Reintegration of Former Girl Soldiers of the Lord's Resistance Army back into their communities in Northern Uganda

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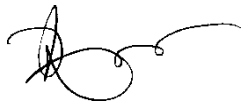
DECLARATION

I, Bob Drani, declare that the research dissertation that I herewith submit for the doctoral degree qualification Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) in International Relations at the North West University is my independent work, and that I have not previously submitted it for a qualification at another institution of higher education.



Bob Drani

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DEDICATION

To my wife Mrs. D, and our lovely triplets Francine, Charles, and Nigel. Thank you for the patience and support.

To my late father Charles Origa Futo Drani and my late mother Marjorie Kobusingye Drani. Thank you for smiling down on me.

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ABSTRACT

Armed conflict always comes with consequences during and after the conflict, and these are mainly experienced by women and children. This study focuses on exploring the reintegration experiences of former girl soldiers (FGS) of the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) in the northern district of Pader, Uganda, following the 2006 ceasefire in the insurgency. The post-conflict reintegration of these girls through various mechanisms had a bearing on their eventual productivity and the sustainability of their life style in the community. This study investigates the current social reality of the FGS with the objective of determining how well they have adapted to civilian life after the conflict, the skills they acquired, and what lessons were learned from the reintegration programmes. Using a case study design, in-depth interviews were conducted with the FGS, as the prime study participants, as well as with key informants through focus groups. A case study allows for the use of multiple data-collection tools to study and analyse a situation over a confined period of time. Qualitative research data allows the researcher to present and discuss how individuals interact, experience, interpret, and are affected by the situation they are faced with. Qualitative methods support researchers in acquiring narratives that aid in forming an understanding of multifaceted contexts. In line with the interpretivist paradigm of seeking to understand human experiences, the FGS' responses revealed their unique perspectives and the new social realities that they are facing. The study results revealed that FGS face major challenges related to basic living conditions and a potential decline in both physical and mental health. Furthermore, the findings showed that there is a need to re-evaluate the actual social, economic, and mental benefits to FGS presented by existing reintegration programmes, as these tend to take a one-size-fits-all approach that does not consider unique experiences and needs. A back-to-the-roots system that identifies and prioritises the challenges faced by FGS is needed. It is recommended that a census of all FGS in the areas that were affected by the LRA conflict in Uganda should be undertaken; this census can then guide policymakers in addressing the current social reality

of the FGS. Furthermore, a parish development model (PDM) should be introduced in the areas inhabited by the FGS. The census data would then be used to identify the FGS at parish level and incorporate them into the PDM as a vulnerable group. The PDM is based on a needs assessment at grassroots level to determine best practices in agriculture. The model is not imposed on people; rather, all its projects are driven and steered by the community members. This ensures more accountability, a sense of belonging, and ownership of any project that is undertaken. The PDM has the capacity to transform the lives of FGS so that they achieve surplus-producing households. This will have a ripple effect on the health, wealth, psychological well-being, and happiness of the FGS and their communities.

Keywords: former girl soldiers, post-conflict reintegration, Lord's Resistance Army, Uganda, parish development model

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ABBREVIATIONS

ARLPI	Acholi Religious Leaders Peace Initiative
ASD	appropriate skills development
CAR	Central African Republic
CCF	Christian Counselling Fellowship
CPA	Comprehensive Peace Agreement
CRC	Convention on the Rights of the Child
DCDO	District Community Development Officer
DDR	Disarmament, Demobilisation, and Reintegration
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
FGD	focus-group discussions
FGS	former girl soldiers
GoU	Government of Uganda
GUSCO	Gulu Save The Children Organisation
ICC	International Criminal Court
ILO	International Labour Organisation
IRC	International Rescue Committee
LRA	Lord's Resistance Army
NGO	non-governmental organisation
NRA	National Resistance Army
NRC	Norwegian Refugee Council

NRM	National Resistance Movement
NUREP	Northern Ugandan Rehabilitation Programme
NWU	North West University
PAR	participatory action research
PDM	parish development model
PRDP	Peace, Recovery, and Development Plan
RUF	Revolutionary United Front
SDT	Skills Development Theory
TC	Town Council
UN	United Nations
UNCST	Uganda National Council of Science and Technology
UNLA	Uganda National Liberation Army
UNSC	UN Security Council
UPDF	Uganda People's Defence Forces
WFP	World Food Programme
WVI	World Vision International

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the Study

This study focuses on exploring the reintegration experiences of former girl soldiers (FGS) of the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) in the northern district of Pader, Uganda, following the 2006 ceasefire in the insurgency. Joseph Kony, the leader of the LRA, came out of the framework of fellow Acholi tribe member Alice Lakwena's Holy Spirit Movement after it was defeated by the National Resistance Army (NRA). His ambition was to further the political relevance of the northern region in the country using the 10 commandments of the Bible as the foundation of his doctrine (Doom & Vlassenroot, 1999). Such thinking is rooted in the British colonial system of governance (based on the divide and rule principle), which favoured certain groups in a country over others, thus creating a false sense of superiority and polarising many African communities. At the attainment of Uganda's independence, the army mainly consisted of Acholi kin; the colonialists deemed them to be stronger and more aggressive soldiers. These "strong men" would eventually get sucked into the defence of the British Empire fighting outside Uganda. This must have created a false sense of ownership of the military by the Acholi, as opposed to instilling in them the sense of duty to serve to the nation. Recruitment into the army was almost a preserve for the Acholi; however, this later had socio-political implications for the stability of the country.

The Acholi people became more dominant and, therefore, thought they should always be in charge of the country. It is one of many reasons that led to the formation of militia groups such as the one being focused on in this thesis – the LRA. One of the key characteristics of the LRA group was the recruitment of children – in particular, girls – to actively serve as rebels on various frontlines. As a result, many recruits died and survivors returned back home, with some accepted back into their communities and others migrating to other areas. As a service

man and an academic, this background motivated me to explore how the former girl fighters of the LRA are living and adapting to civilian life following the end of the conflict and to investigate the implementation of a number of reintegration programmes in Northern Uganda.

This introductory chapter is divided into five sub-sections. These are the conceptual view of child soldiers, the global perspectives on girl soldiers in armed conflicts, the LRA war in Northern Uganda and girl soldiers, girl soldier roles in armed conflicts, and reintegration of FGS.

1.1.1 Conceptual View of Child Soldiers

The issue of child soldiers has become one of global concern, the magnitude of which calls for focused attention. Despite child soldiering often being regarded as a boy-dominated occurrence, literature indicates that girls also become fighters, and their involvement, practices, and understanding within the fighting forces must be acknowledged. Literature shows that, like boys, girl soldiers are recruited and actively part of the fighting forces (Denov, 2008). Due to their ability to quickly adapt to the new situations and fit into adult command roles, many young boys and girls have been recruited and fought in a number of armed battles globally (Banholzer & Haer, 2014). According to the Cape Town Principles (McKay, 2005), a child soldier is defined as:

> any person under 18 years of age who is part of any kind of regular or irregular armed force in any capacity, including but not limited to cooks, porters, messengers, and those accompanying such groups, other than purely as family members. Girls recruited for sexual purposes and forced marriage are included in this definition. It does not, therefore, only refer to a child who is carrying or has carried arms. (p. 387)

Since the end of World War II, many children have experienced violence acts and have been recruited by state military agencies, militias, and rebel groups. Although it is difficult to obtain accurate information about these children since their deployment violates international human-rights standards, it is estimated that about 300,000 child soldiers have participated in

wars in at least 83 countries worldwide (Haer, 2017). While their deployment is usually with limited visibility (McKay, 2005), it is important to note that girls compose a larger percentage of children enrolled to engage in militia activities (Derluyn et al., 2013). Furthermore, despite their relative invisibility, girls have been used and are still actively engaged in armed groups to a greater extent than is reported, which implies that the investigation and representation of their actualities, experiences, and truths have to a large extent been neglected as compared to their boy counterparts (Denov, 2008). It is, therefore, the goal of this research to contribute to tracing and exploring the experiences of FGS since the end of the LRA insurgency in 2006.

The above confirms that, regardless of their contribution in armed conflicts, girl soldiers' actualities and experiences are little understood and infrequently recognised; yet, they experience and witness various violent acts such as killings, forced abortion, manslaughter, rape, drug abuse, and physical and psychological dispossession (McKay, 2005). These experiences are not only hazardous to their well-being, they also rob these girl soldiers of their closest relatives and peers, which inevitably generates severe emotional and mental trauma. Addressing the results of these realities goes beyond the effort to reintegrate these young surviving former combatants into a civilian community, as there is a high risk of continuation of violence which can potentially undermine post-conflict peacebuilding efforts (Banholzer & Haer, 2014). This means that FGS need not be typically subsumed under the larger category of females, for this marginalises the effort to recognise their experiences as former and surviving child soldiers. Understanding their experiences necessitates initiatives dedicated to empowering them to harness the strengths gained from survival during war (McKay, 2005). I argue that the experience of surviving war is a worthy subject to be studied, recognised, and popularised.

1.1.2 Global Perspectives on Girl Soldiers in Armed Conflicts

In contrast to pre-colonial times, where youngsters did not participate in battle theatres, post-colonial wars globally have been characterized with the recruitment of children to

participate in the fighting, logistics, and intelligence of war (Agbedahin, 2018). Children are increasingly enrolled by militias and rebels to serve both primary and secondary warfare roles, fighting for both government and opposition forces (Haer, 2019). Regardless of their rank and situation in the armed forces, literature indicate that girls of different ages have been part of combat clusters in 55 countries globally, especially during the period spanning the 1990s and early 2000s. During this decade, female child soldiers featured in 38 armed battles across four continents (Africa, America, Asia, and Europe), many of which (13 out of the 38) took place on the African continent (McKay, 2005). These figures confirm the premium attached to child soldiers and how child soldiering is a global ethos requiring urgent attention.

Although most of the aforementioned armed conflicts were internal, there are instances in Europe (Macedonia), Africa (Uganda, Sierra Sudan), and the Middle East (Lebanon) where young girls were engaged in armed battles across political borders (McKay, 2005). In these conflicts, a number of children, including girls, were abducted across borders and used as fighters in different wars. The majority of these children never consented to their recruitment into armed forces**.** In the South American country of Colombia, about 5,800 boys and girls are estimated to have participated in armed battles as soldiers, while in the state of Manipur, India, approximately 900 to 1,000 girls were recognised war fighters. About 300–500 girl soldiers fought under the command of both state military agencies and the rebel group (Khmer Rouge) in a civil war that took place in Cambodia**.** While the actual numbers are unknown, it is noted that many school girls in Mozambique were forcefully solicited by the regime's military agencies to fight against Renamo armed rebels for a period of approximately 16 years between 1972–1992 (Nilsson, 2005). In Liberia, between 1989 and 2003, an estimated 21,000 child soldiers, of whom 8,500 were girls, actively fought in the war. The general lack of accurate statistics is often noted as one of the key characteristics of research on armed conflict situations (Agbedahin, 2018). Given the information that is known, it can be concluded that war situations turn children, particularly girls, into a transferable commodity that provides cheap labour to different fighting forces (Haer, 2019).

The idea of girls freely choosing to be part of the armed forces has become a contested one, as research shows that they are simply coerced (McKay, 2005). Such coercion does not only breach international law but presents a weighty concern for the young combatants' endurance, growth, safety, and happiness. Engaging youngsters as soldiers under the supervision of militaries, fighters, and rebels transforms them into agents of fierceness, savagery, and cruelty instead of being engineers of stability and peace (Haer, 2019). Their abduction robs them of their time and freedom, for they are held in captivity where they suffer serious injuries and trauma (Petty & Savage, 2007). Even when the war ends, upon return to their communities, their acceptance remains problematic, which exposes them to a number of hindrances in sustainably reintegrating into post-conflict societies (Agbedahin, 2018).

I argue that the issue of children serving as soldiers in armed violence is a global problem of which the magnitude cannot be fully explored since it is difficult to determine how many children, particularly girls, have been recruited into militia groups. However, the fact that it has been recognised that girls have been or are actively involved in armed conflicts, presents world leaders with a wakeup call to find solutions to such – especially given that child soldiering is not only a problem in the developing world but it is also experienced in the developed world.

1.1.3 The LRA War in Northern Uganda and Girl Soldiers

The LRA is a non-state insurgent group that mainly directed its violence against the civilian population in Northern Uganda and South Sudan. However, due to the intensity of government pressure, it has since relocated its bases to the Great Lakes Region of the Central African Republic (CAR) and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC; Bevan, 2007, as cited in Schabas, 2012).

Historically, the rise of political instabilities in Uganda stemmed from a number of military coups that occurred during the decade the country gained independence from the British. The 1971 coup, for instance, led to the overthrow of the Obote I government by Idi Amin, while the 1979 coup overthrew Idi Amin's government with the help of Tanzania's Armed

Forces. In July 1985, the Uganda National Liberation Army (UNLA), under the leadership of General Tito Okello, overthrew the Obote II government (Kiplagat, 2002). Within the same time, there was the rise of the NRA rebels, led by Yoweri Museveni, who later seized power on January 26, 1986. However, Museveni's rise to power was not welcomed by many, which resulted into the mushrooming of more rebel outfits, especially in Northern Uganda and parts of West Nile, to oust the NRA government. One of these was the LRA rebel group led by the infamous Joseph Kony, whose activities did not only last for over 20 years, but the effects thereof were felt widely with regards to the recruitment of child soldiers (Hutchinson, 2000, as cited in McGowan, 2014).).

The 1970s and 1980s were characterised by the phenomenon of coup d'états in many developing countries in Africa and Asia. Whoever controlled these armies automatically became president. The overthrow of the then Uganda government in 1986 by the "southern rebels" under the leadership of Yoweri Museveni contributed to the formation of LRA – a rebel group led by Joseph Kony. The sentiment among some of the Acholi (one of the indigenous ethnic tribes in Northern Uganda) that the army in Uganda should be commanded by one of their own was a catalyst to Kony's initial rank-and-file manpower. Few of the soldiers would acknowledge defeat, thus resulting in a guerrilla warfare. With the leader of the LRA being an Acholi, the force relied on Acholi recruits (Banholzer & Haer, 2014; Petty & Savage, 2007). This rebel group fought from bases within the territories of Northern Uganda and Southern Sudan and mainly consisted of abducted people from these regions. Up to 80% of the force is estimated to have consisted of children, including girls (McKay, 2005). While attempting to bring down the National Resistance Movement (NRM) government during the 20 years of insurgency, over 30,000 children (including some as young as 5 years old) in Northern Uganda were kidnapped, hijacked, and involuntarily recruited to serve as fighters for the LRA rebel group. As they engaged in frontline battles, it is estimated that nine out of every 10 children died on mission (Russell & Gozdziak, 2006).

One of the characteristics of the LRA rebel group was the large-scale recruitment of children as soldiers over many years (Haer, 2019). As it was with the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) in Sierra Leone, Liberia, Angola, Mozambique, and in many other countries, most girls joined the LRA forces because they were abducted (Agbedahin, 2018; Denov, 2008; McKay, 2005). In addition to abduction, the LRA group commanders used a number of manipulation tactics to lure these children into battle such as drug abuse and alcoholism, which in turn made the child soldiers feel invincible. The child soldiers were made to think that these substances acted as "protection medicine" (Russell & Gozdziak, 2006). In almost every armed conflict in the world, children are the primary victims (Otunnu, 2017). Armed groups systematically and intentionally recruit children because they are easy to manipulate either through violence or indoctrination. Children, once conditioned to a situation, will easily follow instructions. The captors do not consider that children are human beings with consciousness and long-term memory that will store information for a very long time – especially bad memories. I argue that the tactics used by rebels to recruit and officiate children into rebel activities have a very powerful effect on children's thinking.

Primarily, the Acholi people were the victims of the insurgency and, in turn, their community infrastructures were shattered and thousands of them displaced (Agbedahin, 2018; Denov, 2008; McKay, 2005). It is noted that although several Acholi guerrilla forces resisted government takeover by the NRA and were defeated by the year 1988, they never surrendered. Despite their decision to continue fighting, the LRA group received little public support and instead relied on the few voluntary recruits robbing households and forcing enrolment of children to maintain the vigour of the fighters (Banholzer & Haer, 2014). The conflict was characterised by abuse of the individual, constitutional, and civil rights of non-combatants as well as damage to society structures – including breakdown of infrastructure and limited access to social services. This paralysed the economic functionality of the area (mainly in Gulu, Kitgum, and Pader Districts), leading to displacement of over 2 million people whose livelihood security was profoundly damaged. In this case, the displaced survived

through the mercy and intervention of the World Food Programme (WFP; Petty & Savage, 2007).

Even when Uganda had signed the Optional Protocol that sought to protect children against participation in any kind of war, the LRA violated this protocol to the extent of using the world's youngest known child soldier, aged 5, as part of its rebel forces. In fact, it is alleged that there is not one family in the Acholi land that did not have a son or daughter taken by the LRA to be a fighter. The rebels committed many atrocities against their own community, the Acholi (Russell & Gozdziak, 2006). The LRA insurgencies dramatically intensified after 1996, reaching a climax in 2003 after almost 7 years. At this time, the state army was legitimately allowed into Sudan to target the bases of the rebels (Banholzer & Haer, 2014). Due to military pressure from the Uganda People's Defence Forces (UPDF), with advice from the United States military, LRA activity shifted from Uganda to the CAR, DRC, and South Sudan (Arieff & Ploch, 2012; Spitzer & Twikirize, 2013; both cited in Barrett et al., 2013).

In 2004, after almost 20 years of fighting, the LRA was contained by the UPDF, which marked the beginning of the end of the insurgency. This ushered in ceasefire dialogue between the LRA rebels and the Government of Uganda (GoU), mediated by the Government of Southern Sudan – currently South Sudan. As a result of the discussions, an informal truce was reached in 2006, which has had an influence on the reintegration of former child soldiers and, in particular, surviving girl fighters (Banholzer & Haer, 2014). This truce set the momentum which the current Pader District and the entire Northern Uganda are thriving off today. Since the cease fire, substantial efforts have been implemented to achieve steady societal revival in the region and the country at large. Nonetheless, the insurgency left many people in Northern Uganda without protection, economic support, or social safety nets, thereby creating new categories of destitute individuals (Petty & Savage, 2007).

The LRA rebels committed unprecedented criminal atrocities against the people of Northern Uganda. Many people had their lips chopped off, were decapitated, or were even

boiled alive in large pots in the village centres. In 2002, at Gere-Gere trading centre, over 25 people were hacked to death and boiled in large pots. This horrendous act was meant to warn anyone who collaborated with the government or refused to join or support the LRA cause (Ojewska, 2017). These gross violations of human rights, crimes against humanity, and the abduction of scores of young people are among the reasons why Kony and his top LRA commanders ended up on the International Criminal Court (ICC) list.

1.1.4 Girl Soldier Roles in Armed Conflicts

The fact that children are obedient, highly motivated, dedicated, easy to manipulate, and do not require any payment makes them a source of constant and reliable labour. Furthermore, they often lack a fully developed sense of the right and wrong, making them attractive recruits to armed forces (Denov, 2008; Russell & Gozdziak, 2006). It is easy for the rebel forces to trust and train children in military tactics and weaponry use as they prepare for rebel activity. Once abducted by LRA rebels, the newly equipped youngsters served in a number of capacities – for instance as caretakers, patrollers, frontline fighters, domestic helpers, as well as sex slaves for the LRA commanders (Petty & Savage, 2007). In the process, the surviving abducted girls produced children fathered by LRA rebel commanders. It is plausible that some of these children grew up and also became soldiers in the force (McKay, 2005).

While on mission, girl soldiers' obligations and responsibilities are numerous, non-universal, and determined based on a particular attachment, their age, and the cultural understanding associated with being a girl or boy. Across the board, however, they are treated like slaves and servants (McKay, 2005). Right from their initiation into violent conflicts, girl soldiers perform multiple tasks as wives and fighters, and they are the last members of the militia groups to be released by commanders (Denov, 2008). Many times, these girls are at the receiving end of all sorts dehumanising acts – including, sexual exploitation, forced domestic servitude, rape, carrying supplies, moving weapons, and stealing food. They often

spy behind enemy lines and counter fight during ambush (Agbedahin, 2018; McKay, 2005; Russell & Gozdziak, 2006). Their roles in the overall functioning of fighting forces is of critical importance. These realities demonstrate how difficult the life of a girl soldier is and warrants in-depth exploration of how they overcome these experiences and perform in post-war societies. Their war-time experiences cannot be overlooked if they are to be successfully reintegrated within their communities of origin.

Whereas war experiences might be similar, at some level, there are also differences. Some fighters are entrenched longer than others and they also assume differing roles. Those who spend a longer time in conflict become more accustomed to the violent lifestyle compared to those who escaped or were released earlier. This, in turn, has an impact on their ability to reintegrate into and adapt to civilian life when the war ends. The longer they stay in war-like situations, the harder for them to adapt to a non-combatant lifestyle (Banholzer & Haer, 2014). For girls, it becomes another tragedy altogether, especially for those who have produced children with rebel soldiers or have been raped. These often exhibit unhealthy sexual behaviours and will always be worried about being accepted into their communities with their offspring (Russell & Gozdziak, 2006). I argue that this not only puts pressure on the returnees, but it also pressurises the community with regards to how best to handle them. For example, given that the girls have been exposed to various traumatic situations, unpleasant experiences can trigger a past memory which could in turn lead to these girls behaving in ways that pose a threat to their communities.

1.1.5 Reintegration of Former Girl Soldiers

A number of global guiding conventions and protocols have been established for safeguarding children during and after armed conflicts. The United Nations (UN) Disarmament, Demobilisation, and Reintegration (DDR) programme is one of the leading programmes for encouraging reintegration of former child war fighters. This programme incorporates diverse engagement processes as well as activities such as therapy, healing,

and basic functional and life-enhancing skills dedicated to fostering successful reintegration of former child fighters into civilian communities (Agbedahin, 2018). In this regard, literature indicates that such activities are embedded within the three common programming-related areas of community acceptance, economic and educational integration, and psychological counselling. The success or failure of these efforts are context-based, since different societies differ in capacity and response measures (Banholzer & Haer, 2014; Derluyn et al., 2013). It is important to note that such programme designs acknowledge that FGS have an opportunity to engage in various reforms and life-enhancing activities in a post-conflict society (Russell & Gozdziak, 2006).

An example of such a guiding convention is found in Liberia. On reaching a peace settlement – the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) – there were approximately 21,000 child combatants. Of these children, those who were formally demobilised and benefited from the DDR process consisted of 41.8% boys and only 12% girls. As part of the reintegration process, 45% of these young veterans chose mainstream education, while the remaining 55% chose to participate in vocational training programmes**.** Despite these youth being introduced to a number of anti-social behaviours during war, such as cannibalism and killing, research indicates that some of the experiences and lessons learned in fulfilling their soldierly obligations could potentially enhance their reunification process (Agbedahin, 2018). War made these children mature faster, thus they learned to deal with the "real world" and acquired coping mechanisms. However, it is also key to note that, if they are not reintegrated effectively, it may be possible for the former fighters to use forceful measures as a means to acquire what they need for life, which, in turn, might lead to tension and unrest (Banholzer & Haer, 2014). If handled well, however, FGS can become productive and caring adults, who are capable of pursuing their own well-being and that of their families and communities. However, the journey to fit into civilian life is never a straight path for FGS.

Despite the numerous DDR programme interventions meant to support returning war child fighters in therapeutic, physical, psychological, and educational areas (Denov, 2008;

Derluyn et al., 2013), research shows that surviving female youths are often discriminated against and neglected in the DDR programmes. It is noted that, when they come back to their communities, FGS are often abandoned. These war veterans are hard pressed and, as a result, they turn to dangerous sources of income such as sex trade for basic subsistence (McKay et al., 2011). This aligns with Haer's (2017) observations that former girl combatants are often left out in the greater DDR programmes. In many instances, where they are included, they are attached to poorly facilitated and resourced programmes, which do not address their most important needs. Little attention is given to individual experiences of former child soldiers, thus there is a high likelihood that their restoration will fail. Some of the measures implemented seem to approach the FGS as a homogeneous group, which is not accurate (Agbedahin, 2018). This explains why certain FGS, despite their involvement in restoration interventions, have not succeeded or are still struggling with life (Banholzer & Haer, 2014). There cannot be a one-size-fits-all strategy.

