CSOPNU

Civil Society Organisations for Peace in Northern Uganda

Worst Place to be A Child

The Impact of Armed Conflict on Children in Northern and North-Eastern Uganda

UCRNN
UGANDA CHILD RIGHTS NGO NETWORK

March 2007

Table of Contents

Abbreviations

AAP:	American academy of Paediatrics
AIDS	Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
CDO	Community Development Officer
CSOs	Civil Society Organisations
CSOPNU	Civil Society Organisations for Peace in Northern Uganda
DDHS	District Director of Health Services
DEO	District Education Officer
FAC	Formerly Abducted Children
FGD	Focus Group Discussions
GUSCO:	Gulu Support the Children Organization
HIV	Human Immuno-Deficiency Virus
IANSA	International Action Network on Small Arms
ICCO	Inter-church Organization for Development Cooperation.
IDPs	Internally Displaced Persons
LRA	Lords Resistance Army
MOH	Ministry of Health
NGO	Non Governmental Organisations
OPM:	Office of the Prime Minister
OVCs	Orphans and other Vulnerable Children
PEAP	Poverty Eradication Action Plan
PSWO	Probation and Social Welfare Officer
PRDP	Peace, Recovery and Development Plan
PTSD	Post Traumatic Stress Disorders
SDIP	Social Development Sector Investment Plan
SDQ	Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaires
UPE	Universal Primary Education
UN CRC	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

Acknowledgments

The children in Northern and North-Eastern Uganda who shared their experiences and feelings inspired us and it is our prayer that this report leads to development of interventions to lift up their spirits.

Foreword

All children are born with inalienable dignity and rights. The Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) provides a comprehensive array of the economic, social, cultural, political and civil rights of children. All children irrespective of their age, race, ethnic background, legal status of parents and other differences have the right to survival, development, protection and participation. To say that the conflict in Northern Uganda has undermined the realization of these rights is an understatement.

Children in Northern and North-Eastern Uganda have had to pay a heavy price for the two decade long conflict in the North and for close to a jubilee in the North-East. It is conspicuously clear that numerous researches have been done to document the impact of conflict on children in Northern and North-Eastern Uganda. However, they have not been comprehensive in considering the economic, socio-cultural and political effects of the war on children in the short and long-term. This report is a product of a comprehensive study on the impact of armed conflict on children in Northern and North-Eastern Uganda conducted by Civil Society Organizations for Peace in Northern Uganda (CSOPNU) in collaboration with Uganda Child Rights NGO Network (UCRNN).

While welcoming the recent political initiatives towards a peaceful resolution of the conflict in Northern Uganda and efforts towards scaling down the violence in Karamoja, we hassle to add that this is an opportunity that Uganda can ill afford to loose. The end of violence in the region should come with massive efforts for transforming communities therein to attain sustainable peace, justice and harmony.

It is our humble request that all actors working to improve the living conditions of children in Northern and North-Eastern Uganda use this report to guide their programming, policy and advocacy interventions.

…………………………..
Johnson Byamukama,
Chairperson,
Civil Society Organizations for
Peace in Northern Uganda
(CSOPNU)

………………………….
Jolly P.T. Nyeko
Chairperson,
Uganda Child Rights NGO Network
(UCRNN)

1.   *Executive Summary*

Conflict has characterised the socio-political landscape of Northern Uganda for the last 20 years and North-Eastern Uganda since the pre-independence era of the 1960s. The conflicts in the two regions though having different causes, have the same impact on the lives of the people affected. The conflict in Northern Uganda (largely Acholi and Lango sub-regions and occasionally parts of the Teso sub- regions) is perpetuated by the Lords Resistance Army (LRA), a rebel group that is waging an armed struggle against the National Resistance Government allegedly in a bid to take over political power so as to enforce the observance of the 10 commandments. The conflict in North-Eastern Uganda is largely perpetuated by the warrior Karamojong ethnic group whose livelihood is culturally, economically and socially reliant on cattle. Conflict ensues when the Karamojong, in line with their cattle rustling culture, attack neighbouring tribes to acquire cattle, resist or revenge the rustling of their cattle.

