trauma counseling and human rights advocacy to mention but a few.

Several agencies established a number of reception centers to respond to the needs of returning children, in Gulu, Lira and other locations. Such centers had assisted some 20,000 returning children and youth. Children stayed from three to four months in the centers, which offered a variety of services, including medical assistance, family tracing, recreational activities, counseling and psychosocial support (Russell et al, 2006). While the children were at the centers, efforts were made to prepare families and communities for the children's return. In practice, support for children at reception centers varied widely and was often inadequate, particularly in relation to health and trauma issues (UNICEF, 2004).

Foreign donors contribute millions in aid to the north through the Consolidated Appeals Process. Food aid is in kind. While most households in the internally displaced camps receive food aid, some districts for instance, Gulu, Kitgum, and Pader, do not receive it or only receive it irregularly (Jareg, 2005). Sadly, the war in the North has led to competition between donors who

often avoid coordinating their activities because, as one donor put it, (Suarez and St Jean, 2006) *"everyone wants to score."*

While several coordination groups of donors exist in Uganda, they tend to be venues for the presentation of report or sharing of information, and rarely set out cooperative approaches that donors can rally behind. Local District government offices attempt to coordinate the work of local NGOs and register their activities, but are themselves under-resourced and weak (Allen, 2006).

In essence, a lack of coordination and overlap in programs remains a major problem throughout the northern districts.

Some of the humanitarian agencies in Northern Uganda include;

Gulu Save the Children Organization (GUSCO)

It was established in 1994; GUSCO rehabilitates and reintegrates former child victims of war back into civil society. The organization has two main program activities, based primarily at the Reception centre's, and also based in the community. Centre based activities consist of psychosocial counseling, and activities meant to enhance the child's process of reunification and reintegration with his or her community. A series of educational and vocational activities are provided for the children during the community based activities. Main funders of GUSCO are Save the Children, *Teres des Homes* (TDH), UNICEF, and WFP.

World Vision International

World Vision International is a Christian based relief, development and advocacy organization that assists over 70 million people worldwide. This organization works to create capacity for vulnerable groups in times of conflict (World Vision International, 2006). Work in Uganda for world vision commenced in 1986. The organization initially provided relief, resettlement kits, and reconstruction infrastructure. World vision now has the largest Child Rehabilitation Centre in Uganda which was established in 1995. This centre provides psycho-social counseling, family tracing and reunification and reintegration of formerly abducted children.

According to Burman and McKay (2007), it is reported that, with the exception of WFP in northern Uganda, UN agencies are noticeably absent from conflict-ridden areas. Even UNICEF has been slow to engage in the North. This implies that the needs in such as education, health care services, maternal care and child protection remain scarce. This is partly due to the fact that donors are reluctant to fund because they hold the government accountable for its role in failed negotiations with the LRA. So they have an inadequate emergency budget. However, among other NGO's, UNICEF supports other reintegration programs like the Gusco-Center in Gulu town, Youth Social Work Association (YSA), Kitgum's Concerned Women's Association and International Rescue Committee (now Child and Youth protection and Development) which works with child mothers and female child soldiers.

The Ugandan government's role in reintegrating and rehabilitating child victims of war is argued to have been much more modest than NGO's and community's effort, however, it is beginning to expand. President Museveni in 2004 referred the case of the LRA to the International Criminal Court (Reuters Alert, 2007). Not only that, Moreno Ocampo (former chief prosecutor of the ICC) issued arrest warrants against LRA leader Joseph Kony and four senior commanders in 2005. These rebels were accused of crimes against humanity and war crimes, including murder, abduction, rape, mutilation and sexual enslavement.

Several NGO's and Human Rights organizations stressed the need for the ICC prosecutor to act independently and to investigate crimes committed by all parties to the conflict, including government forces. The involvement of the ICC added efforts towards the peace process, but potential tensions emerged over the objectives of peace and justice. The safety and security of the abducted children still with the LRA was a major concern, and there were fears that their safety would be further endangered if hostilities resumed (Allen, 2005).

Community acceptance is essential for a child's reintegration, but preconceived ideas and expectations about children coming out of armed forces or groups, or the scars of violence committed against families or communities could severely limit community support. To prevent reprisals, communities have to be prepared for returning children through raising awareness and education, which can start with sensitization of community leaders, strengthening of local child

protection networks, peace and reconciliation education, and events aimed at encouraging a lasting reintegration of the children (Baines et al, 2007).

The reception from the community, while strong and welcoming is not quite so unanimous. While almost no one reported that their community blamed them for the things they had done, more than a quarter of returnees said that they were insulted by community members upon return, or that community members were afraid of them. Even so, these insults and fear did not seem to deter their long-term reintegration: 94% reported that they felt very or somewhat accepted by their community at the time. Moreover, there was no significant difference between the abducted and non-abducted in reported levels of 14 concrete forms of social support, suggesting that former abducted youth are able to find support within their communities (Murithi, 2002).

The reintegration of children of war faces a challenging process of reconciliation and mediation. Family and community reintegration takes time and must allow for an appropriate process of acceptance and roles. In this context, community mobilization is as important as the more technical tracing and logistics of family reunification (Russell, et al, 2006). Adolescence is a time of establishing identity, and the child soldier may resist changing his identity from soldier to civilian. Overcoming the mistrust they learn in order to survive during a time of conflict can be difficult when transitioning to civilian life (Stark, 2005).

This is why reintegration programs must emphasize the opportunity to form positive, trusting, consistent relationships with adults, with an emphasis on a family-based environment. Experience shows that psychosocial approaches are more beneficial than Western derived trauma assistance interventions.