According to Denov (2008), ineffective implementation undermines the reason why such programmes are created – namely, empowerment of participants. If participants are not truly empowered, this can heighten their insecurity, as there is a reluctance of communities to accept their return (Agbedahin, 2018). McKay (2005) warns that continued failure to integrate these girls within the daily affairs of their communities and keeping their experiences from public scrutiny would only be serve to diminish their individual potential.

Armed conflict is unique in its different forms and practices. The experiences of each individual involved are also unique, and the solutions presented to survivors should be tailored to each individual's needs. That said, the price tag that comes with this kind of intervention is hefty. It is also time consuming. The window of empathy and good will by the international community and the world at large towards post-conflict arena is very limited. At the end of many armed conflicts, there is a lot of sympathy, media coverage, and use of buzz words. Calls to help "the children of war". These calls generate a lot of support (mainly financial); however, if reintegration models are not self-sustaining, as is the case most of the time, the

end user always suffers because funding slowly grinds to a halt. Unless financial backing is solid, many reintegration programmes barely witness a significant success rate. This is in part due to the fact that host countries lack the capacity to maintain the standards that had been set by the initial programmes.

With the aforementioned realities in mind, bringing the concerns of FGS to the fore in mainstream discussions of reintegration and recovery programmes means that one or two steps might be adopted or adapted to prioritise and take action towards their unique needs. However, with such a situation, determining the best practices for the reintegration creates numerous discussions and disagreements among practitioners. Furthermore, FGS' presence in the community does not necessarily show that they are accepted if they are not allowed full participation in the affairs of their communities. Further, this kind of treatment reminds these girls of their previous treatment that violated their human rights and freedoms. Thus, this further justifies the need and importance of exploring the individual experiences of the FGS in the aftermath of war – the aim of this study.

This study seeks to fill a knowledge gap on the adaptation of FGS to civilian life after reintegration. This will establish evidence with regard to how the FGS have adapted to civilian life and whether appropriate skills development (ASD) has played a part in their adaptation. Given that there have been a number of reintegration programmes implemented in Uganda, the study findings will enable an understanding of why the life of FGS is the way it is currently. The study aims to enhance knowledge in the academic and public arena regarding the social reality of FGS. In this case, successes and failures of the implemented interventions shall be explored. The study results may be used to inform policy about reintegration of war veterans not only in Northern Uganda but the whole country and abroad. Improving these interventions will improve the long-term survival of veterans, increase sustainability of reintegration programmes, and accelerate national economic growth (Marimuthu et al., 2009).

1.2 Problem Statement

Despite the significant efforts to address issues of former child soldiers by state and non-state actors (Haer, 2017), more attention has been given to boys than to girls in receiving DDR benefits. In Angola, for instance, despite the large numbers that participated in the armed conflict, very few of the surviving girl combatants were officially demobilised, while thousands of boys were. In Sierra Leone, a couple of thousand boys benefited from DDR compared to only a few hundred of the FGS, whose numbers exceeded that of the boys (McKay, 2005). Of the 21,000 surviving boy and girl soldiers eligible for demobilisation interventions in Liberia, 8,771 boy soldiers were selected for rehabilitation but only 2,511 girl soldiers benefited through the DDR process (Agbedahin, 2018). Girls appear to be a low priority and receive unfair treatment. The low priority afforded to FGS and the neglect (or even undermining) of their needs and best interests greatly diminishes the effectiveness of the reintegration programmes (Denov, 2008). Moreover, a number of prevailing interventions are planned with little or no input from their beneficiaries, which lessens the appropriateness of these programmes to the lives of returned former child combatants (McKay et al., 2011). This again emphasises the importance of exploring how FGS are adapting to civilian life amidst such interventions.

McKay (2005) warns that continuing to isolate FGS from their mainstream communities would only stifle their prospective healing and development in their communities. Besides, continuing to marginalise vast numbers of FGS may stimulate a rebirth of situations leading to resentment and aggression (Denov, 2008). On the other hand, there are clear indications that their acceptance in their communities is questionable (Agbedahin, 2018). Consequently, many of them are left stigmatised, disempowered, and invisible within their communities – especially those who became pregnant or had children with adult male combatants (McKay et al., 2011). This is a big challenge to their successful reintegration but also confirms the continued experience of trauma, which in turn might compel them to behave as rebels. When human beings are rejected on disenfranchised at whatever level, they will either fight the system or go into a cocoon and suffer silently.

A considerable amount of time (a decade and a half) has passed the LRA rebel war ended in 2016, allowing surviving FGS to return. There has thus been ample time for reintegration programmes to be rolled out, providing sufficient data upon which to base a study on how FGS are benefiting from these reintegration processes and programmes. The results of this study will make available extra knowledge on the plight of FGS, which can be of use to research and humanitarian work on recovery from insurgences (Denov, 2008; Haer, 2017) This supports Haer's (2019) suggestion that the more cases of child soldiering we study, the more we are enabled to find patterns in how FGS are experiencing life in the aftermath of war. Studying them is prioritising their concerns and issues in light of their societies' development discourses. Therefore, this research is positioned to provide evidence-based scenarios that can result in practical solutions to difficulties affecting the successful integration of FGS, using Pader District in Northern Uganda as a case study. Studying FGS in these present times will be an additional step to visibly acknowledge and popularise their present struggles and suggest sustainable interventions.

1.3 Aim of the Study

The study seeks to gain an understanding of how FGS of the LRA are experiencing reintegration programmes as they adapt to a civilian life following their return from the war, so as to inform better, practical, and sustainable practices that transform and enhance the lives and livelihoods of war-affected persons. This can also form an avenue to inform policy reviews and amendments of any future reintegration models.

1.4 Objectives of the Study

This study specifically addresses three objectives:

a) To assess the programmes, if any, instituted by the GoU and other entities in the reintegration of girl soldiers back into their communities.
b) To establish whether or not there is a deficiency in addressing the skills development of the girl soldiers.

c) To provide policy with a new dimension while presenting the current social reality.

1.5 Research Questions

The proposed study is set to answer three questions.

a) What programmes were instituted by the GoU and other entities in reintegrating girl soldiers back into their communities?
b) How did the reintegration programmes in Northern Uganda contribute to the lives of the girl soldiers in their civilian life?
c) What has been the impact of ASD on the reintegration of the girl soldiers, and have their lives changed?

1.6 Research Framework

This study is informed by the interpretivist research paradigm, which has the central endeavour of understanding the subjective world of human experience (Lincoln & Guba, 1989). According to Lincoln and Guba (1985) and Morgan (2007; both cited in Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017), interpretivist research paradigms usually exhibits the following characteristics:

a) A situation is understood from different individuals' points of view.
b) Different perspectives from a variety of experiences make up the truth.
c) In the process of searching for knowledge, the research interfaces with the participants to get their understanding of the situation in question.
d) The circumstances surrounding the research participants are key in informing the person's experience and the understanding gained from interpreting particular experiences.
e) New knowledge is the result of the interpretation of the world as experienced by the research participants.
f) Understanding is individual and does not follow any universal laws.
g) There is a connection between what the situation is and what comes out of it.

Through this approach, the researcher's effort is to understand and interpret so as to create new knowledge based in the research participants' viewpoints. The fact that this paradigm acknowledges a variety of experiences, openness to change, inclusiveness of the research process, and freedom to use multiple data-collection techniques, forms the basis for choosing this approach to inform my study. These characteristics of interpretivism are key for leading me to a more comprehensive understanding of the situations of FGS in post-conflict society. My proposed interaction with the participants in Pader District about their experiences following the end of the insurgency will enable me to socially construct knowledge about the FGS. Therefore, as a researcher, my role is to interpret the understanding of these LRA veterans in relation to the research questions (Creswell, 2014; Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017; Thanh & Thanh, 2015)

1.6.1 Research Approach

Recognising the fact that interpretivist research principally and commonly uses qualitative procedures and means always favours the use of case studies – which is the nature of this study (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992; McQueen, 2002; Nind &Todd, 2011; Silverman, 2000; Thomas, 2006; Willis, 2007, all cited in Kolb, 2012). Further, in instances where the research seeks to explore or understand experiences, qualitative methods are likely to be the best. Ivankova and Creswell (2009) define qualitative research as a way of acquiring in-depth meaning related to a particular situation or phenomenon as revealed by the affected. According to Lodico et al. (2010), qualitative research can be characterised as follows:

a) Research is undertaken in a real-life situation using a naturalistic backdrop.
b) Research is conducted to understand the broader point of view of the prevailing situation or social reality.
c) Selecting research subjects and respondents that have vital information about the questions being asked through non-random methods.

d) Using data-collection techniques that bring researchers and participants in close contact.
e) The interactive role of the researcher that leads him or her to get to know the social contexts in which research participants live.
f) The flexibility in the data-collection process (Creswell, 2014; Thanh & Thanh, 2015).

This approach is critiqued for emphasising individual interpretations, failure to provide an opportunity to generalise findings, and lack of transparency. The advantages are that it is very flexible and puts emphasis on the process followed as well as on context as seen and experienced by those being studied (Bryman, 2008). Furthermore, analysing qualitative research data allows the researcher to present and discuss how individuals interact, experience, interpret, and are affected by the situation they are faced with (Berg, 2006). Qualitative methods support researchers in acquiring narratives that aid in understanding multifaceted contexts (Thanh & Thanh, 2015). These advantages justify my adoption of a qualitative approach to undertake this study. My role as the researcher is to get insight and in-depth information through interacting with the subjects. My interest as a qualitative researcher is in how FGS experience life in their current locations in relation to their reintegration process.

1.6.2 Research Design

This research employs a case study design to study FGS as a single case. It is one of the methodologies that suits research grounded in the interpretivist paradigm (Thanh & Thanh, 2015). Case studies are a tool of investigation in which the researcher embarks on an in-depth analysis of a single case – often a programme, event, activity, process, or one or more individuals. A case study allows use of multiple data-collection tools to study and analyse a particular situation/case over a defined period of time (Creswell, 2014), which justifies my choice for its use in this study.

1.7 Methodology

1.7.1 Geographical Research Area

This case study was conducted in the northern district of Pader, one of the constituent districts of the Acholi region and a historic homeland for the Acholi ethnic group. Based on the 2014 national housing and population census, the Northern Uganda has a total population of 178,004 people, of which 86,635 are male and 91,369 are female, accommodated in 34,183 households (Uganda Bureau of Statistics [UBOS], 2017, as cited in Burke & Kobusingye, 2014). Pader is bordered by the districts of Lamwo in the Northwest, Kitgum to the Northeast, Agago to the East, Otuke to the Southeast, Lira to the South, Oyam to the Southwest, and Gulu to the West. Pader is composed of 12 sub-counties, 52 parishes, and 608 villages. It is characterised by flat, undulating land and sloping terrain along rivers and streams at about 900 metres above sea level, lying at an average of altitude of 1,100 m above sea level. The district is predominantly a savanna grassland and woodlands, experiencing variable climatic conditions with two seasons in a year (wet and dry). It has mainly ferruginous tropical soils (clay-sandy and loamy in some areas) that support various agricultural activities – the main source of livelihood to the majority of people in the district. Although it is predominantly inhabited by the Acholi ethnic tribe, who speak Luo, there is a small percentage of people from the Lango, Teso, Bukedi, and Central regions. Compared to men, women in Pader are responsible for most of the household work; the majority of families are being taken care of by women, who spend most of their time running the family business (The Republic of Uganda, 2016).

Geographically, this research was implemented in Pader District (in Parabong, Puranga, and Pajule sub-counties). For a long time, the district was at the centre of the war between the UPDF and LRA rebels, which affected the lives of the inhabitants to a great extent until the inception of the 2006 Juba peace talks. In this war, approximately 250,000 lives were lost, about 1.7 million people were displaced, and more than 26,000 children were abducted

and forcefully recruited as child soldiers for the LRA. The experiences that the people and, in particular, FGS returnees in Pader went through during the insurgency are the very ones that this research uses as a base for exploring the current situation in relation to ongoing reintegration interventions (Wamala, 2015).

1.7.2 Types and Sources of Data

The study data is specific to the period after the war. To successfully undertake this study, I used both primary and secondary data sources. A combination of data type and sources has the potential to lead a researcher to arriving at an enhanced validity and reliability of their study. This approach ensured that issues of FGS integration were explored through a variety of lenses, thus allowing for multiple facets of their reintegration to be revealed and understood (Baxter & Jack, 2008). The primary data sources included interviews and focus-group discussions (FGDs), while documentary review informed the secondary data.

Interviews. This is a widely used data-collection technique in qualitative research. Although their transcription and analysis is time consuming, interviews are more flexible, which makes them more attractive and easily accommodated in the researchers' lives. Furthermore, interviews provide an avenue for sharing historical information and as well allowing researchers to take control of the line of questioning (Bryman, 2008; Creswell, 2014). Using interview guides, I conducted physical or virtual interviews to obtain information from all categories of respondents in this study such as the FGS, religious leaders, sub-county authorities, politicians, army officers, relatives of FGS, and non-governmental organisation (NGO) representatives.

Focus-Group Discussions. This technique works with people who are studied in groups to respond to a particular research issue. My choice for FGDs was based on their focus on group deliberations on certain issues, which is in the interest of the researcher. Within such sessions, participants have a chance to critique and build up a view during group interactions. I used this method to collect data from individuals who are available to meet in groups –

especially relatives, friends, village elders, clergy, and neighbours of FGS. I turned the interview guide into a focus-group guide to proceed with the discussions with an average size of 5-10 participants (Bryman, 2008; Creswell, 2014).

Documentary Review. During the research process, I reviewed a number of documents related to reintegration of FGS in civilian communities such as project/research reports, meeting minutes, newsletters, and papers, among others. These enable a researcher to obtain the language and words of the targeted participants, can be accessed at any time, contain facts that participants have afforded attention, and saves the researcher the time and expenses of transcribing (Creswell, 2014). In this case, I reviewed documents or archived works of the military, Ministry of Defence, government departments (such as the office of the prime minister, whose office was in charge of DDR in Uganda), as well as other scholarly articles.

1.7.3 Method of Data Collection

1.7.3.1 Population. The study focuses on FGS who participated in the LRA rebel war in Northern Uganda and, in particular, Pader District. Samples of this group were obtained from Pader District's three sub-counties – namely, Parabong, Puranga, and Pajule. As these people participated in the war, their exposure and experiences during the insurgency qualifies them to respond to the study questions. They lived to see the insurgency escalating and ending. At the same time, they have lived to witness the reintegration programmes. Their insights are instrumental is assessing the local actions towards transforming the lives of FGS and reintegrating them into the mainstream of the socio-economic development of the district, northern region, and the country at large.

1.7.3.2 Sampling Frame. The sampling frame was comprised of various stakeholders. Former girl soldiers were the principle study participants, with their experiences forming the basis of the analysis of the study findings. The frame also included relatives of FGS, politicians, army officers, NGO representatives, local government authorities, and religious

leaders. These witnessed and have actively participated in reintegration programmes that were dedicated to enhancing the socio-economic lives of the FGS. These have stories to tell as a result of a long time of dealing and staying with FGS in the district, which qualifies their participation in this study.

1.7.3.5 Sample Size. One of the challenging parts of qualitative research is determining a representative and adequate sample size. There is no consensus on what determines the sample size of a qualitative study. Accordingly, some qualitative researchers think that small/moderate-scale qualitative interviews range from 3-16 participants, while high-end/large-scale interviews can involve more than 200**.** Guest et al. (2006) suggest the use of a saturation approach following their experiment with interviews collected from 60 women from West African countries. Due to the richness of the interview data, at the 12th interview transcription, they realised they had obtained all that was needed to answer the research questions (Bryman, 2008).

Murray et al. (1999) used a sample of 280, Wethington (2000) used a sample of 700, O'Connor and Wolfe (1987) used a 64-person sample, while Robinson, Wright, and Smith (2013) used a sample of 50 (all as cited in Robinson, 2014). Aside from considering the time and resources available on the side of the researcher, what is important is getting samples that can effectively represent the rest of the population. In reflection of the above, and in addition to avoiding analytical overload, I considered an initial minimum sample of 30 and a maximum of 50 participants. The sample size grew to involve 60 FGS; 6 key informants; and 100 local leaders, parents/caretakers/guardians, religious and cultural leaders, and male former abductees. This was a relatively manageable and representative sample that fit within my control in terms of time and resources and had the potential to enable me to locate the voices of individual cases within the study (Sparkes & Smith, 2009)**.** As I started collecting data, analysis proceeded simultaneously so as to aid me in making decisions on whether to continue with or halt the data-collection exercise and add on more data. Once the available

data informed me that saturation had been reached, I ended data collection so as to save energy and time for the bigger data analysis phase (Creswell, 2014; Robinson, 2014).

1.7.3.4 Selection Method. Being informed by a qualitative case study design, I used purposive and snowball sampling techniques.

Purposive sampling: Also sometimes referred to as judgemental selection, this technique essentially allows researchers to select participants in a way that purposely allows the research questions to be answered. Those selected are considered relevant and are in a position to answer the research questions. Participants are selected based on the principle of relevance in relation to the research questions (Bryman, 2008). As a researcher, I used my prior and special knowledge about FGS to select those who represent this population and were in a position to answer the research questions (Berg, 2006). I was thus able to identify and interact with an appropriate population, whose experiences are the core and building pillars of this research.

Snowball sampling. Also known as chain referral or respondent-driven system, this approach is used to locate subjects with certain attributes or characteristics necessary in the study. I used those subjects that I interviewed first to identify and refer me to their others with whom they shared the same background of being FGS (Berg, 2006). This came with an added advantage of saving time in locating other respondents and as well as in initiating rapport with additional respondents.

1.7.4 Method of Data Analysis

Data collected was in audio and text formats, from which I drew stories during the process of analysis. Data analysis proceeded hand-in-hand with data collection. While interviews were going on, I started analysing available data. Since not all information collected carried the same value, I winnowed some parts of the data. I transcribe recorded interviews and FGDs, typed up all the filed notes, and arranged data according to sources, which was a key step in ensuring the completeness of the data. Although it was laborious and time

consuming, I hand coded all the data that I gathered. The coded data provided a frame to categorise the themes of analysis, taking into consideration the display of multiple perspectives supported by diverse extracts to represent the active voices of the participants. I used narrative passages and tables to convey the findings of analysis and created pseudonyms as adjuncts to the discussions (Berg, 2006; Creswell, 2014).

1.7.5 Validity and Reliability of the Study

Like quantitative researchers, qualitative researchers have also employed the term reliability and validity to develop criteria for assessing the trustworthiness and authenticity of their findings. In line with the suggestions of Lincoln and Guba (1989), I undertook the following measures to establish the reliability and validity of my findings.

a) Use of multiples sources of data to arrive at diversified data sets.
b) Use of an external auditor (in this case, my supervisor).
c) Sticking to the principle study participants.
d) Peer reviews and adapting to the recommended adjustments.
e) Representing a diversity of viewpoints as exhibited in the data collected.
f) Offering explanations to research participants regarding the aim of the study so that they are able to understand and undertake the necessary steps for engaging in the study and as well minimise dishonest responses.
g) Keeping a record of what transpired during the collection and analysis process.
h) Thorough cross-check of data to detect mistakes made during transcriptions, coding, and editing (Bryman, 2008; Creswell, 2014; Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017).

1.8 Ethical Considerations

Ethical issues can arise in all facets of research and are particularly prominent when studying disadvantaged sections of society (Flewitt, 2005) The FGS whom this research is looking at are among the vulnerable groups in society. The essence of this research is to provide a voice for the FGS reflecting how reintegration has shaped their adaptation to civilian

life (Fetters et al., 2013). It is highest duty of researchers to make sure that the human beings they study, probe, query, and follow-up are treated with dignity and respect (Corbin & Morse, 2003; Creswell, 2013).

This research followed all the NWU and the Uganda National Council of Science and Technology (UNCST) guidelines in information gathering from respondents. The researcher acknowledges that the study undertaken is of a very delicate and sensitive nature that might expose the FGS to secondary trauma. However, the research is meant to evaluate their present social conditions and not bring back traumatic memories.

In view of the above and bearing in mind that this research was meant to bring out the voices of FGS and shed light on their adaptation after reintegration, I sought authorisation and guidelines from authorities in each of the sub-counties. I also obtained participants' signed consent every time I interacted with them, made timely interview bookings, asked for permission to proceed during interactions with participants, and avoided any questions in my protocol that might lead to disclosure of participants' identity. Furthermore, all the research questions were strictly limited to the adaptation of the girl soldiers after reintegration. No questions relating to their war experiences were asked so as to avoid secondary trauma. To mitigate and respect gender and cultural boundaries, I secured the services of female research assistants to support in collecting data. I also secured the services of social workers, who were present at every individual or group session. I explained to every participant the objective of the research and how the results shall be handled. I informed the respondents that the findings of the research would be published and disseminated back to them as feedback. With all the above, an atmosphere of openness was created, which was key in mitigating any unforeseen ethical concerns during and after the research process.

1.9 Scope of the Study

This study considered the time period from 2006, when the LRA insurgency ended, to date so as to explore the experiences of the FGS in relation to ongoing reintegration

programmes. The available interventions and as well their contribution to the transformation of the lives of FGS in the district were explored. Geographically, this study was undertaken in Pader District (in the sub-counties of Parabong, Puranga and Pajule), located in northern part of Uganda, having been one of the epicentres during the LRA insurgency. Former girl soldiers were the principle participants of this study. However, additional insights were sought from a variety of stakeholders, who included religious leaders, politicians, army officers, sub-county authorities, NGO representatives, as well as relatives and neighbours of FGS. Their experience and exposure to the activities of the LRA rebel group put them in a strategic and advantageous position to address the research questions.

1.10 Limitations of the Study

a) The language barrier was one of the biggest limitations to this research. As the principle researcher, I do not speak Acholi/Luo. However, I employed the services of research assistants who speak Acholi and understand the culture and values of the people to support in the process of community penetration and data collection.

b) Another major limitation was finances. Being that this research project was a self-funded one, it stretched my financial capabilities to the extreme. I ensured that I utilised the meagre finances available to suit my capacity and at the same time observing the right procedures.

c) The research was undertaken in the Acholi sub-region of Northern Uganda. The location of the research is about 400 km from the residence of the researcher. The research was predominantly conducted in the rural areas of the sub-region. The logistical requirements were immense. Aspects such as safe drinking water, preferred dietary needs, medical services, and reliable electricity were foregone. The road networks themselves presented a challenge, especially in the rainy season. I parked and carried with myself the necessary essentials before I embarked on the journey to Pader District. With the above noted, there was no danger posed to the research team or the respondents.

1.11 Significance of the Study

a) The relevance of this research is situated in its outcomes, which will shed a new light and understanding on the adaptation of FGS to civilian life after undergoing reintegration. It will also help to establish the significance of gender and ASD in wholesome reintegration and emphasise the need to inform critical decision makers regarding the procedures for reintegration currently in use. The study results can be utilised to check whether the procedure for reintegration are appropriate and sustainable in terms of the economic, social, emotional, and political well-being of the recipients.

b) Seeing that armed conflicts are a continuous evil that plagues the world, findings of this study can be used to identify the most suitable procedure of reintegration for a particular post-conflict area. Results of this study will have the potential to be used for a bespoke model that can be tailored to Northern Uganda as a specific context as opposed to a "one-size-fits-all" reintegration model often promoted by the international community.

c) As an exploratory critique, the research can be a source of clarity and material for future researchers who might want to pursue the issues related to FGS, given its links to children's rights violations and gender in armed conflict scenarios. The research can be used by policy makers in developing the best and sustainable practices when it comes to reintegration of girl soldiers in various regions of the world.

1.12 Outline of the Chapter

This chapter presents information on the study background, problem statement, research aim, objectives and questions, research framework and methodology, significance of the study, ethical considerations, and anticipated limitations of the study.

CHAPTER TWO

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I present and explain the key theoretical underpinnings that provide the basis of discussion in this study. The chapter adopts a logical approach that examines alternative and supportive theoretical perspectives with the aim of determining their adaptability to the study. Furthermore, I present a review of relevant literature on reintegration of FGS, with particular focus on reintegration programmes and their contributions to the lives of FGS.