Civil Society Organizations for Peace in Northern Uganda (CSOPNU) and Uganda Child Rights NGO Network (UCRNN) commissioned this study in Northern and North-Eastern Uganda to provide a comprehensive account of the impact conflict has had on children with a view of informing programming, policy interventions and advocacy toward responding to the needs and rights of children in the region. Primary data collection was conducted in six districts from a total of 1118 children, backed by a comprehensive review of literature. The findings of the study will not only enable formulation of appropriate strategies and interventions for addressing the situation of children in the current situation but also planning and programming for children in the post conflict period. The study captures events, circumstances and occurrences up to March 2007.

Study findings reveal that both conflicts have led to gross suffering of the civilian population. In both Northern and NorthEastern Uganda the physical, social and economic costs of conflicts have impacted negatively on the lives of communities, limiting their access to services and their ability to take advantage of Uganda's development to live their lives to their full potential. Wanton killings, abduction, sexual abuse and displacement characterise these sub-regions. The Northern region remains the poorest with over 63% of population living below the poverty line in 2003[1]. The report estimates that the economic cost of the war in northern Uganda to the country has been $1.7 billion dollars since 1986[2]. The report further reiterates that the costs of one year of the war, $85 million dollars, could fund Uganda's beleaguered national hospital for over a decade. The war has also justified an enormous military budget, $192 million in 2005[12], that has lacked transparency and been plagued by high-level corruption. Intangible costs include the suffering of the millions of civilians, mostly women and children, who have been displaced, abducted, forced into poverty or suffered physical or psychological trauma.

A weak social fabric, break-down of social norms and an erosion of cultural values mean that the affected communities are subjected to emotional stress and hopelessness. The conflicts make it difficult to provide and access social services; the mortality and morbidity rates in the regions affected by conflict are high as are school dropout rates.

Needless to say, children bear the brunt of these conflicts. Childhood is a significant period in human development. It is the formative stage where the foundations of a person are determined and on which one's whole life is based. Childhood is usually described as a one-time window of opportunity that occurs only once in a lifetime. Ugandan law defines

---

[1] Uganda Bureau of Statistics (UBOS, 2003): Uganda National Household Survey (UNHS), 2002/2003
[2] IANSA, Oxfam and Saferworld, 2007: Africa's missing billions: International arms flows and the cost of conflict

a child as any person below the age of 18 years. Age alone does not characterise childhood. A child is a person; in his/her own right, a full human being. A child is not someone in transition to adulthood but rather a child is a person living a full life today and is entitled to basic human rights as any other human being is. In addition a child is entitled to protection, guidance with their survival and development being fundamental considerations in all matters affecting them. All the aspects of a child's life are interdependent on each other. These aspects are succinctly captured in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UN CRC) as rights of the child. Without one aspect, a child is vulnerable. A child by virtue of being one is entitled to being given the opportunity to live his/her life to the fullest. Children who lack this opportunity during this development stage are in many cases impacted negatively and sometimes for the rest of their lives.

The report notes that conflict in Northern and North-Eastern Uganda, especially that perpetuated by the LRA, has been notoriously known for the abduction, maiming and horrendous crimes committed against children. Combatants directly targeted the children: boys being abducted to be recruited as child soldiers while the girls were taken as sex slaves for the soldiers alongside taking part in active combat. Many more children died in the cross-fire, while others were brutally murdered as they either resisted the abduction or were caught trying to escape.

It goes on to observe that child prostitution, sexual abuse and forced recruitment were a daily threat to children in Northern Uganda. Many children in Northern Uganda are orphaned and left with deep emotional scars and trauma from direct exposure to violence, displacement, poverty and/or the loss of loved ones. These coupled with the difficulty in accessing health and education services and a weak social structure to protect them have had a great impact on their potential for growth and development.