Most humanitarian initiatives are based in or around town centers and currently fail to reach camps in highly insecure areas. New, more community-based approaches need to be developed to meet the needs of vulnerable children and to address more adequately what may be the symptoms of the profound social disintegration that has gripped northern Uganda (Reichenberg and Friedman, 2000).

One of the most crucial but underserved sectors of the population in northern Uganda is children. Entire generations of children in the Northern part of Uganda have known nothing but war. They have lost out on education, employment, the enjoyment of political freedoms and social and cultural rights, and, by implication, the ability to become the policy-leaders of the future. Young people in the camps are restless and idle and thus susceptible to violence and other destructive behaviors (Otunnu, 2006).

Reception centers represented an important attempt at large-scale reintegration of formerly abducted children. They are credited with having played an instrumental role in the reinsertion of children back to their families and communities. In addition to providing basic medical care, anthropologist Allen, (2005), has emphasized their importance as "liminal space" a place for children to begin their transition from the bush to "normal" life. Social workers also seek to provide youth with counseling and advice-giving, individually or in groups. Perhaps most importantly, reception centers prove adept at locating the immediate and extended families of returned youth and arranging reunification (Russell et al, 2006).

Civil society actors, who have a vital role in reintegrating children of war, require external support. The demobilization and reintegration of these children requires persistent advocacy from both civil society and international actors. In addition, these children especially child soldiers must be specifically included in peace agreements and processes.
This study will seek to find out if the relationship between attitudes of policy makers and the effective reintegration of children into society exists.

Reintegration eludes easy definition. At a minimum it implies some resumption of livelihoods and social relationships, either to the life led before war or that of non-combatant peers (Kingma 2000).

In all cases, reintegration of ex-children of war presupposes some adverse impact of war, and a gap between ex-children of war and victims. According to the UN Security Council, past experience suggests that, ideally, the basis for a successful reintegration program should be laid within the peace agreement which provides for the end of a conflict. The parties should provide the information necessary of how to go about this process and challenges if any during the

negotiation phase of the process. The agreement should stipulate responsibilities of leading national institutions and other actors essential to reintegration, and should outline their basic approach to the problem, including strategies and time-frames (UN, 2004).

3.5. MEASURES TO ENHANCE EFFECTIVE REINTEGRATION OF CHILDREN INTO SOCIETY

It is a generally held view that once conflicts come to an end or at least subside, return or resettlement becomes possible. However, looking at different literature, it is highlighted that internally displaced people are faced with various challenges and problems when that time to return comes. The key principle that must be upheld is that of voluntary return in accordance with international standards of freedom of movement and the right to choose one's residence.

The lack of attention to the return of children of war can jeopardize the entire process of reintegration. As a result, humanitarian agencies have increasingly become involved in monitoring the return of children and providing reintegration assistance. The dilemma of resettlement is that there is yet no consensus reached as to when to stop counting one as displaced (Veale and Stavru, 2007).

The main objective of this research therefore would be find out possible measures that, when implemented, would enhance effective reintegration of children into society.

Reintegration of children in situations of armed conflict is a complex and long-term proposition. It begins with negotiating the release of children and their physical extrication from armed groups. The family tracing and reunification phase that follows is often complicated, time consuming and resource-intensive (Stark, 2005).

Beyond the practical challenges of locating the families and communities of lost children, successful reunification must also address the less straightforward challenge of spiritually reconnecting children and their communities. This includes dealing with the sense of alienation, guilt or anger that children may harbor against families whom they may accuse of failing to protect them (Harlacher et al, 2006).

At the same time, reintegration programs must also take into account challenges related to the communities themselves being prepared to accept the return of their children, in contexts where atrocities may have been committed by those children in their communities.

Traditional methods carried out in order to create and enforce justice and reconciliation are increasingly playing a vital role in rehabilitation and reintegration strategies, building upon traditional norms to strengthen the protection of children in communities (IRIN, 2012). In a research conducted in Sierra Leone, local actors cited the most positive reconciliation experiences as those that included traditional approaches. Child victims of war forced to commit atrocities during war reported that they had gained acceptance in their communities through dialogue based on traditional healing mechanisms. The efforts carried out in involving children in traditional approaches to justice and enhancing their role in community reconciliation requires further attention (Allen and Schomerus, 2006).

Challenges associated with the durable reintegration methods of child victims in war affected communities and best practices in this regard indicate that a comprehensive understanding of reintegration is required. All reintegration programs should follow the Cape Town Principles, formulated to guide protection partners on the ground (Jareg, 2005).

For best results these programs must be founded on inclusive community-based programming and should be directed at all children in the community so as not to stigmatize child victims of war. They should build on the strengths of the children, especially their resilience, and children and youth should be consulted in the process.

The child-conscious components of reintegration programs, which may be designed in cooperation with the United Nations Children's Fund, other relevant United Nations agencies and non-governmental organizations with expertise in the field, should be planned, executed, and evaluated within the framework of the central reintegration committees and monitoring bodies. This is vital because parties to a conflict often fail to acknowledge that children are among their ranks, resulting in their exclusion from the benefits attached to the reintegration exercise (Annan et al, 2006).

In addition, according to scholars, since past experience has shown that only a limited proportion of children of war have participated in formal reintegration programs, it may be necessary to develop parallel plans to document, track and provide support for those children who do not enter the formal reintegration process. While the long-term nature of the tasks associated with the reintegration of children of war requires the involvement of development actors, a peacekeeping operation can be of vital assistance in launching this process (Humphreys and Weinstein, 2007)

Cultural, religious and traditional rituals can play an important role in the protection and reintegration of girls and boys into their communities, such as traditional healing, cleansing and forgiveness rituals; the development of solidarity mechanisms based on tradition; and the use of proverbs and sayings in sensitization and mediation activities. Care should be taken to ensure that religious beliefs serve the best interests of the child, especially in areas where religion or cultural values may have played an important role in recruitment (Harlacher et al, 2006).