2.2 Theoretical Framework

This study is informed by the UN's promoted DDR framework, with additional reference to the ASD and constructivism theories. Whereas the DDR focuses entirely on the process of reintegrating ex-combatants, the other two theories provide a background on learning and skills acquisition in particular. Reintegrating FGS requires an understanding of the theoretical framework on how the process should be done and as well an appreciation of what kind of learning or training suits the acquisition of a set of social and functional skills that can support them in coping with civilian life.

2.2.1 The Disarmament, Demobilisation, and Reintegration Framework

According to Knight (2008), the origin of the DDR framework/methodology is traceable to Boutros Boutros-Ghali's idea of post-conflict peacebuilding as an agenda for elimination of the recurrence of fierce battles, clashes, and fights in a post-conflict environment or society. This framework is also seen as a reaction to the Brahimi description that clearly and overtly interconnected the peacekeeping, peacebuilding, and socio-economic development purposes and roles of the UN. In the DDR, there is a consideration of disarming warring groups/cliques, repairing and bringing back rule of law, withdrawing and extinguishing fighting arms, taking

home exiles and migrants, reintegrating internally displaced persons back into their societies, among other things. Since the mid-1990s, the UN included the DDR as a vital component of its multidimensional peacebuilding and refurbishment function in post-conflict situations. To date, this process has continued to share the current DDR framework and is an obligation of the UN.

The DDR agendas are by and large positioned to address intimidations, dangers, bullying, coercion, terrorisation, and pressures related to the safety of persons in a post-conflict society in a specific constituency or area through disarming former fighters, discharging and releasing them from military service, and reintegrating them back into societies of their choice. Within this framework, the former war fighters are given opportunity to surrender and taken back into their communities to begin a new civilian lifestyle. This is purposely done to pave the way for reconstruction and progression in a once conflict-filled setting and to facilitate the active participation of ex-combatants in the peacebuilding and recovery processes (Knight, 2008). However, this framework is not generic, but rather meant to be specific to individual settings, given that political settings differ and call for tailored programme designs and interventions. As a DDR programme is planned, the practices (processes and procedures) to follow through the three phases of disarmament, demobilisation, and reintegration must be clearly outlined for proper coordination during implementation and evaluation of results.

Despite its positive aims, the implementation of the DDR framework has been found to often lead to abuse, exploitation, and re-recruitment of ex-combatants – especially on the side of young people (Wessels, 2004). This further supports my view that it is crucial for a special DDR agenda to be designed for girl child soldiers. This would be the most viable way to ensure their protection as ex-combatants. The framework must acknowledge the existence and participation of child soldiers in violent conflicts and the significance of their reunification into civilian life.

The DDR framework follows a three-staged process for ex-combatants to be reunited with their communities. The first one is *disarmament*, which denotes the gathering, assembling, recording, certification, controlling, and removal of all sorts of weaponry in possession of groups of fighters in a battle area. This encompasses establishing arms controlling and administration programmes. The first phase is followed by the process of *demobilisation*, during which members of armed groups are separated from their soldiering service associations and prepared for a shift to civilian status. At this juncture, the registered individual ex-fighters are placed in provisional repair centres, where they receive transitional (changeover) supporting services to meet their immediate basic needs for survival. These needs can include but are not limited to outfits, food, somewhere to live, curative and health services, skilling, counselling, and access to microcredit. *Reintegration* is the third phase, which is an open and long-term process intended to enable the acclimatisation and reintegration of former fighters in a manner that permits them and their relatives to adjust to civilian life in areas where communities may not automatically be prepared to receive them back. This stage includes rehabilitation of war-affected individuals as well as socio-economic reconstruction programmes for well-being and renewed growth (Haer, 2017; Knight, 2008).

This three-phase system is established to support proper functioning of former combatants once they settle into areas or communities of reunification. The system requires that the reintegration process involve the ex-fighters' families and community as a whole to assist in meeting their psychological needs (Brooks, 2012). This implies that, for a moderately successful and sustainable process, the family and community at large must be prepared for the return of the former soldier before reunion. They must understand and appreciate that these former combatants are not inherently bad people, but they need support and are capable of taking on positive roles in a civilian society (Wessels, 2004). It can thus be quite a difficult process to transfer a former child soldier from the life of a fighter into a civilian life that requires a lot of community tolerance. Involving relatives of former combatants in the reintegration process psychologically prepares and supports them to acknowledge and receive their loved

ones wholeheartedly as people whom they have a relationship with and with whom they share a biological and natural attachment.

The DDR framework is a practice/procedure developed to ensure an effective combatant-to-civilian transition. It may involve an amalgamation of some former combatants into the standing government security or armed forces (such as the army, police, or reserve forces). Others are taken back to live a civilian that they were used to before their recruitment into rebel forces (Muggah, 2005). However, as it is with reunification into civilian life, the ex-combatant's choice to be integrated into the armed forces remains voluntary. It is a decision that such people take with the aid of the psychosocial support offered while at care centres. Wessels (2004) notes that care centres are designed to be temporary and are supposed to introduce the former child soldiers to a new environment that facilitates their journey to transition from soldiery into civilian life. This is meant to help them attain a sense of duty, charge, and obligation that prepares them to perform civilian duties. While some of these ex-combatants can take a much longer time to recover from the psychological effects of the insurgencies, the interim centres are designed to accommodate them for about 2-6 months (Wessels, 2004). This further confirms that contexts matter and may be a key determinant of recovery for those in rehabilitation.

I argue that the DDR framework is a valuable resource that offers insightful conceptions of how to begin the process of reintegration of former soldiers, including FGS, into a civilian lifestyle. However, it is apparent that when designing such a framework, it must be tailored to a particular setting for practical and sustainable results. It is also important to note that the DDR approach seem to be an expensive process that requires a considerable amount of resources to facilitate the effective and efficient execution of the elements in each of the three stages. While the process has a number of initial steps, including disarmament, temporary care centres, and so forth, its desired end result is reintegrated and rehabilitated ex-combatants. The reintegration can either mean being recruited into the existing state security organs or being reunited with family members. Interestingly, the framework draws out

particular activities that are supposed to be carried out at every phase, which are a clear signal on how each of the stages must be practically approached. There is a clear line of actions that must be undertaken until the final process of reunification is reached. This implies that the framework is established in the spirit of supporting ex-combatants to live a civilian life, prevent their re-recruitment into violent engagements, and help them be part of their communities' recovery efforts. How short or long the process may be might be determined by the political will of a particular setting to support the activities predetermined by the framework.

However, like any other theoretical framework, the DDR approach has its own shortcomings that might limit its effectiveness in the reintegration of FGS. The DDR process has been criticised for treating children as adults and focusing a lot of resources on disarmament and demobilisation at the expense of reintegration. Although they might have taken on adult roles at the time of their participation in an armed conflict, this does not qualify them as adults and they still need to be treated as children. Such a situation keeps child soldiers invisible and marginalised and yet their presence in rebel groups are a reality in the present-day world (Wessels, 2004). Instead of empowering the young ex-combatants to reclaim their rights and live a better life, such an approach side-lines and disregards these former fighters in the struggle for their reintegration, which denies them an opportunity for participation and full protection. Although this framework can be utilised and adapted in the context of former child soldiers, it is apparent that, by design, the focus is on adult soldiers. This creates an opportunity to design a child-focused and -friendly DDR process, through which issues faced by former child soldiers can be addressed. This is vital for peaceful and sustainable reconciliation, reintegration, and rehabilitation.

The DDR approach recognises that reintegration is an ambitious and complex process, requiring phased procedures. Each phase shapes and compliments the other. If properly reintegrated back into their communities through a tailored version of this approach, FGS have the potential to reclaim their position as purposeful members of a society, and they should not be treated as wrongdoers who deserve no chance of coming back home. Accommodating

reintegration as one of its primary focuses and the end result, DDR supports the notion that FGS are part of the peacebuilding and -keeping process and the socio-economic transformation journey of any post-conflict society. Despite a shallow consideration and acknowledgement of the issues related to reintegration of child soldiers (such as skilling and their functionality back in the community), the DDR framework represents a growing shift in focus to the impact of violent conflicts on child soldiers and the building of peaceful and transformative societies. Thus, this framework can inform the process of reintegration of FGS in post-conflict societies.

2.2.2 Skills Development Theory

Skills Development Theory (SDT) is another noteworthy theoretical approach. Whereas the DDR framework centres on the progression towards reunification, the SDT is focused on developing skills that can support FGS to deal with life after reuniting with their communities. This theory emphasises the capacity of the learners (in this case, the FGS) to perform a particular undertaking, which advances by way of familiarity and repeated run-through (experience and practice) of the skill acquired. Accordingly, for FGS to adapt to a post-war society, they will need to acquire and repeatedly practice several survival and livelihood techniques.

In "Fostering Skill Development Outcomes", Romiszowski (2009) defines a skill as the ability to execute or accomplish a certain job/mission with a specified degree of effectiveness, efficiency, and speed. Unlike knowledge, which is something that an individual has or does not have, skill develops with experience and practice. In this case, the more FGS practice survival skills, the more they master and become creative or innovative in performing behaviours that reaffirm their value in the lives and affairs of their communities (Hajaraih et al., 2012). The underlying belief is that the more one practices what has been learned, the more one steadily and progressively minimises error rates. Basically, practice is looked at as refining performance on a job or activity that already been successfully accomplished. At that

level, the trainee in a particular skill set applies knowledge of realities, actualities, details, designs, thoughts, and notions that he or she possesses, paying particular attention to the set procedures for creating something new and better. According to SDT, skills acquisition becomes the representation of information in memory concerning an environmental or cognitive event (Taie, 2014).

From a psychological perspective, skill as a concept is described by a number of traits that represent attainment and performance in individuals (Cornford, 1996). In this sense, skill is learned; involves motivation, purpose, and goal; is required for qualification as an expert; calls for content and context acquaintance; and involves principles of distinction (Taie, 2014). Borrowing from the constructivist point of view, these aspects of skill can be achieved through use of guided reflections, peer collaboration, role playing, and exhibitions, among other strategies. This further emphasises the importance of social relations and setting in a person's learning and existence. It does not only support learning new skills but also enhances the already possessed skills (Dagar & Yadav, 2016). Accordingly, SDT recognises that specific situations vary in how best skills acquisition can be guided. If, for instance, you are introducing a new skill to the FGS, such as introduction to bakery, the SDT recommends using an exploratory activity. Meanwhile, if the intention is to master performance of a particular task, the facilitator must demonstrate from the FGS's point of view. However, if the goal is to enhance productivity, the theory suggests that a facilitator should provide knowledge of performance through probes, reflection actions, and practice (Hajaraih et al., 2012).

Although much of the theory's focus is on the skills development, it ignores that all individuals have differing background knowledge as a result of their personality, intellect, feelings, beliefs, and past life experiences. Some need to be provided with sufficient background knowledge to enhance their chances of learning and coping (Hajaraih et al., 2012). However, SDT provides a complementary guidance on how skills training sessions in reintegration programmes such as DDR must be handled so as to maintain the interest, attention, and motivation of the ex-combatants.

Considering the skills training component of the DDR framework as well as the SDT, it is clear that once FGS are initiated into a skills initiative, they have the potential to progressively learn and master a particular skill for life – progressing from an amateur into a highly skilled person. The introduction of ex-combatants to orientation programmes (discussions, experience sharing, and dialogue) through the DDR framework, especially at the demobilisation phase, supports the underpinnings of the SDT. The emphasis here is on enabling the former combatants to develop a sense of responsibility and learn to co-exist with others in a civilian life. It is clear that there is a shift from just knowledge/content the ex-combatant can acquire to what he or she can create out of this knowledge obtained. The SDT indicates to us that practice is key and instrumental for FGS to transform their beliefs, thinking patterns, and actions. Once the FGS are trained in vocational skills, they must creatively and innovatively practice the skills learned for them to show that they have mastered and are capable of benefiting from the acquired skills. Learning carpentry, for example, implies that those trained in that skill are able to produce marketable furniture that can earn them some money for survival. However, creating learning situations is the number one prerequisite for enhancing skills acquisition, in accordance with the SDT. Such a methodology has the potential to enable the FGS to link their past, present, and future actions to effectively adapt to civilian life.

2.2 Literature Review

In this section, I present a review of relevant literature on reintegration of FGS, with particular focus on FGS reintegration programmes, the contributions thereof to their lives, as well as the impact of skills development on the reintegration of FGS into civilian life.

2.3.1 Reintegration Programmes for Former Girl Soldiers

In her article "Children and armed conflicts - looking at the future and learning from the past", Haer (2019) notes that children have been and continue to be enlisted by armed groups to participate in battles. Haer emphasises that this leads to erosion of principles and values

human rights, with severe consequences to direct and indirect participants, conflict-filled societies, and as well their immediate neighbours. This is further highlighted by Weine et al. (2020), Russell and Gozdziak (2006), and Williams (2011), who discuss girls' participation in armed violence in Syria, Uganda, and DRC, respectively. They present evidence that, at the end of war, the society expects to receive and accommodate what we term FGS. When these girls return home, it marks the beginning of a new era in a civilian life.

Accordingly, observations by Brooks (2012) show that, for a girl returning home from an armed group, there is a daily battle for continued existence, self-respect/worth, and enjoyment of basic human rights. The girls' struggles include finding the necessary health services, as well as acclimatising back into a community and family that may perhaps be unpromising, unfriendly, and unreceptive. Thus, such a journey is indeed lengthy and challenging for the FGS to accomplish single-handedly. Brooks (2012) adds that these ex-combatants are returning to situations that were different before their engagement in rebel activities and that the prevailing governance systems are often inadequately prepared to address the challenges they face. These challenges include isolation, stigmatisation, and exclusion, in addition to coping with the trauma and distress brought by their battle engagement (Brooks, 2012). This implies that, whether or not there is a streamlined reintegration programme, such people need some sort of assistance for their lives to return to what it was before engaging in rebel or armed group activities.

Derluyn et al. (2013) comment that**,** globally, there is a diversity and multiplicity of agendas, plans, and initiatives that have been established to care for former young combatants' as they return to civilian life (Derluyn et al., 2012; Specker, 2008; both cited in Lamb, 2011). Mainly, these initiatives have been managed by national and international NGOs, with partial contributions from state authorities. Literature indicates that such initiatives include activities characterised by taking care of ex-combatants' physical and mental health through feeding programmes, medical care, health education, home and personal care/ organisation, sports, literacy, vocational and skills training, as well as therapeutic

undertakings. These are carried out as either individual or group sessions (Vindevogel et al., 2011). Similar areas of focus have been highlighted by Weine et al. (2020) when they conducted a rapid review of 31 prior reviews and studies that aimed to inform the rehabilitation and reintegration of child returnees from the Islamic State (ISIS), based on evidence from children exposed to upset, distress, hardships, and misfortunes**.** To successfully implement the above-mentioned activities, Weine et al. propose a public-private partnership that bases its programming on prior evidence obtained from victimised young veterans. The same has also been emphasised by Brooks (2012), noting that such a coalition (national governments and civil society) is an essential component for effective and efficient programming aimed at returning girl soldiers.

Banholzer and Haer (2014) cite earlier literature examining whether participation in reintegration programmes makes a difference. It indicates that reintegration support can range from mapping out families for FGS, stimulating social acceptance, and skilling to trauma therapy. Using DRC as a case study, Williams (2011) asserts that, despite their continued deployment to engage in numerous battles, the use of child soldiers had been solidly condemned as a hateful, repugnant, brutal, and cruel and has been classified as a war crime under the Rome Statute of the ICC 1998 and the Optional Protocol 2000. In this case, it would be a punishable offence for anyone convicted of using children for fighting battles. This implies setting up clear guidelines on how to convict and sentence perpetrators.

In addition to the above, Agbedahin (2018) mentions the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), the Optional Protocol on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict, the UN's Integrated DDR Standards, and the UN Security Council Resolution 1379 – all of which are dedicated to inspiring and assuring restoration and support of children linked with rebel and fighting militant groups. Denov (2008) further takes note of the Geneva Conventions and the Additional Protocols (1949, 1977); International Labour Organisation's (ILO's) Convention No.182 (1999); the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (1999); the Optional Protocol of CRC on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict (2000); UN Security Council

Resolutions 1261, 1314, 1379, 1460, 1539, 1612; the Rome Statute of the ICC (1998); and the Paris Principles (2007) as additional shielding and lawful mechanisms against child soldiering.

While analysing literature in relation to responses to child soldering, Haer (2019) indicates that the international community has implemented three brands of protective actions: a) the identifying and exposing culprits, b) sanctioning of violators, and c) use of juridical tools and procedures to penalise convicts. In 2009, for instance, the UN entered into an action plan with the Maoists in Nepal that culminated in freeing 3,000 youngsters. Furthermore, with the adoption of Resolution 2225 in 2015, sanction commissions were established in Ivory Coast, DRC, and Somalia against individuals who persistently use children in armed conflicts. Subsequently, the Special Court for Sierra Leone sentenced five individuals for enlisting children to participate in hostilities. Among these five is Charles Taylor, Liberia's former head of state (Haer, 2019).

Williams (2011) notes that, on March 17, 2006, Thomas Lubanga became the first individual to be detained by the ICC for war crimes against children, charged with enlisting and conscripting children under the age of 15 years to participate in hostilities in the mineral- rich North Eastern Ituri District (of DRC) between September 2002 and August 2003. Agbedahin (2018) notes that, following a reconciliation agreement (CPA) in Liberia, through the DDR process, over 21,000 young combatants (of which 2,511 were girls) were demobilised, retired from military service, and introduced to care centres where they participated in counselling and numerous recreational activities. As a result of such interventions, some were reunited with their communities, while others were voluntarily enrolled in both mainstream educational and vocational training programmes. This aligns with Derluyn et al.'s (2013) assertion that most such programmes centre on identifying kin and then reunifying ex-combatants and their families. The above shows that, worldwide, there is a wide range of legally accepted mechanisms that can be referenced to shield and guard youngsters

in conflict and war contexts. No matter the route followed, it is clear that the essence of such interventions is to prepare former fighters to fit into a post-war society.

Weine et al. (2020) observed that organisations in various countries are exploring the possibility of naturalising, assimilating, reorienting, and restoring FGS. Russell and Gozdziak (2006) affirm that many NGOs in many places (including Uganda) have created programmes to assist with rehabilitating and reintegrating former LRA child fighters using community-based approaches. This is confirmed by the findings of an 18-month study consisting of ethnographic fieldwork carried out in Sierra Leone from 1999 to 2001. The study focused on the role of the CRC and other international children's rights instruments in the post-war reintegration of child ex-combatants (Shepler, 2005). The findings showed that, while there are various actors involved in the reintegration process – such as children, their families, communities, state, and teachers – NGOs take the lead in supporting reintegration programmes. Russell and Gozdziak (2006) identify the Association of Volunteers for International Service (AVSI), a well- known international NGO in Uganda, as one of those NGOs that strongly promoted the use of community-based programming approaches as a way of enhancing the capability of local communities to assist their former abducted children, who, in this case, included former girl fighters in the LRA. Specifically, the NGO created a psychosocial training guide and course for teachers and educators to prepare them for handling war-affected children and teach them how to integrate formerly abducted children into a mainstream learning environment.

Derluyn et al. (2013) observed that, recently, there has been an increasing adherence to a community-based approach in planning and implementing reintegration programmes. This approach is acknowledged as a way of trying to ensure the right to participation as cherished in a human-rights line of thinking. This matches the results of an analysis entitled "A re-conceptualization of ex-combatant reintegration" by Özerdem (2012), which concluded that the adoption of a community-based approach follows a growing acknowledgement that the roots of conflict often stem from problems at the societal level and, therefore, identifying the role of the community for effective reintegration should be a priority. This justifies the

significance of employing a community model in any reintegration efforts so as to tackle the social challenges and needs of FGS in their journey back to normal life. However, it is also important to understand what is included in the community model and who the different actors are.

In their articles entitled "The international campaign to prohibit child soldiers" and "The struggle of girl soldiers returning home", Williams (2011) and Brooks (2012), respectively, noted that, while the UN and various NGOs are trying to address issues faced by FGS, their interventions are faced with serious challenges, such as lack of international support (particularly funding), limited political will to adopt reintegration programmes, many girl soldiers being marginalised within the DDR programmes, and continued recruitment of children below the age of 18 years. Such factors become a hindrance to the successful implementation of former child soldier reintegration programmes. In his conclusion, Williams (2011) proposed a worldwide conference for revising all relevant international instruments and suggested setting 18 years as the new minimum for voluntary recruitment, 21 for active combat service, and a renewed international commitment to prohibiting and preventing the use of child soldiers. The above indicates that, regardless of the interest shown by the international community in supporting the elimination of child soldiering around the globe, the commitment towards financing such efforts does not seem to match. Consequently, FGS remain at serious risk of human-rights violation and increased vulnerability since the programmes that would have promoted their well-being lack the financial muscle required. The implementation of such programmes remains in the balance, yet they are out of the communities' and families' control (Derluyn et al., 2013).

While critiquing the ongoing reintegration processes, Brooks (2012) mentions that such programmes expose returning FGS to a number of problems – one of being humiliation. It has been widely observed that the community will often not believe such girls because they have lost their sociocultural value and they are not capable of marrying. Such beliefs lead to ostracisation and segregation during their re-entry journey. Brooks (2012) claims that

establishing a functioning female-based reintegration system in conflict areas could change the future for resettling FGS. This can possibly enhance their ability to sustainably develop their future as well as that of their kin, who include their biological children (Brooks, 2012). While citing earlier literature to examine whether participation in reintegration programmes makes a difference, Banholzer and Haer (2014) indicate that juvenile combatants can reintegrate into civil life if provided with adequate support. However, they propose an extended inquiry into the internal life of armed groups so that the individual experiences of fighters can be considered , enabling the design of DDR programmes that are more tailored and efficient. Banholzer and Haer advocate for a personal needs assessment of the actual ex-combatants prior to the implementation of reintegration programmes so that the findings from these assessments will create a foundation for the programmes.

In reference to the above, Knight (2008) presents the UN Development Programme Arms for Development programme in Sierra Leone as one of the few reintegration cases where all restoration assistance and reimbursements were tailored based on the age, gender, previous educational attainment, and physical abilities of the recipient. This was attributed to the fact that women, and girls specifically, bear a greater burden in post-conflict societies, which requires personalised interventions. FGS have differing experiences of the war, which means they have differing intervention needs. Without such a personalised system, the protection of FGS rights and progress in uplifting their lives and livelihoods remains uncertain. A one-size-fits-all arrangement may not yield the required results, as it may expose such ex-combatants to more vulnerability, marginalisation, and oppression.

Denov (2008) reveals that, despite the presence of internationally recognised protective legal instruments and human/children's rights conventions (such as the Geneva Conventions and the Additional Protocols (1949, 1977), the UNs' CRC, and UN Security Council Resolutions), the human rights of girls during and after conflict periods continue to be dishonoured. Their significance is understated, as the disregard for women and girls continues to prevail. Their needs and interests remain under-represented. Haer (2019) also notes that

there are continued debates around the persistent conscription of young combatants despite considerable efforts from the international community. Haer cites earlier studies by Lasley and Thyne (2015) and Hamberg (2013), providing space for further academic inquiry into aspects such as the factors fuelling the continued recruitment of children and the effects of the naming and shaming policy of the UN on child enrolment. From a researcher's point of view, this provides avenues for evaluating the effectiveness of reintegration interventions in relation to elimination of the recruitment and use of child soldiers in armed conflicts.

After examining findings related to the implementation of DDR programmes in seven African countries (Angola, DRC, Burundi, Liberia, Ivory Coast, Sierra Leone, and Sudan) for a period of close to 16 years, Knight (2008) reveals that the DDR processes would be unfulfilled unless they are articulated within comprehensive national recovery efforts designed to create viable and long-lasting reconciliation. However, the study proposes that communities should be formally made aware of the ongoing recovery and reconciliation programmes for them to be able to effectively participate.