In a typical five-year war, the under-five mortality rate increases by 13% and adult mortality increases even more. Even after a conflict is over, its repercussions undermine child survival[3]. Children are always almost the first affected by conflict, whether directly or indirectly. The situation in Northern Uganda led a former UNICEF Executive Director Ms. Carol Bellamy to remark that the conflict-affected areas of Northern Uganda were *"pretty much the worst place on earth to be a child."*[4] For a child to have the opportunity to live life to the fullest, efforts should be made to address a child's needs from a holistic perspective. The UN CRC is a universally adopted Convention that sets out universally accepted standards for child well-being. This framework is used in this study to ensure that every aspect important for the life-long well-being of children is addressed.

It concludes that the recent political developments including the South Sudan peace process and military developments in Northern Uganda has generated optimism for the return of peace to the region. Subsequent to these developments IDPs are gradually returning to their villages. Major rehabilitation, reconstruction and recovery plans are currently being developed.

Recommendations for Action

Peace first: People and children in Northern and North-Eastern Uganda are tired of war and the opportunity for peace must be harnessed. As long as the conflict prevails, various stakeholders providing services will not lead to sustainable improvements in the lives of children. There is no sustainable peace without justice, however justice must not come at the expense of peace.

---

[3] UNICEF 2005: Childhood under threat: The State of the World's Children 2005
[4] Carol Bellamy 2005, Former UNICEF Executive Director's Address at a UN news conference in New York (October 18th 2005)

Look beyond silencing the guns: The government must adopt an approach that focuses on conflict transformation. The Government must be bold to address the underlying contextual issues, attitudes and behaviours that precipitate the conflict. All actions aimed at brining lasting peace in Northern AND North-Eastern Uganda must necessarily promote equality, justice, democratic decision making and respect for human rights.

Truth and national reconciliation: Uganda is a wounded country in dire need of national reconciliation to eliminate the perceived and real social, cultural and political divides that the threaten harmony and co-existence. The Government, civil society and the international community must forge a unitary mechanism for truth and reconciliation for Uganda.

Strengthening the family support systems and access to services: Government and civil society must prioritise strengthening of the family system to provide protection for children. Efforts to rebuild the region must focus on revitalising positive cultural values, customs and practices, meeting the needs of Orphans and Vulnerable Children (OVCs) including resettlement and reunification of unaccompanied children and those born in captivity, night commuters, child labourers, children in conflict with the law

Healthy lives: Help communities understand the link between a healthy environment and their children's welfare as well as places where they can seek help, all interventions in North and North-Eastern Uganda must integrate HIV/AIDS from emergency response, through rehabilitation to reconstruction.

Food security and nutrition for all: Government should carryout a comprehensive demining exercise to clear land for cultivation and ensure self sustenance by the population. In the meantime, integration of feeding into the Universal Primary Education program must be considered. Comprehensive Early Childhood Development (ECD) programs must be central in efforts to revamp the education system in Northern and North-Eastern Uganda.

Keep afloat the mental impacts of the conflict: Government and civil society should train and deploy community based counsellors, mental health professionals to support children suffering from trauma and other psychological problems from the war. Community based child trauma counselling and treatment centres that are culturally appropriate.

Play for self, community and national development: Planners and community leaders should underscore to the communities the importance of play which must be child centred and aimed at acquisition of life skills.

Education: Government must take lead and with the help of civil society and development partners to improve access and quality of education in Northern Uganda through incentives for teachers in the region, catch-up education for over aged children, and revival of community polytechnics and non formal Education programs for children for those who are unable to rejoin formal education.

Protection matters: Child abuse is not a destiny; it casts a damage that must be repaired. Government and other actors must provides opportunities for children who are abused to recover including improved parental relationships, reduced domestic violence, improved social opportunities, better social networks and alternatives to survival sex and other forms of exploitative labour.

Hear my voice too: Government must position children in the search for peace and reconciliation in Northern and North-Eastern Uganda. Children must be given a voice in the peace talks and planning for the rehabilitation and reconstruction of the region.

2. Background to the Study

Overall objective
The overall objective of the study was to analyse the impact of the war in Northern Uganda on children.

Specific Objectives
The specific objectives of the study were:

1. To ascertain the nature (types) and magnitude (extent) of the effects of war on children in conflict affected districts of Northern Uganda.