Reconciliation ceremonies can offer forgiveness for acts committed, allow children to be cleansed of the violence they have suffered, restore cultural links and demonstrate children's involvement in civilian life. Such ceremonies increase the commitment of communities to the children's reintegration process (Harlacher et al, 2006).

Children should contribute to the creation of appropriate reintegration mechanisms to improve their sense of belonging and capacity. However, it is also essential to understand and neutralize community traditions that are physically or mentally harmful to a child. After war, nations and people try to rebuild their lives and avoid a slide back to violent conflict. Reintegrating children is a particular priority, in part for humanitarian reasons, and in part because failed reintegration can threaten economic recovery, social integration, and peace.

On the economic front, research suggests that war leads to injuries, lost education, and lost opportunities. Unaided, human capital may be slow to re-accumulate, leading to persistent poverty. Socially, exclusion and alienation may also create a class with no stake in peace, and the ravages of war could leave psychological trauma and aggression. Together poverty and exclusion could threaten a nation's long term stability (Tajima, 2009).

Indeed, the fear of alienated, aggressive children fuels much of the policy and academic interest in Reintegration. Policy and practice have yielded many lessons learned, but scholars have had few opportunities to assess the impacts of war, and to determine why some individuals and not others are able to reintegrate (Humphreys and Weinstein 2007; Tajima 2009).

Scholars however, argue that there was no official rehabilitation and reintegration program in northern Uganda. The majority of children leaving the LRA were captured by or surrendered to government forces, or escaped (UNICEF, 2004). Under military procedures, LRA children were to be referred to the UPDF's child protection unit and released within 48 hours. However, children were frequently held for longer periods and some were used for intelligence purposes or as guides to identify LRA positions and weapons caches. Fewer than half the returning child soldiers registered for demobilization with the UPDF, fearing the army itself, or rejection by their communities if they were identified as LRA members. Those who did not register at reception centers and who returned straight home could not obtain an amnesty certificate or a resettlement package (Deng Deng, 2001).

CHAPTER FOUR

4.1. DISCUSSION AND FINDINGS

This chapter discusses the methodology used in this research into the challenges faced in reintegrating and rehabilitating child victims of war for the purpose of building a complete and coherent picture of what is progressing well within the current programs, what challenges still exist and to identify possible measures towards effective rehabilitation and reintegration.

This chapter also discusses some of the practical experiences and challenges of undertaking qualitative research in an area such as Northern Uganda.

4.1.1. Discussion

The study was carried out between 13th August to 17th August 2012 and 07th to 22nd September 2012 in two phases. The initial stages of the research mostly focused on listening to the life histories of the formerly abducted children, and included a few focus group discussions and some interviews with parents. These covered the Gulu and Lira districts. A group interview with the staff of Concerned Parents Association in Lira was also carried out.

The second phase of the study concentrated on reintegration mechanisms in place and also involved interviews with some elders and focus group discussions. The second phase of the study was restricted to Gulu district only, because of time constraints. In spite of this, the initial stage also showed that much of the information about child victims of war and the rehabilitation and reintegration practices were similar across the affected districts.

The use of a qualitative research was important because it examined the nuances of resettlement experiences of the children of war, their involvement with family, other social relationships and social cultural activities upon return.

The approach was also preferred because of the complex issues involved in the reintegration and rehabilitation of war-affected children in northern Uganda. As indicated in the previous chapters, the underlying concerns with respect to this challenge include loss of hope, innocence, trust, dignity and confidence, and a life characterized by shame, guilt, trauma and painful memories, not only among the children but within the community as well.

In addition to these complex issues, the need for the community to receive and accept the former child victims also became apparent. The responsibility of all stake holders to do this, and the challenge this poses justified the use of qualitative research methodology as a tool to gain insight into how they handle the rehabilitation and reintegration of child victims of war.

Furthermore, this approach also allowed for the children's stories to be told in their individual tone, context and affect. By narrating their own stories, the child victims were able to relate not only to the conflict but also reintegration issues at national and community levels, as well as the difficulties and fears they had about reintegration. In this sense, the child victims' own voice in letting one know their experiences allowed for a deeper understanding of their predicament as well as contributing towards possible solutions for the challenges involved in rehabilitating and reintegrating child victims.

There were several participant categories that were very important to the field work. In total about 126 people formally participated in this study either by narrating their ordeal in and after captivity, by being involved in focus group discussions and interviews, or through feedback meetings. Our participants were also categorized according to whether they were formerly abducted children, elders or parents and institutional personnel. In all there were 67 participant child victims of war. 15 of these narrated their life history and experiences during and after captivity, the remaining 52 young adults living in the community and school going child victims participated mainly in focus group discussions.

The study also benefited from 12 community elders in Gulu district and 5 in Lira district who participated in focus group discussions and in-depth interviews. In addition 11 parents of formerly abducted children were interviewed. 5 institutional personnel, 9 teachers and 12 non abducted children were also participants, mainly in focus groups discussions. Finally, the study benefited from a feedback team which consisted of four members as well as other informal interactions.

During the study, the child victim participants were not segregated, the research team did not focus on gender differences but of importance was the fact that an individual had been abducted.

Experiences of Child victims of war

Being the central concern in this study, formerly abducted children were the primary category of participants. Fifteen former children of war, now aged between 14 and 29, participated by telling us their life histories from the time of abduction. The team spoke to people who had been abducted as children even if at the time of our research they were already over 18 years of age, arguing that, despite their age when they participated in this study, they nevertheless had lost their childhood. In fact, the formerly abducted children who were now over 18 had spent a very long time with the LRA and the extent of their loss was the reason we considered them for this research.