After analysing integration efforts aimed at girls in war-affected Northern Uganda and Sierra Leone, McKay (2005) established that girls were not thought of as ex-combatants or as having played a vital role within the rebel forces, as is the case with their boy counterparts. Even at the time of recovery, boys and men are more advantaged in getting recovery welfare, which normally includes opportunities to join skills training, attend school, or join other rehabilitation programmes. In Sierra Leone, for instance, 6,052 boys passed through DDR, while only 506 girls did; yet, there were more girl fighters. Such examples clearly indicate how girls are disadvantaged in comparison with boys, which undermines their serving capacities during and after war (McKay, 2005). This reaffirms literature indicating that children have often been excluded from the DDR programmes basing on two reasons: a) an argument that they did not pose a threat to post-conflict society and b) their effective reintegration is not viewed as a routine component of peace making. Where girls are not completely neglected, they are

often included in underfunded and unsuitable programmes (Haer, 2017). When funding decreases, it leaves little possibility of ensuring long-term follow-up (Derluyn et al., 2013).

Using data gathered between September 2001 and June 2002 with a focus on two fighting forces in the West and East African countries of Sierra Leone and Uganda, McKay (2005) analysed gender and terrorism. Results indicate that girls are typically subsumed under the larger category of female, which marginalises their war experiences. However, regardless of how they are recruited to participate in such war acts, girls' efficacy, actions, resistance, and survival skills within fighting forces are inadequately understood and only rarely acknowledged and appreciated (McKay, 2005). Accordingly, the low rate of girls' participation in DDR reflects not only the denial of their right to participation but also the fact that the structure and process of DDR greatly favours boys and men (McKay, 2004). Drawing on the main findings of the three studies concerning the realities, perspectives, and implications of girls in fighting forces, Denov (2008) expresses that the experiences of girl fighters have been largely unexplored; yet, in recent African conflicts, girls comprised about 30-40% of all child combatants. Denov suggests that investigating FGS not only consolidates current knowledge, learning, and scholarship on such fighters, but also provides an opportunity for frameworking policies and programmes to address the needs of this unique population.

2.3.2 Impact of Reintegration Programmes

Section 2.3.1 presented the wide spectrum of rehabilitation and reintegration programmes that are typically initiated and managed to support the post-conflict lives of returning FGS. Whereas some of the views on these programmes indicate that boy soldiers are more privileged compared to their girl counterparts, it is also evident that, at some point, FGS have been beneficiaries. There are arguments that FGS are always excluded and not considered worthy of benefiting from such restoration programmes. In this section, I present literature on the impact of implementing a number of reintegration programmes.

Using a cross-sectional survey design looking at 330 formerly recruited and 677 non-recruited young people, Vindevogel et al. (2012) gauged the prospective impact of informal and formal community interventions on promoting former child soldiers' resilience in the wake of armed conflict. The results indicated that the two groups of participants had comparable perspectives that call for the contribution of various informal and formal support systems to former child soldiers' human capacities and the communal sociocultural fabric of war-affected societies. These findings highlight the importance of community-based, collective, and comprehensive support for formerly recruited young people in the aftermath of armed conflict (Vindevogel et al., 2012) .

According to McKay et al. (2011) and Brooks (2012), when girls and young mothers previously linked to armed groups return to their communities, they are usually socially isolated, stigmatised, and marginalised. This generates recovery challenges for themselves and their communities. Furthermore, their offspring face child protection difficulties such as neglect, rejection, and abuse. However, through innovative approaches to recovery programmes, FGS and their children can live a meaningful life. Through use of community-based, participatory action research (PAR), McKay et al. (2011) carried out a study in three African countries (Liberia, Northern Uganda, and Sierra Leone), exploring the experiences of 658 young mothers (including FGS and those mothers seen to be vulnerable). Participants received caring psychosocial support and were empowered to develop social actions to bring about change in their circumstances. Results indicate that these young mothers and their children experienced improved social reintegration demonstrated by greater family and community recognition and acceptance, better coping skills, and decreased participation in sex work for economic survival. The above implies that, with the right mix of methodology, the impact of an intervention can be widely felt, rendering FGS visible and equal beneficiaries in a recovery process (Wessels, 2004).

In his study exploring the nexus between child soldiers' war-time roles and their reintegration into post-war society through documentary analysis and in-depth interviews with

young veterans in Monrovia, Agbedahin (2018) found that, despite numerous FGS rehabilitation and reintegration programmes being implemented, some of them do not suit all young veterans. It was realised that some of the FGS' war-time roles could catalyse their reintegration process. It is further argued that the experience gained from fighting, logistics, intelligence, investigating, and scouting functions supports these ex-combatants in coping with a civilian life. While some veterans can successfully be reintegrated, there are many cases where this process fails; this is attributable to the way reintegration programmes are designed and implemented (Agbedahin, 2018).

Using information gathered from interviews held with a sample of 66 former LRA child soldiers in Uganda, Banholzer and Haer (2014) studied the effect of personal attributes and the effect of the level of attachment on the reintegration success. Part of this study was to examine how different individual qualities and traits impacted the successful reintegration of former child soldiers who had participated in a reintegration programme. Findings from this research indicate that those ex-combatants who still felt a level of trust towards their former armed group leadership and principles were less likely to trust the members of their home community and feel accepted by them. Furthermore, the findings revealed that ex-combatants' age at the time of abduction influenced the ease or difficulty of reintegrating back into their communities (Banholzer & Haer, 2014). Those that were a bit older when recruited found it easier to reintegrate than those who were abducted at an early age. This study illustrates that, even when the programme is appealing and significant, if the FGS's attitude is closed to a new system outside the rebel structures, it is difficult for these ex-combatants to swiftly adhere to new principles. On the other hand, this qualifies the adaptation and adoption of effective approaches that cultivate such people's attention and investment. Having used it as a research and an empowerment methodology, McKay et al. (2011) noted that although PAR is a long, slow process that requires substantial attention, its participants are empowered in the process, which supports creativity and collective efforts that foster durable progress in their livelihoods and well-being. Thus, while interventions are clearly important, their contribution to the lives

of the beneficiaries might be cut short if the applied methodology is not appropriate. This confirms observations by Agbedahin (2018), who noted that some rehabilitation and reconstruction programmes fail partly because they do not incorporate the ideas, suggestions, and recommendations of participants into their implementation.

It is important to note that most existing reintegration initiatives do not go any further than the provision of re-entry opportunities for FGS. This is attributed to the strong focus on the economic side of the reintegration at the expense of the social aspects of reunification. It is argued that such an approach that mostly emphasises the economic aspects limits the scope of alternatives for successful reintegration. A study by Özerdem (2012) shows that for effective reintegration in post-conflict backgrounds, deep and wide social/communal engagements provide the best inclusive way of addressing ex-combatants' needs and life ambitions. This implies that, for better results, there is a need to shift from ex-combatant-centred to ex-combatant-community-centred approaches. This can make the entire community feel the need and agency to support the return and resettlement of ex-combatants. This further enhances opportunities for greater social cohesion and wider acceptance into social systems. This compliments literature that presents social integration as one of the three areas spearheading the success of DDR programmes (Banholzer & Haer, 2014). In this case, where FGS are able to identify with social networks, they are in a position to abandon the norms and values promoted by their former militant groups and change these to fit into the communities they decide to settle in. The success of DDR maybe partly depend on the removal of large numbers of benefactors from the poverty and marginalisation that were formerly part of the cause of the armed conflict (Agbedahin, 2018). It becomes clear that, while designing and executing recovery programmes, it is essential to relate and connect them to the wider peace, reconciliation, and socio-economic expansion strategies. These must inform and support skills development and vocational training programmes focused on fields such as agronomy, entrepreneurship, and microfinance, among other life-enhancing undertakings (Knight, 2008).

McKay (2004) notes that, when girls return from rebel activities, they usually find their way home without formal assistance. As a result, a lot of their next steps remain confidential and known to only themselves. At their initial arrival, they may settle with their families; however, if things do not work out, they look for alternative places. In such cases, their journey back to normal and ability to fit into the community is solely dependent on their strength to care for themselves and their children. McKay (2004) adds that, quite often, their parents react with fear in the anticipation that these ex-combatants might cause harm to them. They are often seen as spoiled and are generally isolated, especially when their communities recall the painful experiences of the conflicts. These girls thus suffer doubled-edged torture. When they are still in the war, they are traumatised in the roles assigned to them. But, even when they return, their acceptance into their own families and communities is one of their hardest journeys. They are rendered uncomfortable and distressed, which increases the chances of them returning to some of their violent behaviour as a response to their rejection and in attempting to fight for their own survival. Haer (2017) adds that, with such a reception, FGS have less chances of getting married or find means of sustainable survival since their status as former combatants creates more room for cultural rejection. This further exposes them to continued marginalisation. In this case, they become social misfits, which undermines efforts for social integration (Haer, 2017). Despite such negative experiences, purification ceremonies and rituals as well as the development of peer-support structures and solidarity can contribute to FGS' social reintegration. Such can provide proof that they have been accepted back in their families/communities, which in turn facilitates a growing sense of belonging and purification (Denov, 2008).

While tracing the perspectives and experiences of girls as participants in violence and armed conflicts in Angola, Sierra Leone, Mozambique, and Northern Uganda, Denov (2008) found that, although their role contributed to the overall functioning of the militant group and they were likely to have had overwhelming experiences of ill-treatment, abuse, discrimination, anxiety, and uncertainty, girls are mostly rendered invisible and side-lined at all levels of

programming (during and after conflict). These girls' active participation in battlefield activities exposes them to deeply traumatic experiences, which calls for initiatives that can sustainably rehabilitate their physical and psychological functioning as human beings. While examining the growing prevalence of child soldiers, the effects conflict has upon them, and the role of psychosocial programming in reintegration processes, Russell and Gozdziak (2006) conclude that, since these fighters physical and emotional every day, it is projected that their journey towards successful reintegration will be a twisted and prolonged one.

Haer (2017) argues that FGS-centred DDR programmes should under no circumstance be eliminated but rather be tailor-made to reflect the reality on the ground**.** This has the potential to eliminate development of one-size-fits-all DDR programmes for former child soldiers in favour of those tailored to the needs and experiences of former girl fighters. This aligns McKay's (2005) reminder that these girls can never go back to being innocents and that no one can envisage the pain, suffering, and exposure they have gone through. Despite how damaging these experiences might be, it is apparent that these girls have multiplied their strengths during their battle for survival. The challenge, therefore, is to enable them to use the gained strengths to successfully survive in a civilian life (McKay, 2005).

2.3.3 Impact of Skills Development on FGS' Reintegration

According to Agbedahin (2018), in many war-torn African countries, vocational training programmes for skills acquisition are frequently seen as one of the workable options to reintegrate ex-combatants. In Liberia, for example, when FGS were given a chance to choose their training fancies, 60% of them chose skills training initiatives, while 40% preferred classroom education (Agbedahin, 2018). This implies that those who advocate for FGS reintegration and the FGS themselves equally acknowledge that, for their proper functioning, they need to undergo some kind of specialised capacitating. Such skills are key in providing opportunities for establishment of livelihood projects for self-survival. This agrees with earlier conclusions by Banholzer and Haer (2014) in their study about child soldiers. They indicate

that the existence of child soldiers presents a substantial challenge in post-conflict nations as a result of their socialisation into violent cultures and being deprived of education, job training, and family ties. Such an environment creates considerable fears that if such girls do not receive what is in their expectation, they may revert to some of their violent tactics to meet their life needs. This fuels the tension between war and peace (Banholzer & Haer, 2014).

Denov (2008) argues that an overall failure to occupy and involve FGS in economically sustainable, productive, profitable, and beneficial activities for their individual and community gains, is not only a serious error but also an abuse of their right to play a key role in deciding on issues and strategies that positively touch their lives. I contend that it is evil to continue keeping such people marginalised when they have the capacity to do so many things that can mutually benefit the entire society. If such a situation prevails, a new group of destitute can be created, resulting in a vicious cycle of powerless and futureless communities.

Agbedahin (2018) suggests that skills training programmes such as joinery, carpentry and wood work, crafting, masonry, plumbing, metal work and welding, mechanics, block and tiles production, blacksmithing, painting, and electrical installation are instrumental in occupying and engaging the energies and minds of FGS and have the potential to lead them into creating and managing income-generating enterprises. I further contend that the above skills, though good for creating craftsmanship, are culturally or societally masculine in nature and might not attract the interest of many of the FGS. It would be important to incorporate skills that suit both the cultural context and interest of the FGS. This is not to say that females cannot be skilled in these masculine associated trades; however, the dominant narrative of many cultures in the developing world, where most armed conflict occurs, casts certain economic activities as male specific. One would be hard pressed to find a female carpenter, mason, or welder in very many of these communities. Thus, it is of great importance that a needs assessment be conducted for the FGS prior to the implementation of any reintegration programmes that will involve the girls or women.

Banholzer and Haer (2014) affirm that FGS-oriented reintegration programmes come with an added advantage of fuelling their successful reintegration, which is a critical component for a sustainable and harmonious reunion. Thus, ASD among FGS creates an avenue for reawakening their natural abilities, which, in turn, can provide socio-economic transformation of individuals and the nation in general. In this case, the lives of the FGS are revived to fit into a civilian community. In accordance to SDT, it is important to create specific situations that provide a fertile ground for FGS to acquire skills. Special guidance must be provided to ensure that, upon completion of the training courses, FGS are able to practice what they have learned (Hajaraih et al., 2012). It would be feasible to create cooperatives or clusters that are composed solely of this small vulnerable group so as to encourage unity and a form of *esprit de corps.* For example, working on various economic projects with a complete value chain and markets for agricultural products would automatically increase their household incomes and provide for financial independence to the FGS, which, in turn, improves quality of life for themselves and their communities.

Denov (2008) observed that FGS' participation in rebel activities at an early age and for a long time denies them a chance to grow their marketable job skills due to lack of any specialised training. This further leads them to live a continuous cycle of post-conflict poverty. Denov (2008) shows that most of the FGS in the study reported being starved without having the simple supplies for meeting their basic needs and those of their children. This shows that, in the event that such a girl gets any chance, at whatever cost, without even considering its implications for her life going forward, she might get tempted to engage in dehumanising activity in order to survive. This not only puts their lives in danger, but also shows how difficult it is to fit into a post-war society.

Petty and Savage (2007) note that, whereas their families might want to support FGS, they are also often plagued by unending poverty. They are already hit by numerous financial difficulties; yet, keeping FGS engaged calls for productive openings and supporting their initiatives, which certain families might not be able to afford. Such a situation signifies that

FGS, upon their return, are only left with the option of engaging in undertakings that require no or a low level of specialised skills in order to earn a daily income. Creating opportunities for skilling thus remains an effective and strategic intervention that can potentially help these girls fit into society and empower them financially to sustain their lives. In that way, they can be recognised as equally important and contributors to their communities' development efforts.

When an armed conflict happens in a particular place, inhabitants are not left the same**.** According to Petty and Savage (2007), part of what is distorted is the normal social and economic relations within homesteads and across the entire community. The majority of families and households are left without or with limited livelihood security as a result of a collapse in the mutual safety nets in the community. In their study, which surveyed war-affected youth in the northern part of Uganda, Petty and Savage (2007) found that the existing livelihood openings for such groups of people (including the FGS) remain inadequate. This may be attributed to limited access to land and other resources as well as lack of critical linguistic skills, which leaves them with only the option of engaging in random, irregular, and unprofitable ventures. However, for a few, joining the national armed forces is an alternative means of survival (Petty & Savage, 2007). In addition to the above, while observing the effects of war on FGS, Russell and Gozdziak (2006) note that these girls are often disliked by their own community, side-lined by lack of training (whether formal or informal), and usually find it hard to land a job, which might compel them to re-join rebel forces**.** In response, the two researchers suggest that skills training is a key remedy, as it facilitates FGS's recovery from trauma and, in turn, enables them participate in their community's recovery efforts. This is the only way such girls can gain access to and explore possibilities of engaging with higher-order livelihood skills.

In support of the above, literature acknowledges and suggests that, at the end of war, it is time for restoration and reconstruction. Part of this process should be dedicated to reconstruction of the vocational education system, into which FGS can be integrated to acquire vocational and livelihood skills necessary for their functionality and survival (Denov, 2008).

While stories on the training achievements of former child soldier exist, there is data indicating that some of these war veterans cannot succeed in traditional classrooms (Agbedahin, 2018), which further justifies the need and urgency to integrate skills training opportunities into the post-war reconstruction programmes.

The above information shows that ASD is key to FGS's survival. As a result of early childhood abduction, many of these children become soldiers without well-established social skills, and what they learn from the war might be antagonistic to successful reintegration upon their return. Their social and psychological growth is stunted by their early participation in armed/rebel activities. Key in addressing this, is investing in skills training. This is, however, an expensive venture that the majority of returnees cannot afford if not externally supported. It is also important to bear in mind that skills training should not only focus on the technical aspects but should also consider the acquisition of soft and business skills such as communication, aspiration, programming, team working, marketing, and mentoring. These can support the practice of technical skills and mean that the training can holistically and wholesomely impact the lives of FGS.

In the same line, McKay (2004) suggests that rebuilding FGS's broken lives requires activism in meeting their post-war wishes, and needs. McKay adds that research about this group is key for formulating programme designs that respond to the wishes of returnees. The ultimate purpose of such actions must be to enable FGS to achieve a purposeful future where they are able to find answers to their life needs, reunion, and stability (McKay, 2004). Furthermore, Denov (2008) reminds us that, from a rights perspective, skills training is critical for imparting steadiness and bringing the life of FGS back to normal. Therefore, creating a forum for such ex-combatants to learn and live together is an essential and life-enhancing opportunity that helps them to re-establish hope, courage, confidence, and determination.

Brooks (2012) further highlights that, as far as skilling is concerned, it is essential to solicit suggestions from the FGS on which direction to take. They are the end users of the

programmes; they must be involved in making decisions which they believe will transform their lives. It is in the interest of such a veteran to engage in a programme that they will be able to finish and that will not cause secondary frustrations in life as a result of failure to practice what was learned (Brooks, 2012). Existing literature reveals that the present DDR framework may not methodically impart such valuable skills (Agbedahin, 2018). Furthermore, the majority of these programmes cater for boys at the expense of girls. Examples to note here include Angola, Mozambique, and Sierra Leone, where DDR programmes demonstrated noticeable instances of post-conflict gendered exclusion by favouring young male ex-combatants at the expense of their young female counterparts (Denov, 2008).

This thesis argues that designing and implementing girl-focused skilling programmes is essential in addressing such imbalances. Furthermore, it requires some degree of patience in the process of determining the FGS's needs and preferences. Therefore, such skilling programmes must be adapted to the abilities of FGS so as to keep them motivated and inspire the practice of acquired skills. Furthermore, these girls must not be looked at as wrongdoers but rather as victims who should be rehabilitated to fit into an existing social system. This is one way of guaranteeing them protection. Above all, these girls must be productive in their communities, which gives them an assurance of fitting into the future plans of their respective communities.

2.4 Gaps in Literature

A review of available literature reveals a number of research gaps that have helped shape the current study. From a review of 31 sources on rehabilitation and reintegration of child returnees, Weine et al. (2020) proposed further multi-disciplinary research to develop evidence in several identified areas concerning child health and developmental problems, family custody, faith and religiosity, and violent extremism assessment and prevention. In a study that explored the existing state of child soldier studies across disciplines, Haer (2019) observed that, although research on child soldiering has grown in its scope over the last few

years, it lacks a comparative perspective, making it difficult to recognise research areas that urgently require further investigation. As a result, Haer calls for further inquiries using a comparative perspective that focuses on a) why the abduction of children continues, b) why there is little success following campaigns against use of child soldiers, and c) what explains the variation in the use of girl soldiers. Haer's (2019) view is supported by McKay (2005), who highlights that girls' efficacy, actions, resistance, and survival skills within fighting forces are inadequately understood and only occasionally acknowledged and appreciated. Moreover, Haer (2017) expresses the need for more studies about FGS to identify common problems across existing reintegration programmes.

Denov (2008) acknowledged that studying FGS does not only consolidate our current knowledge, learning, and scholarship on girl soldiers in fighting forces within the context of Africa or developing countries, but may also provide a framework to inform policies and programmes designed to address the needs of this unique population. Banholzer and Haer (2014) recommend a further examination of the internal life of armed groups that considers individual experiences of ex-fighters in order to arrive at an inclusive, tailor-made, and efficient reintegration programme that considers FGS as mutual beneficiaries.

These studies and recommendations provide fertile ground for more in-depth investigation of the experiences of FGS and existing reintegration programmes. All the above are a clear indication that the current study has great potential value for use in designing appropriate strategies for reintegration of FGS in Uganda and for serving as a point of reference for creating programmes in other war-torn contexts like South Sudan and eastern DRC.

2.5 Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I present literature on three theoretical perspectives in relation to reintegration of FGS. I also include a review of previous studies in relation to the three strands in this study. In short, while reintegration programmes are in existence, many of them favour

adult combatants at the expense of child combatants. Furthermore, it is also apparent that, where young veterans are considered, boy ex-combatants are favoured over girls. FGS are thus extremely vulnerable, and existing skilling programmes are not appropriate for their needs and preferences. The literature review shows that research about FGS is still inadequate and, therefore, any effort to contribute to the body of knowledge is critical and timely. This serves as ample validation of the value of the current study.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter plots out the research methodology utilised by the researcher during this study. The quality of any research activity is dependent upon the methods that have been used to gather and analyse data accurately. Bryman (2012, as cited in McGowan, 2014) describes social approaches/studies as demonstrating the way in which social scientists visualise the connection between different viewpoints about a social reality and how that reality should be scrutinised.

3.2 Research Design

This study adopted a case study design for the research. The design integrates the various mechanisms of the study into a rational and sound configuration to guarantee the research problem is adequately looked into. Social sciences research involves obtaining evidence relevant to the research problem, which is then used to test a theory, assess a programme, or precisely define a phenomenon. Case study designs are often used to reduce complex themes to a selected few that will be used in the research. Social scientists make wide use of this research design to examine real-life situations and provide the basis for the application of concepts and theories. The researcher chose this design because it applies a variety of methodologies and relies on a variety of sources to investigate a research problem. Hagan (1993) and Yin (1994), as cited in Igreja and Skaar (2013), contend that the case study method may focus on one person, a cluster, or an all-inclusive society and may apply a number of data tools – such as life accounts, documents, oral stories, in-depth interviews, and participant observations. This design allows a researcher to use multiple techniques to explore the topic at hand.

3.3 Research Approach

This study adopted a descriptive approach, which has the advantage of using both qualitative and quantitative methods concurrently to describe the phenomenon. Descriptive research can be quantitative and/or qualitative and denotes an approach to data collection where events are describes and the data are then organised, depicted, and tabulated (Glass & Hopkins, 1984). The approach is composed of processes and procedures where data is collected in the participant's locale; data analysis is descriptive and built from specifics to broad themes. The researcher then makes interpretations of the meaning of the collected data. This approach assists the researcher in discovering the meaning of human behaviour and practice, encompassing contrary views and reactions. Descriptive studies are primarily concerned with finding out the "What, How, and Why".

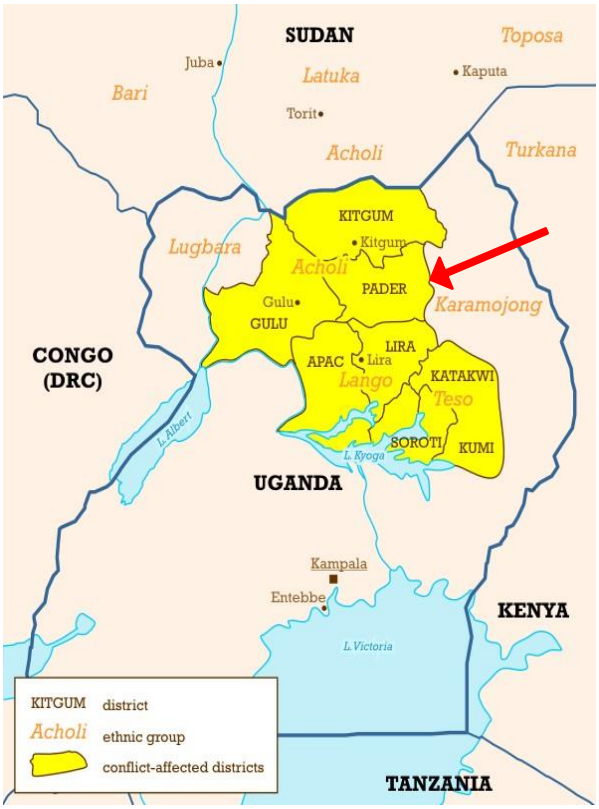
The descriptive approach was applied to investigate the following questions that formed part of the FGS tool in this study. *Question 2: How do you earn a living? Question 4: What are some of the challenges you face in this community? Question 5a: Did you get any form of assistance when you came back to the community?* (This is a yes or no response; there is a direct quantitative measure)*. Question 5b: What kind of assistance did you get*? Whereas the questions take a qualitative direction to understand the "what", there is also a quantitative element seeking to measure how much of that "what" there is. The formulation of study questions also directs the type of data analysis path to be undertaken so that the researcher can make good use of the data to address the research questions. Quantitative methods were particularly applied to generate descriptive data corresponding to the research questions. Qualitative approaches were used more in conducting the key informants' interviews and focus groups. Thematic approaches were used to analyse qualitative data from FGDs and key informants' interviews.