2. To carry out a mapping exercise of agencies operating in the conflict area with a view to identifying services that exists to support children affected by conflict.

3. To identify gaps in the services provided to conflict affected children at the various levels and make recommendations for addressing them.

4. To identify strategies for better protection of children in the present situation and in the post conflict period in Northern Uganda.

Scope and Limitations
The study analysed the primary and secondary effects of the conflict in Northern and North- Eastern Uganda on children. In this context, children refer to all persons below 18 years of age, and living in Northern Uganda now. The conflict in this study included both the LRA insurgency and cattle rustling both of which have caused wanton suffering and displacement of people in North and North-Eastern Uganda.
The study covered six districts in the three sub regions of Acholi, Lango and Teso.

Methodology
The study was a cross-sectional with both qualitative and quantitative components. Qualitative and quantitative methods were supplemented by extensive literature review. This included similar studies done internationally, nationally and locally.

Preparatory Activities:
Preparatory Meetings
The study team held preparatory meetings with the client to harmonise understanding of the terms of reference, the scope of work and to agree on the sample, the methodology and work plan.

Documentary Review
The research team reviewed a number of documents relevant to the study including reports on studies that have already been done in the area. Documentary review was used to inform the process of designing the data collection tools but itself also formed part of data collection. The documentary review continued as the study progressed as more relevant data were collected during fieldwork.

Development of Data Collection Instruments
Before commencement of data collection, the research team developed a number of instruments for data collection (see appendix) which include:

Psychometric tools which were administered to children and to parents/guardians (Instrument 8 in the appendix)

<u>Semi-structured interview guides</u> were used with different respondents including (PSWO/CDO/CSOs, Police, DEO/DES/Head teachers, DDHS and Community leaders) - (Instruments 1-5 in the appendix)

<u>Focus Group Discussion guides</u> were used in focus group discussions with different respondents (Children and Adults) (Instruments 6-7 in the appendix)

Orientation of Research Assistants
Research Assistants experienced and knowledgeable in the local languages spoken in the study area were selected and oriented/trained before commencement of field work. The orientation covered among others the scope of work, their roles and responsibilities and how to administer the data collection instruments.

Sampling of study population
The study was carried out in 6 districts in the three sub-regions of Acholi, Lango and Teso that have been affected by civil conflict and insecurity over the last 20 years. The following districts were chosen for the study:

Region	Districts
Acholi	Gulu, Kitgum
Lango	Apac, Lira
Teso	Katakwi, Kaberamaido

The following criteria was used to determine subcounties, parishes and villages for the study:
1. A mix of sub-counties where people were living in IDP camps and those where people were living in their original homes
2. A mix of sub-counties that were affected purely by the LRA insurgency, those affected purely by cattle rustling as well as those affected by both cattle rustling and LRA insurgency
3. Stratified sampling technique was used to arrive at the sample of respondents. Sub-counties in a district in the sampled districts were divided into those with and those without IDP camps. Random sampling of a sub-county within each of those subgroups was done. A parish was then randomly sampled from a list of parishes from that sub-county. 15 L.C 1s from that parish were then purposively sampled for proximity.

Systematic sampling of every other household was done. If the house contains children that meet study criteria, they were all interviewed. If not, the next systematically sampled house was used. This continued until the desired number of children had been reached.

The following formula was used to determine the sample for psychosocial impact on children:

Formula: n = (z-squared*p*q)/e-squared
Where;
n = sample size
z = the t- value of the 95 percent confidence interval corresponding to 1.96
P = proportion of one of the key variable in the study as revealed from the previous survey/census. For this study we have used the proportion of children orphaned according to the 2002 Population and housing Census
q = 1-p
E = error term/margin of error. For the purpose of this study we have used 5%

Sample size calculations:

District	z-squared	P	q	e-squared		Implied sample size
Gulu	3.842	0.170	0.830	0.0025		217
Kitgum	3.842	0.186	0.814	0.0025		233
Lira	3.842	0.128	0.872	0.0025		172
Apac	3.842	0.116	0.884	0.0025		158
Kaberamaido	3.842	0.122	0.878	0.0025		165
Katakwi	3.842	0.134	0.866	0.0025		178
TOTAL						**1123**