The life histories were recorded in order to understand their experiences from the time of their abduction, through life in captivity, return, to the point at which we interviewed them. All of the histories were taken in private either in a room we were offered or under a tree far from earshot. This was done because of the nature of the stories that needed to be told. Privacy would protect their dignity but at the same time give them space to open up as much as possible. The life histories provided crucial information relating to the research questions.

Their permission was asked to record the session and we assured them that all of the information received would be used exclusively for the purposes of research. All of them accepted the recording. A questionnaire was prepared as a general guide. A checklist was also prepared to achieve all the detailed data that was required. In spite of all these preparations, as the children narrated their experiences that the team often found themselves asking for details of those experiences rather than using the checklist.

These personal experiences of the formerly abducted children are described and discussed in the next chapter.

Participants included child victims of war, school children (not victims of war), and members of the community (including elders, teachers, and NGO representatives such as GUSCO and Concerned Parents Association (CPA) and government workers). In total, 6 focus group discussions were held. Involving the staff from these organizations was important to this research because of the role they played at the reception centers. These stakeholders were the first point of contact with children who returned through the reception centers. They were therefore selected

because of their involvement with the formerly abducted children and the rehabilitation and reintegration process.

The formerly abducted children living in the community had mainly become young adults and were engaging in different socioeconomic activities in the community having either received some skills training from the NGOs or having settled in the community. Others were married. Their participation in focus group discussions was relevant to understand the community-based social reintegration in the mid-term. Elders in the camps were of critical importance to the research. Upon the reunification of formerly abducted children with families and into the community, the elders carried the 'burden' of maintaining social equilibrium, taking into account the disturbing traits that the children had returned with from the bush. They would have to assess the psychosocial condition of the children and recommend them for culturally appropriate interventions to allow for their reintegration. Their opinions about these children provided useful insights into the reintegration process.

Teachers were also relevant to the focus groups because of their central role in schools to which many of the younger formerly abducted children returned. The teachers had the responsibility to guide, protect and inspire these children. They were also points of contact between children who had been in captivity and those who had not, their participation and opinion about the formerly abducted children was therefore critical. Along with teachers, the participation of non-abducted, school-going children also offered insights into how the formerly abducted children interacted with peers, as a measure of reintegration. The non-abducted school-going children interacted with the former abductees on a daily basis during school time. Their opinions could provide ideas about the possibilities for and difficulties of the reintegration process at the school level.

Focus group discussions usually took place in open spaces such as under the trees. In a few cases, especially with the staff of organizations and some teachers, the discussions would take place in a hall, office or classroom. A focus group discussion guide was prepared in order to direct the discussions. These discussions were normally led by a research assistant who wrote down and partially recorded some of the proceedings. Unlike the life histories, it took some time before we felt that the information on community involvement in the reintegration process was saturated. This could have been the result of the fact that, initially, the community felt at a loss

about what to do with the returning children. It was their first experience of such a widespread social problem.

The study engaged the actual involvement of individual child victims of war, who told their stories of abduction and related their experiences of captivity and return home and of reintegration. Active participation in knowledge creation was also fostered through the focus group discussions that were held in schools with various groups, including elders, school teachers, formerly abducted children who are now attending school and non-abducted children. All of these different participation groups contributed knowledge and experience about abduction, captivity and reintegration and rehabilitation practices, either through first-hand or second hand experience.

Through their practical participation, revelations and experiences, the participants directed the research process. The researcher made decisions on the direction the research should take on the basis of the comments and information obtained. For example, originally the research had not conceived of the participation and recording of the experiences of formerly abducted children in the school setting, nor of the participation of teachers and non abducted children who could also relate their experiences with child victims of war. However, initial contact with the elders, the formerly abducted children and institutions pointed towards education and the school as an important part of the reintegration system.

The research assistants left the selection of individuals who would participate in the actual focus group discussions to the community leaders, who had better knowledge of their community. The positive acknowledgement of these power relations, where each participant was left to utilize their status and knowledge to the full, made the research process possible. The participants were not only objects but also the subjects of the research. Under this arrangement, the researcher took responsibility for considering and implementing various suggestions that were made, feeding them into the design of the research when appropriate.

The relevance and importance of the subject of research "protection or violation: challenges facing the reintegration and rehabilitation of child victims of war", not only to the victims themselves but all concerned parties cannot be overstated. In addition, the involvement of

knowledgeable elders and teachers, NGO staff and the district officials in charge of humanitarian assistance gives a high level of reliability to our research processes and results. The involvement of institutions as major actors in this research was also very valuable. These institutions included the NGOs, the Amnesty Commission, and the UPDF's Child Protection Unit, schools and the traditional Acholi institution headed by the Acholi Paramount Chief known as "Kel Kwaro" in Acholi.

In addition, there were different NGOs dealing with different aspects of rehabilitation and reintegration of child victims of war. For example, provision of food was the preserve of the World Food Program, others such as the Acholi Religious Leaders Peace Initiative focused on education, War Child Holland specialized in children's play and World vision on values and creating life skills. The needs of an individual's life were segmented according to what NGOs could offer. This in itself is a phenomenon which needs to be reflected upon, especially regarding the power that institutions have over individuals and communities in humanitarian emergencies.