3.4 Geographical Area and Location of Study Population

The study was specifically conducted in the three sub-counties of Pajule, Purongo, and Pader Town Council (TC) in Pader District, Northern Uganda. Pader District is bordered by the districts of Lamwo in the Northwest, Kitgum to the Northeast, Agago to the East, Otuke to the Southeast, Lira to the South, Oyam to the Southwest, and Gulu to the West. Pader is composed of 12 sub-counties, 52 parishes, and 608 villages. These are characterised by flat, undulating land and sloping terrain along rivers and streams at an average of altitude of 1100m above sea level. The district is predominantly savanna grassland and woodlands, experiencing two main seasons in a year (wet and dry), and has mainly ferruginous tropical soils (clay-sandy and loamy in some areas) that support various agricultural activities – the major source of livelihood to the majority of the population in the district. Although it is predominantly inhabited by the Acholi ethnic tribe, who speak Luo, there is a small percentage of people from Lango, Teso, Bukedi, and Central regions. Compared to men, women in Pader are more hardworking and responsible for most of the household work, as most of the families are being taken care of by women that run the family business (The Republic of Uganda, 2016). The population statistics indicate that Pader District in Northern Uganda has a total population of 178,004 people, of which 86,635 are men and 91,369 are female, accommodated in 34,183 households (UBOS, 2017, as cited in Burke & Kobusingye, 2014). The map in Figure 1 (page 59) below presents the study area and the surrounding districts that were similarly affected by the armed conflict between the UPDF and LRA rebels.

Figure 1

Map of Ugandan districts affected by Lord's Resistance Army, including study district – Pader



Source: *Dingemanse (2012)*

3.5 Study Population

The study population was comprised of various stakeholders. Former girl soldiers were the principle study participants, and their experiences formed the basis of the analysis of the study findings. Additional participants included guardians and relatives of FGS, politicians, army officers, NGO representatives, local government authorities, local leaders, as well as cultural and religious leaders. These individuals witnessed and had actively participated in reintegration programmes that were dedicated to improving the socio-economic lives of the FGS; they had relevant stories to tell because of their proximity to the FGS in the district, thus qualifying their participation in the study.

3.6 Sampling Strategies

To identify the desired category of participants for the study population, the researcher utilised purposive sampling to select and locate individual participants, informed by the type of study group(s) which the researcher needed to hear from (see Section 3.5 Study Population). Non-random sampling methods were selected because these techniques enable researchers to capture personalities or human clusters that display certain characteristics that are entrenched within the research question/s (Jarrett et al., 1998). The researcher employed snowball and purposive sampling. This was because sampling only with one technique could not have given accurate results. These methods are discussed in greater detail below.

Purposive sampling. This technique was used because it allowed for the researcher to utilise the available cases that have the essential information and are demarcated within an established arena, which ensures that participants with those important characteristics are included in the sample. This abundance of respondents ensures the validity and practicality of information obtaining during the investigation (Patton, 2002). Those selected are considered relevant and can provide data that answer the research questions. It is recognised that participants are selected based on the principle of significance tied to the research questions (Bryman, 2008). This method was especially used to guide the selection of participants for FGDs and the key informants.

Snowballing. This can also be termed chain referral or a respondent-driven structure and was used to locate themes with certain traits or characteristics necessary to the study. Certain groups that are of specific interest to the study can be hard to reach and/or hidden. In this case, locating the right FGS would be a great challenge. Such populations and other specific groups can be hard to reach because they experience societal shame, engage in unlawful or prohibited activities, or possess other traits that cause them to be ostracised.

Snowballing is not a probability-directed selection method and can thus be used to acquire access to these clusters of people.

3.6.1 Sample Size

Qualitative research requires a limited sample due to its comprehensive and rigorous requirements when utilised in a study. As such, sample sizes are not considered by the use of calculated rules and probable statistics. Initially, the researcher proposed to have a maximum sample of 60 participants, due to limited financial resources available to traverse the remote countryside to locate study participants. This strategy changed during the mapping visit to the study district. One of the proposed study areas – Purongo sub-county – had been annexed to another district and was no longer part of Pader District. This relocation of administrative units called for an immediate substitution of the affected sub-county with Pader TC. This sub-county was selected because it was more accessible and presented high potential of getting study participants. During the field pre-visit, the researcher got information that most of the FGS were settled within Pader TC. This was an added advantage of the substituted study location, as it presented greater access to the FGS, who are the main study participants. The sample size thus increased from the planned number of between 30 and 50 participants to a sample of 166. This sample included 60 FGS, six key informants, and 100 other study participants spread across the 10 focus groups. This sample is described and presented in Table 1 on page 62.

Table 1

Categories of Respondents

Location (Pader District)	Designation	No. of participants
Pader TC	Former girl soldiers	60
Pajule		
Purongo / Ogom		
Key informant interviews		
Pader TC	Deputy Chief Administrative Office (DCAO)	1
	District Community Development Officer (DCDO)	1
	Project Coordinator: Christian Counselling Fellowship Pader District	1
Pajule Sub-County	LCIII Pajule Sub-County: 2002–2016	1
	Religious Leader: Bishop Ochola	1
	Traditional Leader: Rwot Koyo	1
Other study participants		
Pajule, Purongo	Local leaders, parents/caretakers/guardians of FGS, religious and cultural leaders, former abductees (males)	100

Source: *Created by researcher*

3.7 Data-Collection Methods

Data-collection approaches are the techniques researchers employ to collect data that are required to answer their research questions. The researcher decided to use in-depth interviews with key informants and FGDs as the main methods to collect data. The best and most advantageous methods of collecting these types of data are participant observations, focus-group interviews, in-depth interviews, and an assortment of archived documents. This allows for aspects such as perceptions and attitudes, which differ from one person to another, to be studied more deeply using social interaction and more flexible techniques.

3.7.1 In-Depth Interviews

The researcher used this method to elicit information from participants to achieve a holistic understanding of the participants' views on the subject matter. The method involved conducting individual interviews with small numbers of respondents to explore their perspectives. The in-depth interviews involved asking the participants open-ended questions and being inquisitive whenever it was necessary to obtain further information believed to be useful. In-depth interviews were purposefully conducted with the FGS, who were the prime study participants because of their direct participation in the LRA war, and with other key informants like the district local leaders, religious and cultural leaders, senior politicians, and NGO leaders. These participants were interviewed mainly because of their participation in and different roles during the reintegration process of the FGS.

3.7.2 Data-Collection Procedures

The process of data collection took place between August and September 2019, after approval for the study was acquired from the UNCST (registration number: SS 4950, dated 8 April 2019).

The study required that the researcher establish direct contact with the FGS and purposively selected key informants. To identify participants in the FGS category, the researcher was guided by key informants from existing NGOs that were once reception centres for FGS and other child abductees that were affected by the LRA war in Northern Uganda. The researcher observed how formerly abducted girls maintained close communication and established a network among themselves, especially those that had gone through the reception centres. Most of the girls were acquainted or had met during the course of the conflict and thus knew each other. Some had even have been abducted from the same villages or communities.

The interviews were conducted using semi-structured questionnaires (translated into the local language). The necessary care was taken to handle all the information with utmost

confidentiality and privacy. All the respondents were provided with the appropriate environment that was void of any form of pressure, thereby allowing the respondents to be open and confident during the interviews and to express themselves freely. Enough time was allotted to them to thoroughly address the questionnaire. Precautions were taken throughout the study to ensure the correctness and dependability of the collected data. Each interview with an FGS had a social worker in attendance to monitor for any signs of stress.

3.8 Data-Collection Tools

The data-collection instruments consisted of a semi-structured, open-ended questionnaire for the FGS and key informants as well as an open-ended interview guide for the FGDs (all of which were translated into the local language). These are described in the sub-sections which follow.

Semi-structured, open-ended questionnaire. The researcher carefully designed the questionnaire to align with the research questions. A checklist was created for the interview guides to ensure that all topics directly related to the research were covered. According to Wenden (1986), a framed guide is the foundation of a good interview. She used this system while conducting research that led to her eventual award of a doctorate. Wenden (1986) contends that the discussion guide format is beneficial, as it provides an avenue into the depth of the subject matter while permitting the investigator to keep the interview inside the boundaries set out by the aim of the study. In order to make optimal use of interview time, the use of interview guides serves as a useful tool for interviewing large numbers of respondents within a systematic framework.

Open-ended interview guide. As a qualitative data-collection method, FGDs target groups (usually about 6–12) people who have a mutual distinguishing and relevant connection to the exact argument or questions at hand. The aim of having FGDs using the open-ended interview guide as framework was to access the perceptions of participants regarding their community and social dynamics within it as well as to understand how they view or experience

their own involvement in various facets of life. This method was selected because it allows for the quick collection of multiple views on the themes under study, therefore creating larger amounts of information faster than one-on-one interviews. Dzino-Silajdzic (2017) contends that interfaces among FGD participants provide valuable understanding and also provide for checks and balances, thus lessening the influence of unique or far-off views. He further adds that

> FGDs are considered a low-cost method whose flexible format allows the facilitator to explore unanticipated issues. Because of their flexible design and the exchanges among participants, the discussions may lead to the discovery of attitudes and opinions that may not be revealed through methods targeting the individual, such as structured interviews, surveys, or semi-structured key informant interviews. (Dzino-Silajdic, 2017, p. 2)

3.8.1 Data-Collection Procedures for Focus Groups

The first step taken at data collection was the effort to identify the participants. Separate groups consisting of between 8-10 participants, who were invited to participate in the discussions. Krueger (1994, as cited in Guest et al., 2017) states that groups of up to 10 respondents can be sufficient to acquire a diversity of viewpoints and small enough not to produce saturation. Recruitment of FGD participants was guided by local leaders, who helped in identifying and selecting participants. Each group consisted of a local leader, cultural leader, guardians/parents/ caretakers of FGS, religious leader/catechist to the FGS, and community elders. The choice of composition was because the selected members were involved in receiving the FGS back into their respective communities and participated in the social reintegration of FGS. Therefore, their views on and opinions of the reintegration processes would be very insightful in informing the study objectives. Such information would then be matched with the data generated from historical documentation review and the in-depth interviews, in an attempt in respond to the research questions. The FGDs were conducted in a single focus group. According to Morgan (1996), this is the most frequently used kind of FGD

and is extensively used by both scholars and experts across varied fields. This process involves a single moderator asking questions and organically discussing the topic with the selected group of respondents. The 10 FGDs were spread across the study locations and conducted in selected venues which the participants could easily access. Given that the information is for academic purposes only, FGDs involved a crew comprising of a trained facilitator and an associate (Burrows & Kendall, 1997; Krueger, 1994; both cited in Guest et al., 2017). The participants were verbally informed about the research purpose and assured of the confidentiality of the information shared. Consent forms were signed by the participants. Establishing this rapport with the participants led to the achievement of a high response rate and more honest responses. The FGDs were audio-recorded with consent from the participants. The formation and numerical composition of the FGD often the dictates the duration of the interviews. The participants will most likely get tired and fatigued if the deliberations stretch too long, with the general rule being 1.5–2 hours; however, this also depends on the complexity of the topic of study, the number of questions, and the number of interviewees. In this case, the researcher limited the duration of the focus groups to 1–2 hours.

The FGD composition seemed appropriate because the participants willingly and voluntarily talked about their children, family members, or next of kin in the presence of other participants that were not directly connected to the affected participant(s), like the in-laws, local leaders, friends, and neighbours.

3.8.2 Data-Management Procedure

Within 24 hours after each FGD, the facilitator and note taker sat to review the notes for completeness and accuracy. The review involved checking abbreviations, symbols, and shorthand that were used during note taking. Also, the editing and verification of the content of the notes was done, occasionally with playbacks of the audio recording to capture content that may not have been well noted. However, caution was taken to retain the character of respondents' comments in the local dialect and expressions they used, despite them being

grammatically improper. Dzino-Silajdzic (2017) cautions about excessive editing, saying that it is detrimental and not productive. Shortening participants' comments in a bid to create to a better understanding as the researcher is particularly harmful to data quality, as it often means ending up with the same information and same linguistic expression across all FGDs. Transcripts of interpretations by the facilitator and note taker must similarly be translated. The facilitator and note taker also supplement the notes with their own observations. These additional comments may include non-verbal communication, behavioural responses, the tone of the discussion, and group dynamics. These remarks are very important during the data interpretation process; if left out, identification of particular moments during the FGD can be difficult. These remarks must be indicted at the end of the transcripts, clearly marked with "team observations/comments".

The above process unfolded into well-written transcripts that formed the basis for data analysis of each of the focus groups and which meant the discussions could be shared or used in the future.

3.9 Reliability and Validity

In qualitative research, reliability and validity are complementary concepts which are used to refer to dependability or consistency and authenticity, respectively. Neuman and Wiegand (2000) stress that qualitative researchers need to be stable and not vacillating and erratic. For reliability in this study, the researcher used different methods – that is, in-depth interviews, focus groups and document analysis – in a consistent manner to explore and gain more understanding of how FGS of the LRA are experiencing reintegration programmes.

Reliability in qualitative scholarship conveys the value of a changing or emerging interface between the researcher and what he/she is studying (Neuman & Wiegand, 2000). In the case of the FGS, the researcher had diverse experiences from the interviews that were conducted among the different participant categories. When the study was undertaken with the use of a questionnaire, there was the mandatory requirement to evaluate the validity and

reliability of the questionnaire, as the questionnaire was created and organised by the researcher. The purpose was to minimise the interpretation gap between researcher and respondent. Well-structured questionnaires should be easily comprehended by the respondents and must possess an above average level of constancy with time.

3.10 Data Analysis

Data analysis is essentially examining material/evidence as well as reviewing its principal sections and the links between the different concerns to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon. Data analysis metamorphoses the gathered information and other categories of evidence into functional material that supports a conclusive interpretation. Levine (2007) explains that analysis can consist of both quantitative and qualitative characteristics – describing what something is and also how much of that something there is. Although the focus in this study is on the qualitative dimensions, some quantitative aspects remain relevant. Data analysis for this study was organised according to the method of data collection. The processes are described below.

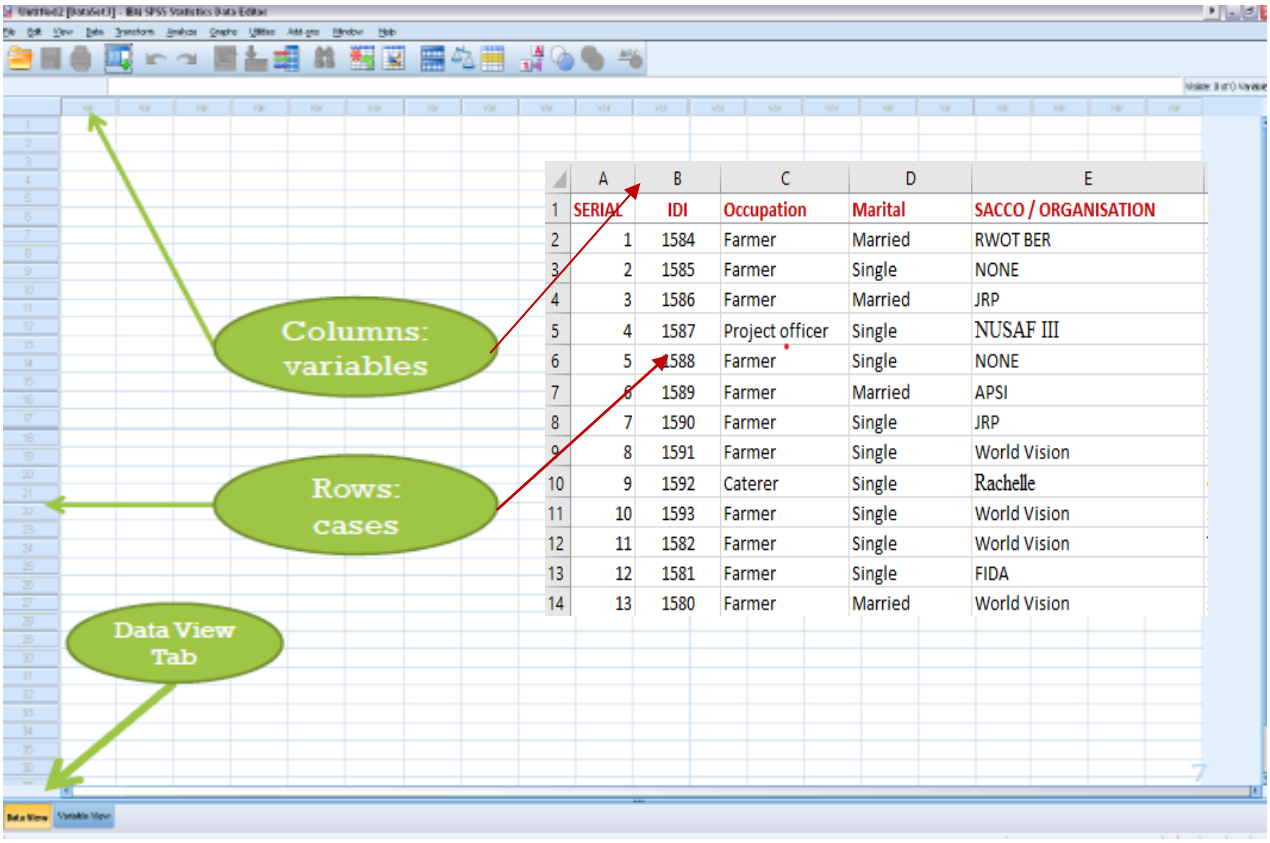
3.10.1 Data Analysis

Data analysis for this category was only applied to data from the FGS. The analysis had various stages: data entry, computer processing, analysis via SPSS, and later conversion into MS Excel for reliability, descriptive analysis, hypothesis testing, and validity.

Data Processing. This category had 60 questionnaires collected from 60 FGS. The data-collection tool was formatted in MS Excel, which is a common software tool for data entry. The data were arranged in spreadsheets and all 60 cases were electronically captured on the computer. Each data entry had a unique identifier linked to data from each participant (see Column B in Figure 2). In Excel, the data was arranged in columns with characteristics of each participant (variables) and the rows as the different cases. Figure 2 below shows a screenshot of the field data as presented in MS Excel.

Figure 2

Screenshot: Data Presentation in Excel



	A	B	C	D	E
1	SERIAL	IDI	Occupation	Marital	SACCO / ORGANISATION
2	1	1584	Farmer	Married	RWOT BER
3	2	1585	Farmer	Single	NONE
4	3	1586	Farmer	Married	JRP
5	4	1587	Project officer	Single	NUSAF III
6	5	1588	Farmer	Single	NONE
7	6	1589	Farmer	Married	APSI
8	7	1590	Farmer	Single	JRP
9	8	1591	Farmer	Single	World Vision
10	9	1592	Caterer	Single	Rachelle
11	10	1593	Farmer	Single	World Vision
12	11	1582	Farmer	Single	World Vision
13	12	1581	Farmer	Single	FIDA
14	13	1580	Farmer	Married	World Vision

As described in the research design, the analysis of the FGS data would take a descriptive approach. The researcher thus subjected the data to descriptive analysis. This displayed the type of graph the researcher would find suitable to present the secondary data in relation to the research questions. The graphs generated by this analysis are presented in the findings in Chapter Four.

3.10.2 Data Analysis for Key Informant Interviews

After data collection, six transcripts were generated from six participants. These were fewer in-depth cases, and this made data comparison quicker. The researcher selected key questions from the guide that were relevant in addressing the research questions. Key topics were identified, and data from each participant were reorganised according to patterns and

emerging themes. The themes helped the researcher write a detailed findings report, the information from which was integrated with other findings as presented in Chapter Four.

3.10.3 Data Analysis for Focus Groups

The analysis framework is normally derived from the predominant questions and sub-sets in each question. Therefore, for the purposes of this research, a thematic approach to analysis of the FGD data was adopted. Caulfield (2019) argues that the thematic method is often useful for analysing collections of texts and studies the data to detect the common thematic matters, concepts, and themes that occur frequently. Levine (2007) adds that the method is a resourceful and rational process, void of any predefined formulas for computing, and normally correlates to a collection of transcripts, such as interview transcripts. However, before the data analysis, there was need to identify a coding team to do a participatory data analysis and interpretation. So, for purposes of this research, the coding team included key members that participated in the entire research process – namely, the researcher and the facilitators.

To analyse the information in a more feasible manner, the researcher chose to use a matrix. The matrix is designed to capture all the information required for the analysis, including the research questions and specific group characteristics that are relevant in informing the analysis for more than 10 groups. The matrix was prepared before data collection, and this provided an added advantage for the researcher to cross-check and ensure that the questions in the FGD guide sufficiently covered all the main information requirements and questions. This analysis resulted in the data foundation of every section/grouping, which was then compared with the outcomes emerging through the analysis of other data sources that link back to the research questions.

3.10.4 Ethical Considerations

In this study, the researcher was cognisant of the ethical principles that govern the research process. Bryman (2012, as cited in McGowan, 2014) is very empathic about the

research principles to always keep in mind as a scholar: do no harm to the respondent or research team, always obtain informed consent, and protect both data and confidentiality.

Prior to data collection, the researcher notified the key study participants in time for the interviews by contacting them through their mobile phones, clarifying the rationale of the data collection, and requesting consent to conduct the interviews. The participants agreed to take part in the interviews and did so on an entirely voluntary basis without coercion or intimidation. All activities during the data collection – for example, audio recording of interviews – were first approved by the participants. The researcher pledged not to reveal any of the respondents' personal details like names or locations.

These steps were taken to uphold the principles of confidentiality and privacy, which implied that no personal information would be used in the discussion of the findings or any other part of this study. Finally, the researcher made known to the participants the purpose and possible use of the research so that deception would not occur as an ethical liability. The researcher further informed the participants that they would receive any feedback that came from policymakers after the research had been submitted.

CHAPTER FOUR

TRAJECTORY OF GLOBAL REINTEGRATION OF EX-COMBATANTS

4.1 Introduction

From the literature as presented in Chapter Two, it is clear that reintegration of former fighters, including FGS, is a global phenomenon that has existed for several decades. Much of this process has been linked to the creation of the UN following the end of World War II. While there are regional or country-specific reintegration policies, guidelines, and regulations, most of these have their roots in the UN's protocols on the same. Furthermore, many of these protocols or guidelines have come as a result of emerging issues that might have been an oversight in the existing protocols. There are a number of UN resolutions, recommendations, and programmes that countries have adopted to rehabilitate ex-combatants in general and FGS in particular. These represent the genesis of the present-day rehabilitation efforts worldwide. However, the most notable protocol on this matter is the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UN, 1948), especially Article 5, which stipulates that no one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhumane punishment. This declaration provides the foundation for present-day work related to violations of human rights during conflict. In the subsequent sections of this chapter, I present and discuss some of the notable agreements and conventions that condemn the recruitment of and support the reintegration of former child soldiers.

4.2 The Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court

According to the International Committee of the Red Cross (Straus & Waldorf, 2011), the UN considered and promoted the establishment of a stable and lasting international criminal crime court in its efforts to seek redress following continued violations of human rights. During the early 1990s, two ad-hoc tribunals were established to address serious violations of international humanitarian law, as were exhibited in Rwanda and former Yugoslavia. These

two tribunals resulted in the endorsement of the Statue of the ICC in July 1998 in Rome, Italy, which came into effect on 1 July 2002 (Kirsch & Holmes, 1999). At its adoption, during the UN Diplomatic Conference of Plenipotentiaries, the state parties to this statute recognised that millions of people has suffered unimaginable atrocities which threatened the peace, stability, security, and well-being of the world (ICC, 2011).

The ICC is the first self-directed and independent transnational law court, with its headquarters in the Hague, Netherlands. Its main mission is to bring to justice criminals who commit serious crimes that victimise humanity around the globe. This court handles four primary crimes: war crimes, crimes against humanity, genocide, and crimes of aggression (Bassiouni, 1999). While addressing such crimes, this court provides an opening for the national courts of law to take on the prosecution. This implies that, in cases where a state's courts of law fail, the ICC then takes it from there and prosecutes the criminals This is further explained in Articles 1 and 3 of the Rome Statute, which provide for the establishment of the court and an international institution that would extend its authority and influence to those convicted of severe criminal cases against humanity as defined and explored in Articles 5–9 of the same Statue (Bernat et al., 2019; ICC, 2011). By defining the nature and severity of crimes, the Rome Statute provides a basis for promoting nationally and internationally acceptable and adaptable resolutions to check and exercise judicial powers over criminals. Such definitions work as a point of reference in criminalising the offenders and seeking justice for the victims. This provides a justification for the creation, functioning, and contextual operationalisation of the ICC and the Rome Statute.

Reflective of the above, Bernat et al., (2019) observe that, currently, the ICC is examining and exploring nine circumstances in addition to 23 cases taking place on the African continent, Europe, and the Middle East. Some of these cases under scrutiny are in Uganda, DRC, Sudan, CAR, Kenya, Libya, Ivory Coast, Mali, Ukraine, Columbia, Georgia, Afghanistan, Guinea, and Palestine, among others. The International Committee of the Red Cross observes that efforts of this nature represents several years of commitment to redress serious crimes

against humanity by penalising the criminals (Trumbull, 2007). Specifically, under the Rome Statute, using children below the age of 15 years to participate in violent acts (including armed activities), rape, murder, and enslavement is defined as a grave or severe crime that must not go unpunished. This gives powers to the court to provide and preside over justice by checking and punishing offenders.

The effects of crimes against humanity continue on as generations grow. While men and women suffer serious consequences as a result of such crimes, children are the most at risk during the occurrence of any form of violence. They are at an age where they are still dependents and are unable to process what they experience during and after any form of violence. This justifies the emergence of humanitarian and reintegration programmes and assistance. However, the establishment of the ICC is a clear indication of the love and sympathy towards tortured and suffering human beings. It is a total commitment that member states have taken to support justice for victims. Trying criminals for crimes they have committed gives hope that, one day, the world will come to witness peaceful and harmonious relationships and exercise of the rule of law. Fairness and social justice are promoted, such that criminals are punished and victims receive justice .

While many countries subscribe to the ICC, there is a belief that it unfairly advantages perpetrators from developed countries. Some wars or conflicts funded by the West – for example, in Syria, Afghanistan, Libya, Mali, and Pakistan – have been fought under the umbrella of the "fight against terror" but have been reported to include gross violations of human rights. The indiscriminate use of drones to target terrorists has come with much collateral damage to civilian populations. The world is yet to see any persons from the West being prosecuted by the ICC for crimes against humanity in this regard. The ICC also lacks an apprehending arm and must rely on countries cooperating to arrest a given subject. Take, for example, the visit of former Sudanese President Omar Bashir to South Africa. South Africa was not obliged to hand him over despite the international warrant of arrest for him.

4.3 United Nations Resolutions on Child Soldiering and Reintegration

The UN has been at the forefront of profiling, denouncing, and criminalising practices related to conscription of children below the age of 18 years to serve or participate in armed and violent conflicts. Through different general/special assemblies and declarations, this world peace body has passed a number of resolutions to prohibit and eliminate acts of child soldering as well as advocating for and promoting their reintegration into communities of origin or where they voluntarily choose to live. These resolutions have been passed and promoted at various intervals, with each reinforcing the other. All these resolutions describe child soldiery as a criminal act and, therefore, punishable in courts of law in accordance with international humanitarian laws.

In the year 2000 (October), the UN Security Council (UNSC) accepted Resolution 1325, which focuses on women, peace, and security. This Resolution presents an acknowledgement of the grave effect that armed conflicts have on women as well as the notable influence women have in supporting stability and harmony (Ramsak, 2015). Within this context, all UN entities and member states are called upon to take action so as to increase and intensify the engagement of women and girls (more so ex-combatants) in averting and resolving hostilities, which gives them a central place in the journey to reconciliation and stability (Ramsak, 2015). In addition, UN resolutions such as 1820, 1888, 1889, 1960, 2106, and 2122 have all been agreed upon by the UNSC so as to respond to the growing and aggravated violence against women and girls. The essence of these resolutions is to provide space and opportunity for the affected women and girls to engage in and negotiate for social justice (Corbin & Morse, 2003).

These UN resolutions acknowledge that, while women and girls are among the most vulnerable humans in situations of violence and conflict, they are also key stakeholders in the restoration of peaceful post-conflict societies. This implies that their involvement in peacekeeping endeavours is crucial in strengthening the existing stability, peace negotiation,

reintegration, and rehabilitation efforts. It is further noticeable that the reintegration process is a collaboration among different actors who undertake actions for ensuring a peaceful recovery from hostilities, which, in turn, enables a new beginning for ex-combatants who have inevitably been affected by the conflicts.

In addition to the above, at its 4948th seating on 22 April 2004, the UN security council approved Resolution 1539. As a result, the following considerations were adopted and advocated for: a) condemning of the enrolment and usage of juveniles by fighting groups, b) creating procedures for watching, observing, following up, and reporting to provide reliable and truthful information on the deployment of underage children as fighters in accordance with the relevant international laws, c) halting the staffing of child soldiers, and d) abiding by the obligation to shield and safeguard children affected by violent acts (UNSC, 2004). It is evident that it is not only inhumane to recruit children into fighting forces, but it is also a crime that is punishable under international humanitarian laws. This is linked to the realisation that the recruitment of children into armed forces is harmful to their lives and those who survive might experience a retarded mental and physical growth. However, the Resolution provides us with a basis for providing humanitarian assistance to ex-combatants. Whatever their experience is, their lives are not left the same and they are, therefore, in need of intentional and guided rehabilitation.

At another general assembly, and in consideration of the 54th session agenda item 116(a), the UN passed the Optional Protocol to the CRC on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict. This is a multifaceted protocol where member states agreed on: a) banning the recruitment of anyone under the age of 18 into military service, b) ensuring that military entrants are not below 16 years, c) preventing entrants of 16 or 17 years from active participation in conflicts and aggressions. In other words, this agreement bans any form of action that leads to enrolling any person below the age of 18 into the armed forces or associations. In fact, Articles 2 and 4 of this protocol purposely provides that any person who is below 18 must not be forcibly enlisted into fighting forces by either state or non-state armed

forces (UN, 2001). This affirms that, whatever recruitment methodology state or non-state actors may use, it is against children's fundamental human rights and the protocol directives. Their recruitment is strictly prohibited. Against this background, and in a bid to restore the status of human rights, the UN created the position of High Commissioner for Human Rights so as to elevate the experiences, opinions, and voices of those whose human rights are violated or threatened. This has, in turn, led to the establishment of national human rights organs as essential agents and advocates of human rights worldwide (UN, 2013).

The Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (Torture Convention), especially Articles 2 and 16, prohibits any actions that inflict torture on a human being. This convention indicates that a state is responsible for taking effective controls to prohibit any acts of torture in its territorial boundaries (REDRESS, 2018). The Torture Convention further acknowledges that, when someone does wrong, it must be punished; however, the act of punishment is not a justification for torture (as defined in Article 1). Article 4 of this convention requests states to criminalise all acts of torture with appropriate penalties as provided in Article 5 of the same protocol. In this context, sustained battering, application of electric jolts to the private parts of the body, and tying/hanging in a position that causes extreme pain are among the different examples of torture (Garcia, 2009). Even during times of war, the Torture Convention requires state authorities to protect those involved in and affected by armed conflicts from torture. These include the former girl fighters.

In respect of the above, it is essential to note that reintegration of former child soldiers is rooted in the urgent need for promoting and advocating for universal human rights. Furthermore, the whole process is governed by a number of UN resolutions, protocols, and treaties that member states have agreed to uphold. It is further evident that promoting child soldiery is in violation of children's rights and whoever is convicted of doing so is a criminal and must be punished in accordance with international humanitarian law.

4.4 The UN's Disarmament, Demobilisation, and Reintegration Framework

Created and promoted during the mid-1990s, the UN's DDR framework can be traced back to former UN Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali's idea agenda to eliminate the recurrence of fierce battles, clashes, and fights in a post-conflict context so as to establish stability and security (Knight, 2008). Within this framework of action, there is a consideration of disarming warring cliques, repairing and bringing back rule of law, withdrawing and destroying fighting arms, taking home exiles and migrants, and reintegrating ex-combatants back into their societies.

From the 1990s to date, the UN has included the DDR framework to complement its holistic recovery and refurbishment role in post-conflict situations. Accordingly, it is among the principal programmes for encouraging the reunification of former child war fighters and incorporates diverse components such as therapy, healing, and basic functional and life-enhancing skills. All these are dedicated to fostering successful reintegration of former child fighters into civilian communities (Agbedahin, 2018). As a result, this design acknowledges that FGS have an opportunity to engage in various reform and life-enhancing activities in a post-conflict society (Russell & Gozdziak, 2006). This requires communities where FGS seek refuge after the war to accept them and engage them in any recovery and rehabilitation programmes as a way of keeping them busy and focused on building a peaceful post-conflict society.

The DDR framework is positioned to promote safety by disarming former fighters, relieving them of their soldierly role, and reintegrating them into societies of their voluntary choice. This framework provides room for ex-fighters to surrender and, in turn, get initiated back into their communities to begin a new civilian lifestyle. This is purposely done to pave the way for reconstruction and progression in a once conflict-ridden setting. This approach acknowledges and promotes the active participation of ex-combatants in peacebuilding and recovery processes (Knight, 2008). Therefore, as the DDR programme is planned, the

practices to follow through the three phases of disarmament, demobilisation, and reintegration must be visibly and evidently indicated for proper coordination during implementation and evaluation of results. The DDR framework acknowledges the existence and participation of child soldiers in violent conflicts and the importance of their reunification into civilian life (Wessels, 2004).

To illustrate, on reaching a peacekeeping agreement in Liberia (Liberian CPA) with the rebels, of the 21,000 child combatants, about 53.8% of these former soldiers (of which 41.8% were boys and 12% girls) were formally demobilised and benefited from the DDR process. As part of the reintegration process, 45% of these demobilised young veterans chose mainstream education, while the remaining 55% chose to participate in vocational training programmes (Agbedahin, 2018). Furthermore, in more than 120 projects over the past 25 years, the International Organisation for Migration (IOM, 2019) has supported the transition and recovery of former combatants, their dependents, and host communities in sub-Saharan Africa and Columbia. This is through vocational, educational, business development, and skills training; health and psychological support; and administrative assistance (IOM, 2019).

The above examples indicate that DDR is a practice brought on board principally to respond to and ensure an effective combatant-to-civilian transition. Whereas some ex-combatants can voluntarily choose to join the government security forces, others will choose to live a civilian life that they used to have before their recruitment into rebel forces (Muggah, 2005). The framework is established in the spirit of supporting ex-combatants to live a civilian life, preventing their re-recruitment into violent engagements, and involving them in their communities' recovery efforts. How short or long the process may be is largely affected by the political will to support reintegration activities within a particular setting. Violent and or armed conflicts are unique in forms and practice, which further implies that the experiences of those involved are also unique. As a result, solutions should at the very least be tailored to individual and contextual needs. Tabling the concerns of FGS in the mainstream discussions of

reintegration and recovery programmes requires humanitarian actors to prioritise and take action with regards to their unique needs.

A system must be deliberately established to support proper functioning of former combatants once they settle into areas or communities of reunification (Brooks, 2012). A successful and sustainable process requires that, before reunion, the family and community at large must be prepared for the return of the former soldiers. They must understand and appreciate that these people are not inherently bad people but, as adults, need support and are capable of taking on positive roles in a civilian society (Wessels, 2004). This thesis presents an understanding that it is quite a problematic process to transform a former child soldier from the life of a military commander and fighter into a civilian life that requires a lot of community tolerance. Thus, early involvement of relatives of former combatants psychologically prepares and supports them to acknowledge and receive their returning loved ones wholeheartedly as people whom they have a relationship with and with whom they share a biological and natural attachment.

This thesis will show that the DDR approach to reintegration is an ambitious and complex process that requires phased procedures; each phase shapes and compliments the other. The DDR framework affirms that FGS should be part of the peacebuilding process and socio-economic transformation journey of any post-conflict society I argue that FGS have the potential to reclaim their position as purposeful and significant members of a given society and deserve to be welcomed back home.

4.5 International Labour Organisation and Child Soldiery

The issue of child soldiers is at the heart of the ILO (ILO, 2007). The ILO Convention No. 182 on the worst forms of child labour distinctively identifies and declares use of underage children (those below 18 years) in armed conflicts as an act of slavery that must be banned and eradicated. This act is looked upon as constituting child labour, which deserves no room for expansion. Within this convention, not only active participation in fighting is banned but

also involvement in other supporting activities such as cooking, spying, carrying arms – any aspect of conflict that involves the use of children is banned. This convention further prohibits enlisting of any child below the age of 18 years into armed forces and states that whoever does so must be prosecuted for promoting child labour. The convention calls for exercising of strategies that guarantee no further conscription or use of children in armed conflicts. Furthermore, it is within the mandate and directives of the convention that those children that are found to have been recruited are withdrawn by state authorities so as to ensure their sustainable recovery and restoration. Member states agree to track and safeguard these children's discharge from military duty so as to prepare them for reunification with their communities of origin or where they voluntarily choose to live (ILO, 2007). This convention is further supported by the ILO's Recommendation No. 190 of 1999, which invited member states to take on a series of strategies: a) elimination of any forceful and fierce deployment that exposes children to exploitation, b) extending support for facilitating suitable recovery and reintegration, and c) sanctioning perpetrators accordingly (ILO, 2010).

It is evident that recruiting and using any human being below the age of 18 years is promoting child labour. Whether recruited by state authorities or armed groups, this constitutes exploitation of children. Measures for reintegration of former child soldiers clearly indicate that child soldiers are human beings who deserve attention from their communities and that their survival is at stake if not supported. Accordingly, both ILO Convention No. 182 and its subsequent recommendation (ILO Convention No. 190) declare the recruitment and use of children under 18 years in armed forces and groups as a war crime that must be accompanied by punishment.

4.6 The Paris Principles and Guidelines on Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups

With the understanding that thousands of children are connected with fighting groups the world over, it became imperative to create an atmosphere for repurposing the lives of the

victimised children. While in these groups or forces, children are involved in a number of traumatic activities, including frontline fighting, carrying firearms, and violent sex, among others, which altogether violate their rights. Consequently, some die and others become disabled in such violent acts; those who survive struggle to reintegrate into their communities if not supported. Such a background provided for the establishment and adoption of the Paris Principles in February 2007 at a governmental meeting held in Paris, France (UNICEF, 2007). It is widely known that these principles are a result of the review of the Cape Town Principles of the time. These had been endorsed at a conference prepared by UNICEF and the NGO Working Group on the CRC to advance measures for abolishing deployment of children, demobilising juvenile combatants, and supporting their reintegration back into their communities. Objectively, these principles were endorsed to: a) avoid illegal enlistment or use of child soldiers, b) amplify the discharge of children linked with hostility groups, c) enable the reunification of all child soldiers linked to the different armed associations, and d) safeguard all children.

The Paris Principles are set to battle the illegal enrolment of children into fighting forces and as well ensure that those that have been enlisted are discharged and supported in their successful rehabilitation and recovery. These ex-combatants are seen to play a vital role in their own reintegration and in building peaceful post-conflict societies (Leff, 2008). The above implies that war experiences are not only harmful but also destructive. Therefore, whoever is implicated needs to be supported to overcome the trauma and improve their own lives as well as to become involved in the socio-economic and decision-making affairs of their communities. The Paris Principles provide us with guidelines on how to support ex-combatants so that they are able to effectively contribute to peace-making and -building processes and efforts.

4.7 Chapter Summary

In this chapter, the thesis presents various protocols, conventions, and resolutions in relation to reintegration of former child soldiers. Literature indicates that engaging in or

promoting child soldiering is not only a violation of children's rights, but also a criminal offence under international humanitarian law, which should not go unpublicised or unpunished.

CHAPTER FIVE

FINDINGS

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the findings from the study in relation to the research questions as a way of understanding the concepts that have been earlier discussed. The study findings are embedded in three research questions:

1. Which programmes were instituted by the GoU and other entities to reintegrate girl soldiers back into their communities?

2. How have the reintegration programmes in Northern Uganda contributed to the lives of girl soldiers in their civilian life?

3. What is the impact of ASD on the reintegration of girl soldiers and have these skills changed their lives?

5.1.1 Research Question 1: Which Programmes Were Instituted by the Government of Uganda and Other Entities to Reintegrate Girl Soldiers Back Into Their Communities?

The reintegration programmes for girl soldiers in Northern Uganda form part of broader and more complex programmes that were initiated by the GoU in partnership with international NGOs, development partners, local civil society organisations and NGOs, and religious and cultural leaders. Having ratified the CRC in August 1990, the Ugandan Government is obligated to

> 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 other form of cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment; or

> armed conflicts. Such recovery and reintegration shall take place in an environment which fosters the health, self-respect and dignity of the child. (UN, 1990, p. 11)

The DDR programme that the GoU instituted in Northern Uganda after 2000 is an informal one, as described by Stout (2013) – that is, a programme conducted by the government and aid agencies, but still implemented in the context of formal DDR. The DDR components that were implemented involved the following activities as described below.

Disarmament. This process involved the collection, documentation, control, and disposal of small arms, ammunition, explosives, and light and heavy weapons of combatants and often also of the civilian population. The combatants were required to surrender all their armaments in exchange for a financial reward and vocational training. This initiative also came with additional assistance in the form of household items.

Demobilisation. This involves the official and organised discharge of active fighters from the armed forces or other armed personnel. The initial stage of demobilisation may extend from the registration of each individual combatant in holding centres to the cantonment of troops at sites designated for this purpose. This activity was implemented by the UPDF. Information gathered from all the key informants confirmed this phase of the DDR and highlighted that girl children were rescued from captivity end referred to child soldier reception centres that were in the districts of Gulu, Pader, and Lira. Further discussions with the key informants revealed that the UPDF rescued the girl soldiers after organising multiple attacks on the LRA rebel territories, and during such encounters, many girls were rescued and initially transitioned to the various military bases across the region. Later, the FGS were transferred to the nearest designated reception centres for identification and reunification with families.

The second phase of demobilisation, which is referred to as reinsertion, happened at the reception centres that were managed by other entities like World Vision International (WVI), Gulu Save The Children Organisation (GUSCO), and the Rachelle Foundation. Key informants revealed that

> *details of these girl child soldiers were collected, including their names, their ancestral locations, address of where they were abducted, estimated time frame of abduction, and, when available, details of parents' names for purposes of helping identify and inform families about the situation of their abducted girl child.*

Upon securing the above details, the FGS were to be provided with reinsertion packages – a form of provisional support to cater for the basic needs of the ex-combatants and their kin – which included cash allowances, food, clothes, shelter, medical services, short-term education, training, and employment. This support could last from between 6 months to a year as they prepared for the long road of reintegration. It was noted other child soldiers were taken to temporary reception centres that were run by the UPDF across various military bases in Northern Uganda. These centres guaranteed that the defectors (rebels who escaped from LRA captivity) were rehabilitated and reunited with their families. Holding an amnesty certificate and family reunification through these centres was considered *formal reintegration* in Northern Uganda. Basically, the centres held the key to the ex-combatants' future. This as a programme activity was also confirmed by one of the key informants, who mentioned that

> *The Amnesty Commission implemented the provision of amnesty certificates to all child soldiers that were returning, but this was after they had gone through the processes at the centres, so that they can reunite with their families. The certificate was a pass to allow the child return to the community and also reunite with the family.*

The demobilisation strategy and reintegration mainly concentrated on providing resettlement packages to the ex-combatants, aiding reunification with their families and the public and providing channels to access existing services. However, information from credible sources indicates that the DDR programme has not been supportive to former female combatants within the Acholi sub-region. Below is an extract from an article by Samuel Okiror in *The Guardian* (Okiror, 2018, par. 1–4), highlighting the grievances of a formerly abducted 9-year-old girl, who is now 30 years old and has not benefited from the DDR programme.

> When Agnes Acayo escaped from the rebel group who had abducted her at the age of nine, she felt overjoyed to be free and back home at last. …

> Now 30, Acayo, like many of her fellow female ex-combatants, is stuck in a cycle of poverty, despite government promises that they would be helped. … Like other female returnees, she struggles to buy food, access healthcare, send her children to school or get a job as a result of the failure of the government's demobilisation, resettlement and reintegration programme. … "It's difficult to cope with life. We [ex-combatants] are marginalised and abandoned. I keep thinking whether I should go back to the bush or just commit suicide," says Acayo. "I do all kinds of jobs, like washing people's clothes, in order to get money to buy food, and pay school fees, house rent and for medical care. Despite the promises, the government has never provided any assistance. I got an amnesty [commission] certificate and a reintegration package."
>
> Acayo was given 263,000 Ugandan shillings (£55), a mattress, blanket, hoe, machete, cups, and maize and bean seeds. (Okiror, 2018, par. 1–4)

It is common knowledge that, on paper, the DDR programme was implemented in Uganda, but that it was underfunded – as acknowledged by Justice Peter Onega, Chair of Uganda's Amnesty Commission:

> Ex-LRA female combatants, abductees and other returnees in Northern Uganda are right when they complain. We have failed them. Our hands as a commission are tied. We don't have the necessary financial resources for proper resettlement and reintegration of these people into the communities … We really can't do much. We need 10bn [shillings] for reintegration purposes. But government allocates the commission about 1.2bn for its operations each year. We appeal for urgent funding to help us reintegrate and empower these people to forget about their past. (Okiror, 2018, par. 6 & 9)

Among the key informants targeted for this research, only one recognised some of the activities that were implemented by GoU – specifically the liberation of abducted girls from their captors and linking the abductees to reception centres. This was highlighted by the LC III Chairperson, Pajule Sub-County:

> *The government initiated the reintegration programmes and provided a conducive environment for the girl child soldiers to return to their communities. Multiple military escalations into rebel territories were undertaken, with the aim of liberating girl child soldiers held in captivity. Upon rescue, most cases were temporarily kept at the various military bases for first aid and then later linked them to development partners that transitioned the rescued girl child soldiers and provided livelihood assistance and medical care.*

However, most of the key informants recognised the reintegration programmes that were implemented through the NGOs, like GUSCO, WVI, Rachelle Foundation, and other actors like the religious and cultural institutions that supported the implementation of the reintegration programmes. This information was emphasised by one of the study participants during FGD discussions, who said that

> *most of the help or assistance rendered to these girls during reintegration was given by NGOs and not the government... the NGOs have contributed so much in the education of these girl child soldiers – for example, the Norwegian Refugee Council* [NRC] *provided scholarships for these girls.* (Camp Leader; Pajule Centre 2)

Each of the above-mentioned entities supported different components of the reintegration programmes. The International Rescue Committee (IRC) initiated reintegration programmes that focused on the needs of the community and considered the traditional aspects of communities, which helped with acceptance of the FGS into society. Traditional leader Rwot Koyo disclosed that

> *most important aspect with the tradition was the community participation, which created a more sustainable platform for reconciliation. Although these practices varied in the way they were practised across the different communities, they shared similar principles, which included a voluntary aspect of the process, establishment of*

> *truth, apology, and acknowledgement of wrongdoing by perpetrators, and payment of symbolic compensation or reparation to victims by perpetrators [through] ritualised cleansing and livestock sacrifice.*

The organisation WVI had a different approach towards reintegration. Their approach was religious centred, with a focus on extending and propagating their views about the Christian values among the ex-combatants. According to the DCDO, the implications of the lack of community involvement in such decisions taken on behalf of their children was underestimated. A needs assessment in consultation with the gatekeepers based on cultural, social, and religious foundations should have been the first step. The cultural aspect of return was very pivotal. The DCDO said that

> *World Vision did not pay attention to these rituals, which are of great importance for the local community – for instance, the case with the cleansing rituals. If not performed, the acceptance of the children is more difficult because the community is less willing to reintegrate the children.*

Despite the above ideology, the reintegration programmes did not focus on formal education but offered life-skills training on HIV/AIDS and vocational-skills training programmes. In the discussions with key informants, the key reintegration activity highlighted was reuniting and the follow-up with families during the joyful but challenging return home of former abductees.