4.1.2. FINDINGS

EXPERIENCES OF CHILD VICTIMS OF WAR

The findings are guided by the research questions identified in the objectives, but are grounded in the voices of the participants. This chapter answers the question: What are the experiences of child victims of war in northern Uganda? In this section, the researcher reports the experiences of the children, mostly in their own voices, offering an empirical explanation of what children experience, know and do, and how they adapt to hostile life in captivity. The information is mainly based on the experiences of some of the children we talked to in the camps and schools. Their stories began from the moment of abduction through their time in captivity, to reception centers and back home. The stories give an indication of what it was like living with the LRA, in addition to recounting their individual experiences. The combined stories highlight life in captivity with the Lord's Resistance Army.

The abduction of children in northern Uganda occurred on a massive scale, with children taken into captivity and forced to be involved in active conflict. However, if children's involvement in

war is viewed only from the perspective of the numbers involved, there is a risk that we only obtain a general outline of the war experiences of abducted children, at the expense of individual experiences. Such generalities obscure the important details of war experiences of formerly abducted children, yet these particular experiences expose and reveal how much help they need after their return home.

Each experience is unique in its own way and providing details about them exposes the hardships, struggles and survival strategies of the children in captivity. Particular stories also give one the chance to learn and identify with these innocent young victims what life was like when abducted by the LRA rebels, through the eyes of the children.

Interviewed at St. Augustine church in Gulu district, Eunice (fictitious name) was living with her grandmother at the time of the interview, Eunice returned straight into the community without going through any of the reception centers. At the time of the interview, she had gone back to school and had been engaged in some Christian activities for children in school. Her story shows how the LRA conditioned children to kill and loot through the use of threats:
Abducted at the age of 10, Eunice tells her story;

"*I was abducted from Agago; I had gone to the garden with my mother. After digging for some time, my mother told me to return home. On my way home I saw two soldiers coming. I tried to run but they ordered me to stop. They told me that if I ran they would shoot me. I became afraid and stood in one spot. They came and asked me where I was going. I told them I was going back home. They insisted that 'are you really going back home?' I told them, yes. They asked me where I had been; I told them I was from the garden. One of them ordered me to drop my firewood down and threatened that if I didn't drop it he would kill me. I dropped the firewood. He commanded me to lead the way for them; we moved for some time until we reached where the bigger group was. They received me and offered me cooked greens to eat. I ate it and immediately after that we started moving. I was given three chickens to carry. We kept walking until we reached Anaka; by the time we reached there it was dusk and they decided that we spend the night there.*

In the morning we started moving, we moved and moved and moved until when the chickens became heavy for me. I started crying; they asked me if I wanted to cry and added that if I kept crying they would kill me. They again asked me if I was tired; I told them I was not tired because if you admit that you are tired they kill you. They asked again, 'you girl are you tired?' I told them I was not. We continued to

move; we moved, we moved and moved; when we reached a certain place they got two women and they joined us.

We were sent to loot; two of us were ordered to break into locked shops in Anaka trading centre. They collected sugar and biscuits. They gave us the biscuits to eat and we ate them all; when we ate the biscuits they told us that we were to start moving. The women who were abducted were given the beans that were looted from Anaka camp to carry; the very place where they had looted the sugar and biscuits. There were two sacks of beans. We moved and moved, and reached, which place? We reached under a certain tugu tree (palm tree). They ordered the women to cook. The women cooked and cooked and we cooked. We ate the beans and spent the night there.

On the next day we continued the walking. We were two girls; they told us to look for food in people's field. The girl told me: '... if you can listen to me let us escape. You see now we are suffering; we are tired even our feet are swollen, let us escape and go back home'. I told her that 'aaah, my friend we shall be caught'. She responded that 'if you want to remain then remain; I am going'. I told her 'I am also ready to go home'. It was four months. We started coming.

It was at dusk; we met a certain old man. When he saw us he dashed off running. We stopped him in vain; he ran away. We moved on till we reached a certain garden; we uprooted cassava and munched. We moved towards a certain valley and got some honey and somebody's simsim (sesame seeds) hidden. We also got some and ate. We came under a certain tree and we wanted to spend the night there but since there were bees we moved a bit aside under another tree.

In the morning, the girl suggested that we could uproot more cassava for munching; we went and uprooted cassava and munched. We do not even know the owner; we uprooted cassava and munched. We came back; we started moving again." "I don't know the place. It is there, there, there; but it was in the midst of a jungle. We could hear birds singing and there were many wild animals. It was really a thick forest. When we saw like that, we started moving; we saw the soldiers; they were the government soldiers. We hid and hid; the soldiers passed near us. When they passed, we got up to check and we could not see them. We walked and walked and walked until when we were about to reach Anaka camp. We could see the soldiers; we said that if we moved further they would shoot us. It was already dusk we decided to sleep in the bush nearby. We were hungry but there was nothing to eat. There was nothing completely to eat; we just spent the night anyhow in the forest. It was so cold; our clothes were all torn. We only had some skirt that they had given us; it was also torn.

In the morning, we started walking towards Anaka camp and the soldiers saw and asked us to go to them. We started going to the soldiers. The other girl asked me if they would not kill us, because from the bush we were told that if we escaped, the government soldiers would get us and kill us. We all the same walked

towards the soldiers. The soldiers took us; they took us to the barracks. It was Anaka barracks. While there, they gave us food, we ate. We even listened to the radio. We heard our fellow returnees talking over the radio. We asked them to bring us home. They refused. They told us that if we knew our way home we could go on our own." "Yes, they said they were not going to take us to any rehabilitation centre. They said they were already tired of taking people to rehabilitation centers. We got frightened thinking that the soldiers would kill us. It was getting dark again; they gave us food to eat then we bathed. They gave us things for covering ourselves. The next day they gave us clothes and we changed; they put us in a certain vehicle and told us if we know where our home was we could go. They asked us if we knew where home was and we told them it was in Anaka camp. From there we were taken to the LC; from the LC a bell was rung to call people; people came from Anaka and Alero camps. They were told that if anyone knows that we were his/her children they were free to take us.

I saw my grandmother; my real mother had died of asthma. I also suffer from asthma and from time to time I get the attacks. Those who abducted me wanted to kill me because I was coughing so much; I begged them not to kill me. When I saw my grandmother, she received me and took me home. She bought for me clothes. I stayed and stayed then I started going to fetch water. The children at the well would tell me look at the girl who has returned from the bush, look at her red bulging eyes; the spirits of those she has killed will make her kill us; let us get away. The children disturbed us and I would cry at the stream. That is what happened." "In the bush they make you carry luggage. For me I was made to carry three chickens; they also added a very heavy kaveera (polythene bag), which I could not carry. They ordered me to carry and said that if I refused they would kill me. That is the trouble of being in the bush, but also we walk long distances even if a thorn pricks you, they do not allow you to remove it. You walk, there are no clothes to wear, vegetables are just boiled and you are to eat; it is also very cold. We were beaten but also one day a certain man who was abducted was escaping; they caught him and ordered us children to beat him. We beat him; at first, I did not want to beat him, but they threatened me that if I do not want to beat him they would kill me. I then started beating him. He died. They shot him; they killed him.

We burnt Alero camp. They killed many people. The kids were given to us. I was given one kid to kill. They told me to hit it on the tree; I hit its head on the tree just once and it died. They said if I refused to kill, they would kill me. We were not sent to attack (ambush) vehicles but another group did it." "The children within our home did not disturb me; when they saw me on arrival they all cried. But the children I met at the stream called me names. They said look at her, a returnee, a killer; she will kill us. You have killed so many. I responded by crying. I live well with my grandmother and I am free. There is no one who disturbs me even up to now. It is only cough that I suffer from because my mother and father died of asthma.

(When I returned home) they made me jump over layibi (stick for opening the granary). The Sisters organized (for me prayers). From Alero when we came, the Sisters, Sr Magdalene who lives in the parish, invited me and started teaching me prayer songs. She encouraged me to join the catechumens and I was baptized on 18 November 2005; I was confirmed from Alokolum. I was received very well.
I did not receive counseling services. Sr Magdalene encouraged me. She told me not to worry about what my colleagues do to me, I have already come home. "I will not think of going back to the bush; it is nice to stay home but it is hard to stay in the bush; you cry anytime, you carry very heavy luggage, when you cry they threaten to kill you. If you say you want to come home, they threaten to kill you; you should never say you want to come home. When they ask you if you want to come home, you should respond that you want to stay in the bush. There is nothing good in the bush completely. They loot from people in the camps. Sometimes they even forget the looted clothes and they rot in the bush; sometimes they give their wives and they wear; some are given us for covering ourselves." I like it in church now. I had nightmares when I had just returned before Sr Magdalene started praying over me. One time I dreamt that we were burning Atiak camp. I screamed and ran out and hid in the bush. My grandmother had to go and look for me. When I have nightmares I feel weak and pain in the body and sometimes I get sick. Sometimes the environment looks cloudy for me and sometimes I even lose appetite. I feared when they asked me to kill that child; I was worried that if I killed that child its spirit would haunt me and I just wondered what I would do. Nothing has happened to me."

This story tells of this girl's journey from her familiar home environment, of the threats used by the LRA while in captivity, her time in the bush where she observed and committed murders, and her subsequent return home, where she feels safe in the family home but is taunted about her already painful experiences by children in the neighborhood. She finds comfort from the nuns in her church and is happy to be involved in some organized activities.

Most of the experiences that were told by the children were similar. Other stories tell of ill-treatment, hunger, and lack of water, death, battles, killings and survival.

CHAPTER FIVE

5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1. CONCLUSION

The rehabilitation and reintegration of former child soldiers is challenging enough in a benign post conflict environment. Unfortunately, the situation in northern Uganda is anything but post conflict. The protracted conflict in northern Uganda has and will continue to place children at risk. This, coupled with a lack of integration and cordination between government and stake holders in the field of child soldiers, makes for a disjointed and fragmented rehabilitation and reintegration program. The situation in northern Uganda demands strong ownership and political will to ensure that these former child soldiers are given every opportunity to thrive socially and economically.

Successful rehabilitation and reintegration of child victims of war is difficult. Stakeholders need to undertake a holistic approach in order to form a cohesive program of rehabilitation and reintegration. Children of war can be successfully reintegrated into their communities and lead a normal life that is socially and economically fulfilling. By allowing the LRA to abduct these children, as their custodians we are denying them a bright future.

5.2. RECOMMENDATIONS

The government of Uganda bears the bulk of the responsibility for improving the rehabilitation and reintegration process of formerly abducted children in northern Uganda. It is important for the government to continue peace talks and offer amnesty to former child soldiers in order to end the conflict. Not only that, government should also create a secure and stable environment in which ex-combatants can start living normal lives.

Long term planning is also required by the stakeholders working in northern Uganda. Many stakeholders distribute large amounts of money for short term projects although these projects will not be beneficial in the long run. As a result, there is no money available for the children who were not initially targeted, but are still in need of assistance. Contingency planning by NGO's would greatly benefit in providing assistance to the children in need.

Education and vocational programs for formerly abducted children in northern Uganda are much needed. Such programs are essential for children who have missed several years of school. Placing formerly abducted children back into the grade they were before abduction, when they are now several years older, only further frustrates them. Additional education assistance to formerly abducted children is necessary. The education system in northern Uganda needs special educational programing for formerly abducted children, including conflict management skills, psychological support and social interaction.