GUSCO is a local grassroots Ugandan organisation that provided psychological and social support, education, and peacebuilding activities in the community. The fact that this NGO had strong ties with the community and had knowledge of the cleansing rituals before reintegrating in the community, made it easy for the community to participate in the programmes and made reintegration of children into the community easier. In highlighting the activities initiated by GUSCO, the Project Coordinator Christian Child Fund indicated that

> *GUSCO set up programmes to help child soldiers who managed to survive to access special psychological and medical interventions during their integration back into*

> *normal life. The programme offered children vocational trainings, formal education, trauma counselling, and reintegration into their families.*

Although government and other entities initiated and implemented many activities and programmes, there are other actors that were involved in this process, as discussed below.

Religious leaders. Through their umbrella body called the Acholi Religious Leaders Peace Initiative (ARLPI), which was formed in 1999, all major religious denominations in Northern Uganda focused on the same goals of pursuing peaceful resolution to the conflict with the LRA and all conflicts associated with the LRA insurgency. The religious leaders, notably Bishop Ochola (one of the key informants), said that religious leaders were also key players in counselling communities to reintegrate returnees – including girl child soldiers and children born in captivity. Community counselling, settlement of disputes, and a call for forgiveness was led and carried out by religious leaders, who encouraged the community to accept these children. Bishop Ochola added:

> *as religious leaders, we talked to these parents, encouraging them to understand that these girls were not abducted on their own will, but were victims of circumstance and their children are completely innocent. … the parents eventually accepted these children with their mothers.*

Cultural/traditional leaders. The customs and norms involved in reconciliation and reintegration practices are of key significance to the Acholi community; therefore, they must be considered. De Groot (n.d., p. 44) argues that "when the programme-developers [*sic*] show understanding and respect for traditions, the communities are most of the time more willing to participate in the programmes that are set up for them because they feel accepted and listened to". This argument is confirmed in the reintegration programmes of the IRC and GUSCO, in which care was taken to be sensitive towards and to implement the local customs, traditions, and norms in their programmes. The DCDO indicated that it was a lot easier for FGS to settle in the community after going through the traditions than those that did not. In addition, community participation in reintegration programmes was largely dependent on implementers'

respect for tradition and culture. This goes to show the relevance of initial needs assessments in conjunction with the community gate keepers and formulating a bespoke strategy for the FGS that would result in a win-win situation.

> *The grassroots community and the FGS were willing to partake in programmes that respected their traditions and here reintegration of the children would go more effortlessly. When they are not taken in mind, chances are that the children would be rejected by the community or that their reintegration will be tough.*

Rwot Koyo – one of the key informants – mentioned the role of traditional leaders as crucial in reintegrating children back in the community. He also highlighted the roles of other traditional leaders like Rwot Logai and Rwot Achana, who were involved in face-to-face discussions with rebel commanders and aided the peace process. They performed several traditional practices in acceptance of FGS returnees and children born in captivity. The participation of FGS in these traditions qualified them to be reintegrated into the communities and be accepted by society.

Caritas Pajule Reception and Rehabilitation Centre. This centre was established by a Catholic development agency called Caritas to receive and rehabilitate the children formerly abducted by the LRA rebels. Child soldiers were treated and fed at the centre and eventually reunited with their communities. The centre provided the returnees with vocational trainings and capital to ensure they returned as economically active persons in the society.

Rachelle Rehabilitation Centre. In 2003, a journalist and child soldier activist called Els De Temmerman formed the Rachelle Foundation. This centre mainly provided psychosocial support to child soldiers, after assessing their risk level, to ensure that each category of FGS received the right psychosocial package of support. Speaking of this centre, the Project Coordinator for the Christian Counselling Fellowship (CCF) explained that

> *the children in the low-risk category had spent some time in captivity, whereas the high-risk children may have been involved in the killing of dozens of people – perhaps even their own parents. This categorisation informed the nature and period*

> *of the psychosocial support that these children were exposed to. Besides psychosocial support, the children were given medical care, nourished, and their families were traced for and eventually reintegration. The centre was closed in 2006 after helping to reintegrate approximately 2,500 children.*

Political leaders. Northern Uganda politicians played an active role in the reintegration process. These political leaders organised peace talks and negotiations with various rebel commanders that led to the release of several girl child soldiers and their eventual reintegration. They were also active in the framework of family tracing since they could easily pass on communication about rescued girl soldiers and kept records of various abduction events that led to the tracing of families.

Media. The use of media, especially radio, played a very important role in the reintegration and reconciliation of the former girl child soldier. Northern Uganda leaders and NGO officials used community-based radio stations as a communication tool to talk to rebels about peace and reconciliation. The DCAO emphasised the role of media in this process, saying

> *Mega FM played a pivotal role in the dissemination of programmes that were tailored to engage the rebels into peace dialogues, to offer the community a forum to discuss justice, to offer family members a chance to plead with their kidnapped children to flee the LRA and return home, to give returnees a chance to convey their reintegration experience and advise their former rebel associates to defect and return home, and to create an avenue through which rebels could pass on communication.*

Though not mentioned by the key informants, the Northern Ugandan Rehabilitation Programme (NUREP) was one of the multi-billion Euro projects funded by the European Commission. The programme activities were implemented in Acholi sub-regions but heavily concentrated in Gulu District. The activities implemented under NUREP involved mainly development and planning of programme activities with direction from the district structures. These activities brought together all the diverse stakeholders tasked with the planning processes of the district as well as the local civilians to participate in these processes. The

programme activities were designed to promote better community and ex-child soldier access to sustainable health and education as a first step.

5.1.2 Research Question 2: How Have the Reintegration Programmes in Northern Uganda Contributed to the Lives of Girl Soldiers in their Civilian Life?

Reintegration programmes were commonly offered to former combatants and abductees to acquire civilian status and support services to reintegrate them into post-conflict society. As stated by De Vries (2011, as cited in Muldoon et al., 2014, par. 6) "one cannot 'programme' people into accepting one another after years of violence conflict". Muldoon et al. (2014, par. 6) further add that the "objectives of reintegration programs are generally to provide support and opportunities to live 'normal' lives, become a functional member of society, resume education, gain skills training, and reduce trauma, including anxiety and depression". This understanding is central to the reintegration programmes that were initiated by the GoU and other entities in Northern Uganda.

The reintegration process of the FGS called for the involvement of the entire Northern Uganda community, GoU, and other entities to ensure that the sustainable objectives of the reintegration process were in line with national economic and human development goals and to foster and sustain political stability, security, and peace. In this study, a total sample of 60 FGS were reached out to in selected sub-counties of Pader TC and Pajule to establish the kind of professions and other economic engagements that FGS were involved in. It was important to identify the providers of support and the forms of support that were provided to the FGS. Findings established that the reintegration support to the FGS was provided mostly by NGOs. Many of the girls mentioned WVI, Rachelle, CCF, and Kalongo Barracks, among others, as their providers of support during reintegration. This was also highlighted by some participants during the FGD discussions, who asserted that

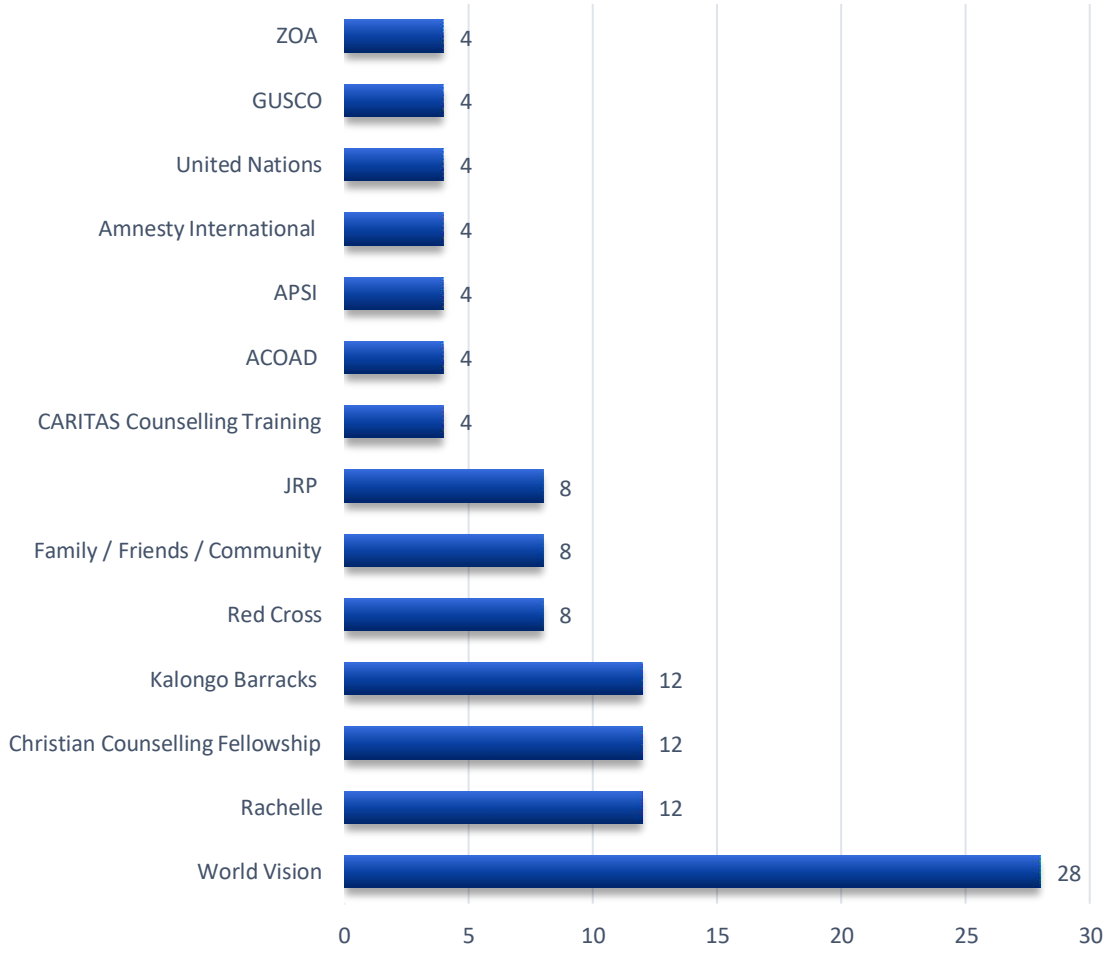
> *most of the help or assistance rendered to these girls during reintegration was given by NGOs and not the government … the NRC gave the girls some small money and education study scholarships to support the abducted girls in school; the World*

Vision gave them different items like beddings, clothing, and so on as well as agricultural inputs. (Parent, FGD Pajule Centre)

Presented in Figure 3 below are the organisations and individuals that the FGS recall provided them with reintegration support.

Figure 3

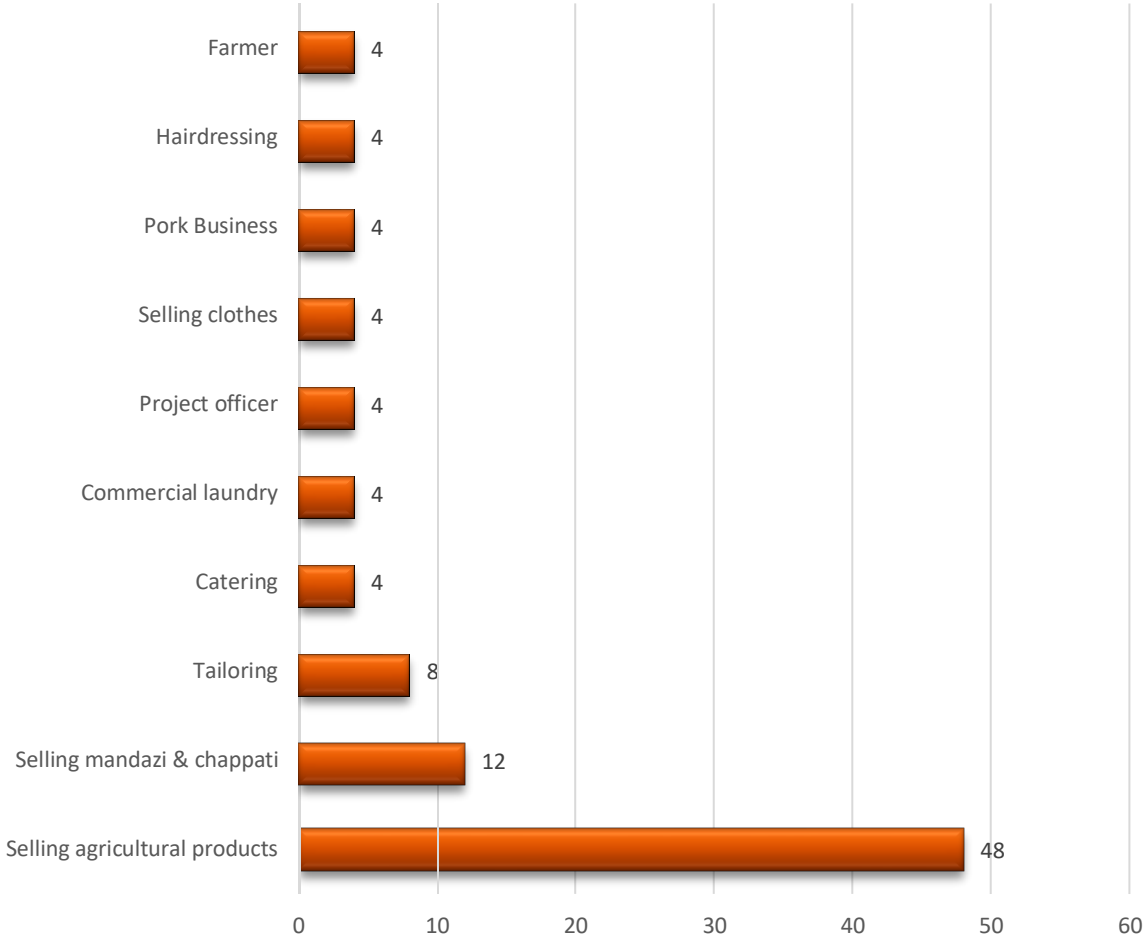
Providers of Support to FGS



Further findings presented in Figure 4 below, established that the FGS recruited for this study had at least a source of livelihood to earn an income. Most of the girls mentioning selling agricultural produce (which was the most common livelihood source), selling mandazi and chapati (fried snacks), and tailoring, among other trades as presented in .

Figure 4

Livelihood Sources for FGS



Discussions with key informants like the Project Coordinator CCF revealed that some FGS were trained in various livelihood skills such as agriculture, tailoring and garment cutting, hairdressing, and catering, while others were trained on how to run small-scale businesses to enable them to have a skill that would render them productive members of the society. In addition to the skills training, key informants noted that the FGS were each provided with relevant equipment like sewing machines and catering equipment to support them in their line of training.

Key informant interviews revealed that the FGS were provided with other forms of support like formal education; basic resettlement support, which included personal

belongings like blankets, beddings, basins, and soap; medical assistance; and food. Furthermore, some FGS were involved in small-scale businesses like trading in silver fish, livestock, and poultry or growing produce and were provided with assistance such as seeds and hoes to start their businesses. It was also noted that some of the FGS were facilitated with start-up capital equivalent to 270,000 Ugandan shillings to help them establish businesses. Key informants confirmed that some FGS requested to have formal education, and these were supported by the CCF in Pader District. One of the key informants indicated that Pader Girls' Academy was the only school in Northern Uganda where these girls studied. After O Level, the girls who performed well were taken to good schools in Kampala for their Advanced Level, after which they were supported to go to University. FGD participants, especially parents to FGS, observed:

> *Most the girls were able to complete their formal education and awarded with certificates and diplomas and are currently working in big offices within the district and other places.*

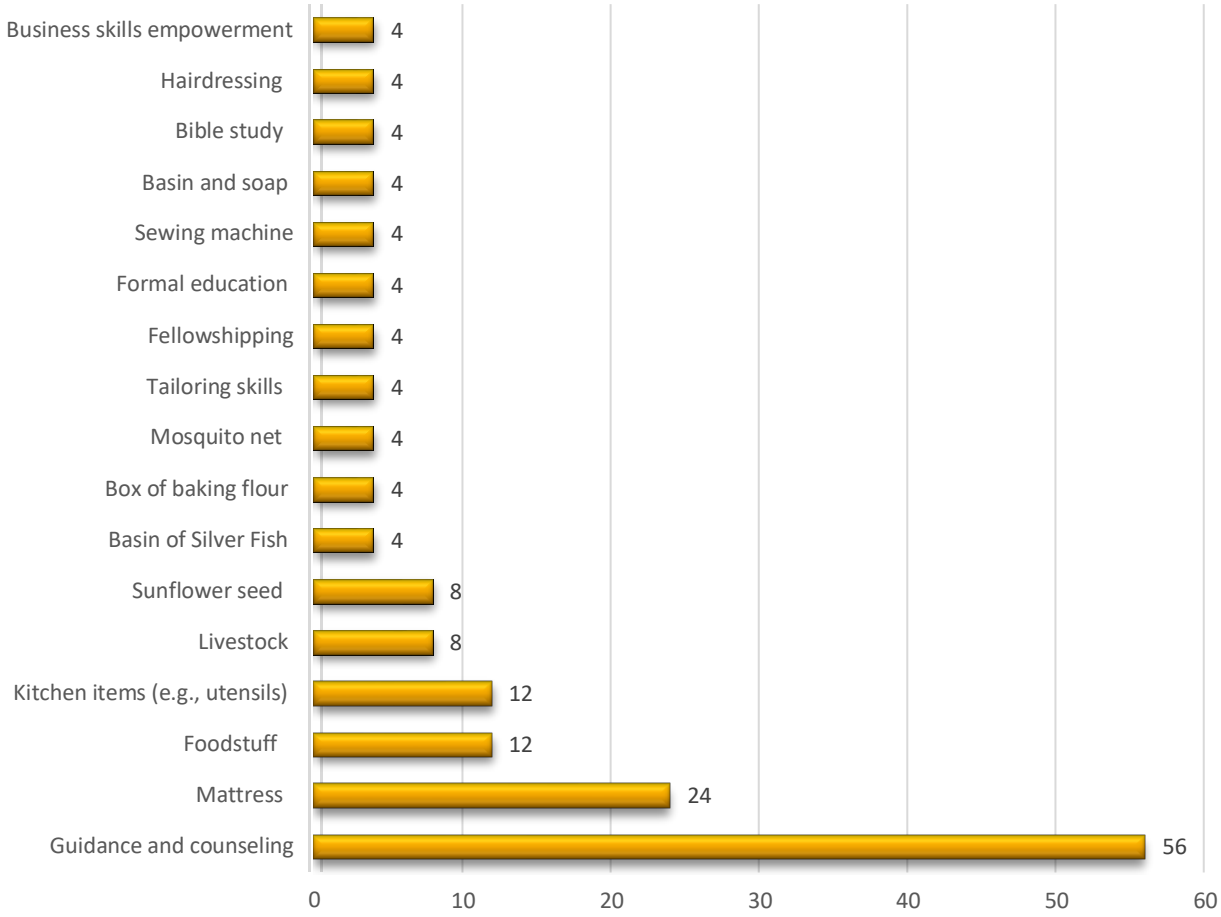
The parents to FGS and the local leaders observed that the business skills some of the FGS gained enabled them to be more economically productive in the community. Some local leaders and parents to FGS complimented the skills training, saying that

> *some of these women were trained in tailoring and thus are currently very good tailors in the community, and others who trained in hairdressing and are also very good hairdressers in the community.* (Camp Commandant and current LC I of Tyer village)

Similarly, discussions with FGS revealed that the girls received different types of reintegration support. Guidance and counselling was the most mentioned form of support received by the FGS, while others mentioned mattresses, foodstuff, and kitchen items. The forms of support mentioned are presented in Figure 5 below.

Figure 5

Forms of Reintegration Support Received by FGS



Determining the extent to which the reintegration programmes have contributed positively to the civilian lives of girl soldiers calls for more investigation by examining the challenges being experienced by the FGS. Furthermore, there is a need to explore how the programming has helped encourage normalcy and created opportunities to help FGS become productive and reduce trauma, anxiety, and depression. From Figure 5 above, it is evident that the FGS were provided with different types of support to help them lead a successful civilian life; however, even with this support, the FGS were experiencing several challenges as they tried to settle within their communities. These challenges are presented in Table 2 below, with verbal assault and stigmatisation being the top challenge, followed by lack of adequate income and lack of land to settle.

Table 2

Challenges Experienced by FGS

	Total	Occupation				Marital status	
		Caterer	Farmer	Project officer	Retailer	Married	Single
Total	60	4	48	4	4	16	44
Verbal assault and stigmatisation	40	0	36	0	4	12	28
Limited sources of income	36	4	28	0	4	12	24
Lack of land to settle down	12	0	12	0	0	8	4
Land grabbed by relatives	8	4	4	0	0	0	8
War injuries	8	0	8	0	0	4	4
Limited access to health facilities	8	0	8	0	0	0	8
Long distance from the town	8	0	8	0	0	0	8
Lack of business orientation	4	0	0	4	0	0	4
Abuse by husband	4	0	4	0	0	4	0
Seasonal farming	4	0	4	0	0	0	4
Discrimination	4	0	0	0	4	0	4
Gender-based violence	4	0	4	0	0	0	4
Husband abandoned her	4	0	4	0	0	0	4
Spouse stole her savings	4	0	0	0	4	0	4

The findings presented in Figure 5 (page 97) show that guidance and counselling (psychosocial support) was received by most FGS, in addition to other basic provisions like mattresses, food, and kitchen items. However, these findings are challenged by the outcomes of the support provided. While psychosocial support scored highly as the most mentioned support provided, it is challenged by the fact that most FGS experienced a lot of verbal assault and stigmatisation in their communities. Key informants in their discussions perceived that reintegration efforts had not fully helped the FGS to settle into civilian life. This was mainly attributed to the inadequate counselling services that the FGS received. Shanahan (2008) contends that "psychosocial reintegration within the community is a fundamental aspect for former child soldiers and the peacebuilding in the community" (as cited in De Groot, n.d., p. 27). This view is in alignment with the views of the key informants as discussed below.

Key informants observed that the psychosocial support provided to the ex-combatants through reception centres was not sufficient. This left many with an unstable state of mind, triggering name calling by the communities and making it difficult for the FGS to settle in the communities and adapt to a normal life. One of the key informants added that,

> *Rachelle Rehabilitation Centre was one such reception centre that provided psychosocial support to different at risk abducted children. However, the Centre was closed in 2006 after helping to reintegrate approximately 2,500 children*. (DCDO, Pader District)

The key concern was the short counselling period for FGS, which ranged from about 7 days to 3 weeks. This appears to have been insufficient, given the fact that the FGS had each been affected differently. Furthermore, as mentioned by the key informants, some of the FGS had been kept in captivity for a long period of time, while others were victims of rape and had babies as a result. Some had HIV and most had witnessed many atrocities or even actively participated in these atrocities. These experiences required specialised, long-term therapy and counselling to rehabilitate the FGS.

It was also noted that most of the counselling was administered by unqualified personnel, and there was no follow-up done by qualified personnel to establish whether the support provided to the FGS had been helpful. This was intimated by one of the key informants, who said that

> *some of these women have failed to reintegrate because there were no follow ups made after them to find out whether or not the help rendered to them was effective or not. … some ended up drifting away from society or from community, preferring solitude.* (LC III Chairperson)

Accordingly, most of the follow-up was left to camp commanders, religious leaders, traditional leaders, and some chosen members of society who mainly looked at the physical state of the returnees rather than their psychological state. Ideally, the psychosocial support should have been continuous. Similar concerns were voiced by some study participants,

especially the parents, during FGDs, who highlighted that some of the FGS had not settled in society because of the type of counselling they received.