Reception centers should be restricted to providing shelter, family tracing services and assessments of living arrangements. While this is occurring the child or youth must be provided adequate medical care and receive referral to community programming and supports. Community programming must be inclusive to all community members to avoid labeling and stigmatizing the returning child or youth to a greater extent than already exists. These programs should focus on empowerment and leadership training to improve upon their self esteem and sense of agency within their communities. Also, these programs should strengthen the skill sets they already have and explore opportunities within the community for these individuals to use those skills. Families must be provided with more assistance and follow up upon receiving these children and youth back. It should not be forgotten that families have also suffered tremendously

as a result of the war and terror inflicted upon the general population. They too require additional support.

Children and youth must be provided a voice and be actively involved in planning their future. This not only applies to education and employment but also in regard to where they would like to reside. Children and youth should not be forced to return to their parents and families under the assumption that this is the best place for them. It is potentially much more harmful than helpful. Alternative living arrangements must be further explored.

Programming must be flexible and take into consideration unique experiences, skills, strengths, and individual, family and community characteristics which impact reintegration efforts. The specific factors that contribute to the success or failure of such reunions must seriously be explored and integrated into planning and policy. As well, the changing Acholi structure of family and community must always be considered and programs must be responsive to these changes.

A process of dialogue and negotiations at national and local levels is necessary to create an atmosphere of peace and stability in northern Uganda. Not only that, community as well as rebel leader should be involved in the negotiation and mediation processes in order for the conflict to receive the attention it deserves and in order for the peace process to be a suceess. This will also bring solid agreements and cessation of hostilities to the abducted children in northern Uganda.

Special attention should also be paid to economic and social reconstruction of the shattered villages, districts and towns in Acholiland. This will help the Acholis to rebuild their shattered economies, inprove their living conditions and prospects of hope for the future. This will also create a positive step towards the reconstruction and reconciliation of Acholiland. Such efforts should be undertaken by the government of Uganda with the help of the international community in order to create an atmosphere where feelings of hoplessness and frustration are replaced with hope for reconciliation, reintegration, reconstruction and economic resettlement.

Western psychological techniques have been argued to be inadequate especially when compared to local or traditional approaches. Western techniques, although arguably they should not be totally ignored, deflect attention from real survival issues, which include the loss of livelihood,

separation of children from parents, and a lack of schooling. But these in our view must include the trauma suffered by the children in the rebel ranks, their participation in killings of their own relatives, and the dehumanization and alienation suffered by the communities in IDP camps over prolonged periods. All these traumatic, social-cultural and psychological problems have to be confronted at once in the community.

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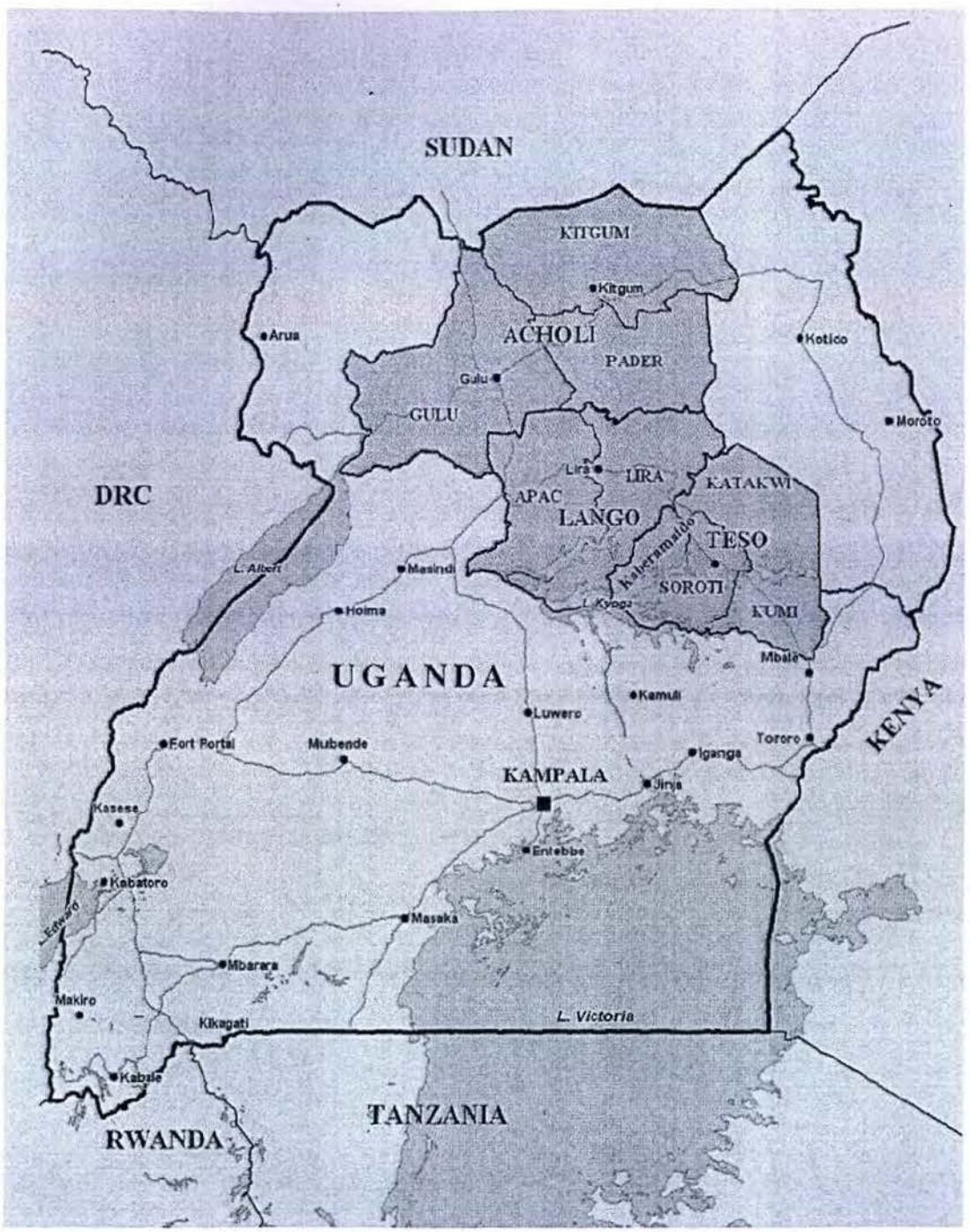
Figure 1. Map of Uganda with LRA affected areas shaded