> *The former girl soldiers have not managed to fit into the community because of difference in how they were counselled. That is, some underwent poor counselling and guidance, which is the reason why they take longer to adapt to life in the community.* (Parent – FGD Kilak A)

Another parent also added that

> *the nature of atrocities committed while in captivity is also the reason for their slowness in fitting in the community. For instance, those who killed while in captivity take longer to adapt to life in the community than those who did not commit any ugly crimes or acts like killing*. (Parent – FGD Pajule Centre, Pajule Sub-County)

Findings from the survey established that some of the FGS returned with children and, apparently, these children live in the custody of close relatives and parents to the FGS. Most parents that participated in the FGDs noted the challenges they face with these children who have grown lacking proper identity in terms of their paternal origin.

The parents highlighted the issue of FGS struggling to get married, which left them burdened with fatherless children. Simultaneously, they were also struggling to survive with limited resources. The parents of FGS noted that, whenever any FGS got a chance to marry other men, their children were left behind with close relatives and parents in the communities, because, according to Luo tradition, it is not the responsibility of a man to look after children that belong to another man, except if that man is his kin. One of the study participants indicated that children that were born in captivity to FGS, in most cases, find it very difficult to interact with other children in activities like playing, fetching water, or other socially bonding activities. These children tend to be bullied and called names. One of the religious leaders in the FGDs suggested that

> *the children born to these women while in captivity could be taken to child centres like SOS and Watoto in Gulu, where they will be given good homes and treated kindly and also helped to forget the pain they have gone through. Since they usually*

> *end up abandoned and neglected by the community they are brought back to, it would be a good idea to put the women in groups to strengthen their ability to do something for the community.*

Legislators have also urged the government to support former female abductees and children born in captivity during the LRA insurgency. The legislators argue that former abductees generally have limited income. The suggestion to government is to register these former child soldiers so as to provide some sort of affirmative action to them.

One of the key concerns raised by parents to FGS was the request to government to address the issue of land. Findings from the FGS also highlight lack of land to settle as one of the main challenges being experienced. Thus, while some of the FGS became farmers (Figure 4) and may have received support in the form of seeds (Figure 5), they were challenged by a lack of land to cultivate. Programmes needed to assess whether the FGS have land to cultivate before providing them with agricultural inputs for income-generating activities. Some FGS had their land grabbed while away in captivity. Furthermore, these FGS came back with children who then did not know where their homes were and had nowhere to go. The local leaders highlighted that the reintegration programmes mostly focused on the FGS but did not include the children who had come along with the FGS. During these discussions, those living with these children (usually the parents of FGS) and the local leaders suggested free education and vocational training be provided to these children. Religious leaders in the Tyer Village FGD concluded that the government could set up a secure place where these children could reside together without any conflicts or worries about their security.

The local leaders acknowledged that the support rendered to FGS was very important but noted that the lack of follow-up on these women to establish how they were progressing economically. The outcome of this was that some FGS ended up selling the items they received as part of their business initiatives. For others, the utensils broke before fulfilling the purpose for which they were provided; thus, according to key informants, these forms of

reintegration support had not transformed the lives of the FGS, most of whom were then helpless and with no hope of earning a livelihood.

Research from other sources also shows that lack of follow-up and constant monitoring hampers the development of effective longer-term reintegration strategies, even in situations where the FGS receive some degree of programming. "We simply fail to stick around long enough to learn whether our programmes have made a positive difference in the lives of these children" (Stout, 2013, p. 37). Nonetheless, these programmes that are lacking in proper long-term follow-up are used as the basis for "best practice" in FGS reintegration.

5.1.3 Research Question 3: What is the Impact of Appropriate Skills Development on the Reintegration of Girl Soldiers, and Have These Skills Changed Their Lives?

It is important to understand ASD in the context of this study. Skills development is a process involving the identification of skills gaps and then developing and honing particular skills. Such ASD is important because the skills then determine the ability to execute the reintegration plans with success. Some FGS, as part of the reintegration transitional support, were facilitated with formal as well as various vocational skills. Upon completing the course, FGS were expected to make use of their newly attained skills to sustain their livelihoods.

To explore the impact of these skills-development courses, the study focused on the skills mentioned by the study participants and how these have impacted their lives – whether positively or negatively. From the findings, as presented in Table 3 below, it is evident that in the study sample (n = 60), most study participants (n = 48) were practising farmers, while a few others were involved in occupations like tailoring, hairdressing, and catering.

Table 3

Participant Occupations

	Total	Occupation				Marital status	
		Caterer	Farmer	Project officer	Retailer	Married	Single
Total	60	4	48	4	4	16	44
Selling agricultural products	48	0	44	0	4	16	32
Sells mandazi & chapati	12	0	12	0	0	0	12
Tailoring	8	0	8	0	0	0	8
Catering	4	4	0	0	0	0	4
Commercial laundry	4	0	0	0	4	0	4
Project officer	4	0	0	4	0	0	4
Selling clothes	4	0	0	4	0	0	4
Pork business	4	0	4	0	0	0	4
Hair dressing	4	4	0	0	0	0	4
Farmer	4	0	4	0	0	0	4

Most study participants confirmed that the FGS were given training in income-generating activities like hairdressing, tailoring, catering ,and so on. While the FGS tried to fully utilise these skills and have taken up related jobs and occupations, these numbers are few in comparison with the number of FGS trained. Study findings also show that single FGS were the most involved in the different occupations. One of the key informants highlighted that

> *Some of these former girl child soldiers chose not to remarry and are carrying out some small-scale trading dealing in small drug shops, tailoring, livestock trade, local brewing businesses, and produce buying and are just taking care of their children born in captivity.*

Some key informants viewed the vocational training with positive sentiments. For example, the local leader for Pajule said that "*some of these women were trained in tailoring and thus are currently very good tailors in the community,"* and another parent within the

same group added that "*the girls were trained in hairdressing and are also very good hairdressers*".

However, there is a need to understand the appropriateness of the skills that were provided to FGS. It is widely expected that the provision of such skills is a clear indication that one can easily get employed or create employment. After completing a cookery course, for example, some participants indeed relied on their cooking skill to earn a living – whether through forming work groups or working alone. However, as time went by, cooking was not successful in proving sustainable income and jobs for many of the FGS. Some of the reasons for this include limited capital to start a food business and also stigma from some community members. It must be understood that the communities in Northern Uganda are very close knit. If the girls are not embraced by the community, then stigmatisation was the likely outcome.

These observations were noted by some key informants who maintain that most of the FGS are still not employed due to failure of the skills-for-life initiatives. The CCF project coordinator stated that

> *as much they were imparted with these vocational skills, there was a lack of marketing extended to these girls, and so they had the skills but lacked the market where to apply these skills. For example, many were trained on catering but in their rural settings where they had to resettle there were no persons that could afford or were in the habit of eating in makeshift hotels and restaurants, so many of the skills attained went unutilised.*

Comments from FGD participants highlight that where NGOs and sections of the government provided groups of FGS with supporting items along with the vocational training and skills development, it has since been observed that most of the items given to these groups were either sold off, broken, or became spoiled and could not be used. One of the study participants in Lagwai 2 FGD Group in Pajule stated:

> *My sister came back with some beddings and utensils, tailoring knowledge, and a tailoring machine given to them as a group, which right now is broken. And yet the group currently has no ability to repair the machine, therefore they are idle.*

This again highlights that there was a lack of proper needs assessment to guide community partners. From the discussions with the fey informants it emerged that

> *the choice of which vocational skill to take up was guided on by the community outreach officers who based this on the level of the former girl soldiers' education attained prior to abduction and the deduced mental capacity of the former girl child soldier, leading to choices that did not consider the market trends in the community.*

The tailoring skills, for example, could not support a livelihood because the societies to which the FGS returned opted for cheaper second-hand clothing as opposed to the tailored garments and clothing. The FGS should have been empowered with more appropriate skills that speak to community needs, like agriculture support with a focus on production as an enterprise. This suggestion aligns with other researchers who believe that these programmes should be needs based and not designed according to donor or organisational priorities (Woldetsadik, 2012).

In terms of their career paths, some former girl child soldiers were noted as having re-joined formal education. Accordingly, one of the key informants intimated that Pader Girls' Academy was the only school in Northern Uganda where these girls studied, and, after O Level, the girls who performed well were taken to good schools in Kampala for their Advanced Level. Following this, they were supported to attend University, from where they have chosen many different paths. Study participants in FGDs, especially parents to FGS, observed that "*most the girls were able to complete their formal education and awarded with certificates and diplomas and are currently working in big offices within the district and other places, as mentioned by the District Community Development Officer".*

Several successful cases that attained some professional certification, undergraduate degrees, and diplomas, have acquired different employable skills. For example, one of the

study participants from the Pajule FGD group noted that "*some few FGS who went back to school are working in big offices. For example, one of the girls is currently working at a health centre in the area.*" Another participant indicated that some of these girls were taken back to attain formal education and are working in government offices.

In this study sample of 60 FGS, four FGS mentioned that they had received formal education and were currently placed as project officers of some sort. However, their main challenge was lack of orientation in business skills that were in line with their profession. This finding speaks to the concept of ASD, where FGS are engaged in activities or professions but lack the appropriate skills to manage the task.

It must be noted that the majority of FGS in this study were not able to complete their studies due to the burdens of early motherhood, lack of support to facilitate the survival of their children, and ostracisation in the form of nicknames and frequently being belittled by their peers – all leading to them dropping out of school.

CHAPTER SIX

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Introduction

Following the ceasefire of the LRA insurgency in 2006 in Northern Uganda, restoration programmes began to be implemented with the aim of reintegrating ex-combatants and, in particular, FGS into their communities of origin. As time went by, it became evident that the experiences of the girls who went through these programmes needed to be assessed from both a humanitarian and an academic perspective; this research constitutes the latter. This study sought to gain an understanding of how FGS of the LRA experienced the reintegration programmes as they adapted to civilian life following their return from LRA captivity. This understanding can then inform better and more sustainable practices that transform and enhance the lives and livelihoods of the FGS.

This study was guided by three objectives: assessing implemented programmes for reintegrating girl soldiers back into their communities, establishing whether there is a deficiency in addressing the skills development of the FGS, and providing policymakers with new insights through presenting the current social reality. In short, this study sought to fill a knowledge gap on the adaptation of FGS to civilian life after reintegration. This was intended to establish evidence with regard to how the FGS have adapted to civilian life and whether ASD has played a part in their adaptation.

6.2 Summary of Findings

This study explored the reintegration experiences of FGS of the LRA in the Northern district of Pader, following the 2006 ceasefire of the insurgency. In relation to the objectives of this study as outlined in Chapter One, findings indicate that there were a number of reintegration programmes established and managed by government, civil society, and humanitarian agencies with the aim of reintegrating former LRA girl soldiers. One of the most

notable of these programmes was the NUREP, which was a multi-billion-Euro programme funded by the European Union. Others included those supported by the Christian Child Fund; WVI; Rachelle Foundation; GUSCO; ARLPI; Caritas Pajule Recreation and Rehabilitation Centre (Caritas); traditional, cultural, and spiritual leaders; as well as local community leadership. All these activities were designed to negotiate for the release of girl soldiers, promote better community experiences for ex-child soldiers to be able to access sustainable health and education services. Furthermore, local radio stations – especially Mega FM – played a tremendous role, as they were used as a communication tool to talk to rebels about peace and reconciliation.

Reintegration programmes were dedicated to supporting former combatants and abductees to reacquire civilian status and become functional members of a post-conflict society. In terms of education, there were two programme interventions. Some FGS participated in vocational ASD skills training, while others were sponsored for formal education – graduating with certificates and diplomas. The vocational ASD skills training focused on subjects such as agriculture, tailoring and garment cutting, hairdressing, catering, and managing small-scale businesses. These skills were intended to provide a source of livelihood to FGS. The skills development programmes were supported and provided mainly by NGOs, such as Red Cross, UN, ZOA, Agency for Cooperation and Research in Development, APSI, and WVI (see Figure 3 in Chapter Five of this report). Worth noting that, after skills training, all the FGS who participated in this study were provided with support services as well as starting capital and equipment (see Figure 5 in Chapter Five) to support them in utilising the vocational skills they had acquired. Some FGS who received vocational training and support were able to engage in various economic activities which made them productive members of their communities. The findings indicate that those who took the formal education route were more successful than those who enrolled for short vocational-skills training courses. However, there was a very low intake into formal education, with only a handful of FGS going back to school.

Findings from this study establish that reintegration of FGS is a long and complex process. It started with getting the combatants from the bush or the military camp to disarmament centres so that they could later be referred to rehabilitation centres. From these centres they were then reunified with their families or reintegrated into a community. During each phase, there were a number of activities that were initiated in the lives of the ex-combatants, such as registration of identity documents, counselling, and guidance, among others. There were a number of initiatives supported by different entities, but the findings show that many of these interventions were more influenced by the priorities of the donors than of the recipients, and most programmes were based on the UN's DDR framework. This framework included the provision of resettlement packages consisting of basic household necessities (such as bedsheets, pots, and pans), access to skills training and rehabilitation, and reunification with families. However, this study found that the reintegration programmes were mostly underfunded. As a result, the operations of these activities did not effectively support FGS as it was hoped.

Furthermore, findings reveal that, generally, FGS struggled to establish a stable and sufficient livelihood and that the support provided through the reintegration programmes had not sustainably transformed their lives. Many of them were hopeless, living in regret, with an additional burden of parenting fatherless children and, in some cases a community that had still not "forgiven" them. This was further worsened by the lack of land ownership, despite agriculture being the most promising sector for engagement (see Table 3 in Chapter Five). There was also a general lack of follow-up or monitoring of the FGS with regards to their socio-economic progress. It was found that some of the FGS ended up selling the items which were given to them as start-up capital. This, in turn, not only sabotaged their financial but also their sociocultural capital. As a result, many failed to cope with the resulting social stigma and ended up drifting away to other communities. Participants revealed that some of the guidance and counselling activities were not helpful, but instead created more psychological trauma in addition to what they had already gone through during their life in captivity. Furthermore, this

study reveals that the FGS had difficulties in mixing or associating with community members during socially bonding activities like fetching water and collecting firewood.

Many of the FGS who trained in vocational skills are engaged in different income-generating activities but lack the appropriate skills to manage the tasks. This is attributed to being semi-skilled, frequently stigmatised, and the fact that some of them did not finish their courses due to the burdens of single motherhood and limited support to facilitate their livelihoods. As a result, the attained skills have not been successful in providing sustainable livelihoods, as many of them cannot even use the acquired skills for decent employment. However, just a handful of success cases are recorded among those who pursued formal education qualifications. These are now graduates with certificates and diplomas who are in many cases employed by the district local government in Pader.

6.3 Conclusion

This study establishes that the end of the LRA war in Northern Uganda, as with many violent conflicts, created a community of destitute and vulnerable girls (now women) that needed to be supported to reunite with surviving relatives. Due to the long period spent in captivity, this community of girls was exposed to numerous dehumanising and traumatising acts such as killings, rape, and physical and psychological torture. Consequently, their lives would never be the same; they needed a bespoke, guided rehabilitation programme that is fitted to their personal needs and economic circumstances. In the aftermath of the war, substantial efforts have been undertaken to reintegrate FGS in an attempt to contribute to societal revival in the region. The established programme designs acknowledge that these returnees have an opportunity to engage in various reforms and life-enhancing activities. In turn, this has created room for surviving FGS to support their livelihoods amidst challenging times and in spite of the difficulties related to their mental and physical growth.

Reintegration of FGS is rooted in the urgent need for promoting and advocating for continuity of human survival. Further, it is noticeable that the reintegration process is a

collaboration among different actors, who undertake actions that pave the way for ensuring a peaceful and sustainable reunification process. Establishing special reintegration programmes or initiatives means providing FGS with the opportunity to replace militant/rebel behaviour with normal social and civilian life experiences in the communities where they choose to stay. Furthermore, they are able to identify and develop their strengths and abilities.

Despite the significant efforts to reintegrate FGS by state and non-state actors, this study revealed that most of the interventions, including skills training, suffered from underfunding, and the majority of these interventions were influenced by donors' priorities rather than FGS' actual needs. As a result, these interventions were not appropriate to the lives of the returned former child combatants, which explains why many FGS have failed to cope with civilian life and struggled to establish a sustainable livelihood. In addition, stigmatisation and post-war trauma have led to continued isolation; consequently, their strengths might be difficult to develop and their full acceptance into the community remains uncertain. This study found that some of these girls could not fit into their families and ended up fleeing to other villages or urban towns like Gulu and Kampala. All these findings considered, determining the most appropriate reintegration practices remains a far-off goal due to lack of follow-up and effective management of interventions. However, this study also demonstrates the extraordinary potential and resilience of FGS who, despite the enormous difficulties the face, have endured, are still alive, and have somehow adapted to post-war life.

6.4 Recommendations

Drawing from the study findings, the following recommendations are suggested.

6.4.1 Census

A specific census of all FGS in the areas that were affected by the LRA conflict in Uganda should be undertaken. The census will then guide policymakers on the current social reality of the FGS. The estimated number of FGS might not be accurate; consequently, a census would provide new data that could allow for the clustering of FGS according to districts and all the

way down to the parish level. The FGS would then be classified as a vulnerable group, ensuring that none of the FGS is left behind.

6.4.2 Parish Development Model

While there were other skills and vocations the FGS received training in, the findings indicated that agriculture was one of the most effective avenues for quickly achieving increased household incomes. The census data can be used to identify the FGS at parish level and incorporate them into the parish development model (PDM) as a vulnerable group. This model, which is still in its infant stages in Uganda, if untaken correctly, would provide the pathway to socio-economic transformation in the areas that were affected by the LRA conflict and in rural Uganda in general. It is based on a needs assessment at the grassroots level to determine best practices in agriculture. It is not imposed on the people; rather, all its projects are driven and steered by community members. This ensure better accountability, a sense of belonging, and ownership of any project that is undertaken. The PDM has the capacity to transform the lives of FGS so that they achieve surplus-producing households. This will have a ripple effect on the health, wealth, psychological well-being, and happiness of the FGS and their communities.

6.4.2 Holistic Programming

Reintegration programmes or initiatives should be designed in a way that compliments the entire life cycle of an ex-combatant, with consideration given to their age, sex, and the duration spent in captivity. These interventions should have a holistic focus on empowering the person with the ability to overcome any form of stigma and proactively work towards occupying their rightful socio-economic and cultural space. Such programmes must incorporate diverse and longer-term activities such as therapy, healing, and acquiring basic functional and life-enhancing skills. This is opposed to a one-size-fits-all approach that treats all ex-combatants in the same way. Such a holistically designed programme would also

acknowledge that FGS have an opportunity to learn and engage with their peers in the community, which would assist in addressing issues of social stigmatisation.

6.4.3 Customised Interventions for Addressing Contextual Priorities

Armed conflicts are unique in form and practice, which implies that the experiences of those involved are also unique. Solutions should thus be customised according to individual and contextual experiences and needs. With such an approach, targeting the real needs of FGS becomes a priority during the design of reintegration and recovery programmes. Findings from this study revealed that many of the FGS failed to translate the attained skills due to the fact that some dropped out of the training sessions due to a mismatch with what they expected, not being interested in the resulting skills that they would acquire, or because the counselling and guidance provided was not appealing to all. This meant that FGS did not see the value in the support services provided, which might be because these did not address their real needs. This also explains why many of these women sold off the start-up items that were provided to them after training. There is thus a need to provide context-relevant entrepreneurial support services to assist FGS in improving their quality of life.

6.4.4 Community-Wide Sensitisation About Former Girl Soldiers

There is a need to carry out family and community-wide sensitisation campaigns to create awareness about the FGS as equally important members of their society who must be embraced regardless of their previous experiences. Their families and the community at large need to be prepared for their return. This study established that many FGS were not accepted and therefore had to seek refuge in other communities. The community must understand and appreciate that these people are not inherently wrongdoers but victims who now, as adults, need support and are capable of taking on positive roles in a civilian society. An understanding must be encouraged that FGS have the potential to significantly and purposely contribute to their communities and deserve to be welcomed back home. The community needs to be reminded that many of these FGS were abducted or coerced and acted against their will;

hence, they deserve the support of their communities if they are to survive in a post-conflict society.

6.4.5 Provision of Specialised Financing Mechanisms

There is a need for government and affiliated financial institutions to provide access to interest-free or reduced-interest financing either to FGS as individuals or as a collective. One of the key issues that was noted as a hurdle to the effective reintegration of FGS and their engagement in the socio-economic affairs of their communities was inadequate financial support. Accordingly, providing interest-free or low-cost loans to FGS can boost their functionality and help them become an asset to their communities. The findings showed that some FGS belonged to a saving or cooperative scheme. Furthermore, government can also institute job placement schemes or tender pre-qualification provisions as affirmative action (with quotas stipulated for FGS) – especially in those districts that were affected by the conflict.

6.4.6 Specialised Rehabilitation Health Facility

There is a need for the establishment of a psychiatric referral hospital in Northern Uganda to continuously provide care for those affected by war-time and post-war traumatic experiences. Some FGS are still undergoing traumatic experiences, partly resulting from isolation, triggers of past experiences during captivity, and stigma experienced in their communities. This hospital would be a one-stop centre where FGS can go to receive post-war psychosocial support and experience themselves as being part of the greater community and worth being cared for. A serious reality for those who have experienced armed conflict is the development of post-traumatic stress disorder. Accordingly, continuous mental health assessment and treatment, where necessary, is critical to the long-term, sustainable well-being of FGS. Identifying FGS experiencing psychological challenges will provide a platform for continuous monitoring and treatment and would greatly assist them in their steady recovery from previous traumatic experiences. The FGS can also be in co-opted into military health services to receive access to free medical care.

6.4.7 Situation or Contextual Analysis

It is equally important to carry out a thorough needs assessment of the current circumstances of the FGS so as to establish their health, mental, social, and economic needs and priorities. Interventions can then be planned based on facts rather than assumptions. The findings of this study established that part of the failure of the reintegration efforts was due to the fact that FGS were not involved in creating plans based on what their priorities were; instead, plans were made based on what the donor community thought was appropriate for these women. As a result, much of what was implemented did not solve the FGS' challenges as was envisioned.

6.4.8 Focus on Longer-Term Plans

There is a need to consider provision of longer-term training mechanisms for skills acquisition and education support services as opposed to shorter-term training since those who enrolled for longer-term training (certificate and diploma programmes), though fewer in number, were more successful than those who attended short vocational-skills training programmes. Findings indicate that most of the success stories are evident among those FGS who enrolled for formal education, with most of them now employed by the Pader District local government. This type of skilling and employment offers a long-term mechanism for positively engaging the ex-combatant. The longer they stay in controlled environments, the better they are able to cope with life and interact with the rest of the community. It is now evident that, because of the success of the FGS who graduated with formal qualifications, they were able to live a decent life and participate in the affairs of their communities. At the same time, they were also better able to independently take care of the children they had while in captivity.

6.4.9 Monitoring and Evaluation of Interventions

There is need to establish and operationalise a monitoring-and-evaluation framework so as to be able to follow up and track progress of reintegration programmes. Observations from this research indicate that many interventions could have been successful but lacked a

follow-up and steering mechanism. As a result, it became hard to establish the impact of the implemented recovery programme, which may have been one of the key factors that led to the FGS selling the items they were given to start up small businesses.

The recommendation is that all the projects involving FGS should be under the direct supervision, monitoring, and direction of the Peace, Recovery, and Development Plan (PRDP) in the Office of the Prime Minister, with a specific desk or department assigned for this purpose. The findings showed that, while many civil society organisations, international and local agencies, and NGOs followed the "buzz word" of children in armed conflict and the LRA, there was very limited stakeholder engagement. Every agency went about its business independently as a means to justify its existence and continued funding. Having all these agencies obliged to coordinate under the PRDP can reduce the duplication of services and ensure better pooling and distribution of resources. Effective follow-up and feedback systems, coordinated efforts, and a needs-based approach involving wide stakeholder engagement will allow programme developers and implementers to learn from past mistakes and establish best practices in the pursuit of the healing and successful reintegration of FGS.

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