ANNEXTURES AND APPENDICES

CONFIDENTIALITY AND ETHICAL GUIDELINES AGREEMENT

ANNEX 1 - FOR RESEARCH INTERPRETER

As an Interpreter, I fully agree to uphold and abide by the rules outlined below.

1. Keep all names and information confidential

Confidentiality – means that information is not shared outside the setting where it was obtained; it is kept private.

In the case of this study;

- This means that we will not reveal the names of the participants who participate in the study. For the interpreters, this means that we will not discuss or reveal names of participants to anyone except the study team.
- Interview materials that we will be using should be safely kept at all times and are not to be shared with anyone except during the course of the interview. It is important to let the participants know what the study is about and the nature of questions we will be asking.

2. Protect the safety, security and privacy of the interviewee at all times.
3. Translate what the interviewer and interviewee say verbatim; i.e., I will not distort the meaning of what is said during translation.
4. Ask interview to stop the interview if requested by the interviewee.
5. Interviewers not raise expectations and/or make promises that cannot be fulfilled.

Name & Signature.....

Date.....

ANNEX II

INFORMED CONSENT

(This form is to be read and explained to the interviewee. Interviewers must be certain that it is understood before any interview is conducted.)

(Greeting), my name is (interviewee) my colleague is (name of interpreter) who will translate for you and me. We are conducting some studies regarding the protection of children who were affected by the LRA conflict.

We are interested in knowing your story. What kind of things you did when you were younger, where you lived and also information about your family that you would like to share with us.

We would also like to know, how you became associated with armed groups, how you lived in the armed group, what you did and how you felt about it and how you left and how your life is today.

What you and other young boys and girls tell us will be used to assist policy makers to plan appropriate programs of reintegrating and rehabilitating all the children affected. These programs will also include what you like yourself. Your experiences will also help us understand children who have been affected by armed conflict and know how well to assist them.

If you agree to be interviewed, we will agree on a time and place that is comfortable, private and safe. You can choose the place. If you agree, I will record and at times write what you tell me. I would like you to know that when am writing I won't use your name or anyone's real name to protect you and the people you talk about.

During the interview, if questions are upsetting or difficult to answer, you can choose not to answer those questions. If you do not want to answer a question, just tell me and we will proceed to the next one.

Finally, if you decide not to want to continue talking with me we will stop our discussion. It is okay to make that decision and you can make it anytime you want.

ANNEX III – INTERVIEW GUIDING QUESTIONAIRES

Can you tell me about your early life?

- Where you are from
- How old are you
- Whom did you live with
- Do you have any siblings, how many?

1. Could you give me some more information about your relationship with your family and the community you live in before being abducted?
2. Were you in school before the abductions? When?
3. Do u remember when you were abducted?

- How old were u then
- Can you tell me where that happened?
- Can you tell me where they took you? What did they do or say to you
- Did you try to refuse?

4. Were you alone when they took you. If not, what happened to the ones you were with?
5. What was your role in the military camp
6. How did you find life in the bush?
7. How long were you abducted
8. Was there anything that you liked while you were with the armed group?
9. What was the worst thing you had to face or witness while in the armed group?
10. How were the other children treated and what roles did they play?
11. Did some leave while you were there? How did they leave? Where did they go?
12. Did you experience any violence yourself? If yes, would you mind describing that?
13. Did you have any physical or psychological problems linked with being a soldier? If yes, how it did happen and how you dealt (deal) with that?
14. How did you manage to return/escape?
15. Upon return, how did you get assistance, where were you taken/where did you go?
16. Have you been through a reception centre? Which one? How long did you stay there?
17. Did you have any fears or anxiety? What was the reaction of your family and community?
18. What is the general perception of the community to child victims of war? Did you receive any support?
19. What do you think could enhance effective rehabilitation and reintegration of child victims of war?
20. Do you think there are any threats that you will be recruited? If yes, why do you think this may happen?
21. I would like to know if sometimes you think about the future. What do you wish to accomplish?

Ask about general questions as to how the child thinks reintegration and rehabilitation can be made more child friendly.

To ease the tension, take a few minutes to divert for instance talk about the weather.

GENERAL GUIDE FOR THE FOCUS GROUPS DISCUSSIONS.

1. Briefly explain how the community perceives child victims of war in general.
2. Why do you think some of them joined armed groups? Were they abducted, joined voluntarily etc?
3. What is your view regarding child victims of war? Do you know any former child soldiers? Is so what do you think of their return? How is there relationship with the community? Do you see them as a threat? As impure or as innocent children who were forced to become soldiers?
4. What do you think should be done to improve the perception of the community towards child victims?
5. Do you think the government and NGO's have done enough reintegrating and rehabilitating these children? If no, why?
6. Are our elders and religious leaders helping these children? How?