Data Collection

To allow for comparative analysis, data was colleted from two types of communities; those who were living in their original homes and those who were in IDP camps.
Field data for the research were collected between January and April 2006

Personal interviews and administration of psychometric tools

To investigate the psychological impact of the conflict on children in Northern Uganda, a quantitative survey was used. The questionnaires administered to each child included a socio-demographic questionnaire that inquired about variables like family and living circumstances, economic standing of the family, and family history of mental illness, domestic violence, and abduction among others. It also included a Strength and Difficulties Questionnaire. This is a brief questionnaire that can be administered to the parents and teachers of 3- to 16-year-olds or directly to 11- to 16-year-olds themselves.
It covers common areas of emotional and behavioural difficulties. It has been validated in a number of studies in Europe (Goodman, 1999)[5] , other third world settings and used in Uganda (Kizza, 2004)[6]. We also used the UCLA PTSD trauma Reaction Index, an instrument that measures exposure to trauma and presence of post traumatic stress disorder symptoms.

Category of the children interviewed

A total of 1,118 children were interviewed. The children represented 6 districts in North and North-Eastern Uganda. Information was got from the children themselves in 81% of cases with supplementation from a parent or guardian whereas in the rest of the children, information was obtained from the parent or guardian. This was mostly in cases where the child was shy or seemed to be afraid to talk. 49.3% of the children were male. They were all between the ages of 6 and 16 years, 16 inclusive. The majority of children were between the ages of 10 and 15 years old. Figure 1 shows the age distribution of the children.
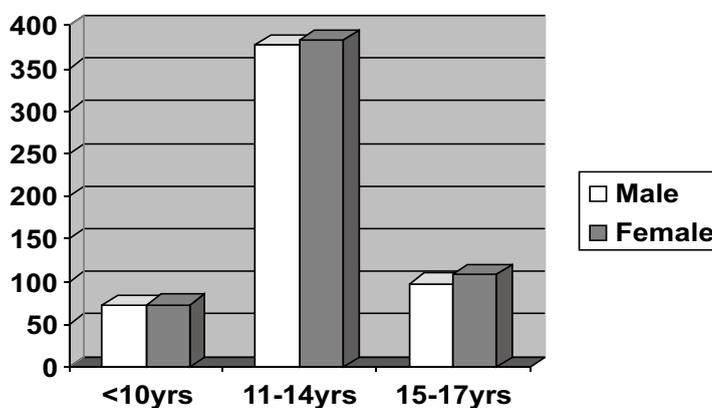

Figure 1: Age and Sex Distribution

[5] Goodman R (1999): extended version of the strength and difficult questionnaire. Journal of child psychology and psychiatry,40,791-801
[6] Kizza R (2004):Mental disorders among children admitted in Mulago hospital, dissertation

Table 1: Sample by Districts and Tribes.

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Tribe: Acholi	488	40.1
Langi	335	30.0
Iteso	229	20.5
Kumam	106	9.5
Total:	**1118**	**100**
District :Gulu	218	19.5
Kitgum	234	20.9
Apac	171	15.3
Lira	157	14.0
Katakwi	203	18.2
Kaberamaido	135	12.1
Total:	**1118**	**100**

The children were predominantly Acholi and came from the districts of Gulu and Kitgum. 53.2% of the children interviewed were orphans with 14.8 having lost at least one parent to the war.

Key Informant Interviews

The research team conducted key informant interviews with relevant stakeholders at district and community level. The sampling technique for key informants was purposive to cover those with vital information about the issue under study. The respondents interviewed include:

    Local Government Officials (CAOs, Probation and Social Welfare Officers, Community Development Officers, District Education Officers, District Inspectors of Schools, Head teachers, Police and Sub-county Chiefs)
    Camp leaders
    Religious and traditional leaders
    Representatives of Civil Society Organizations offering services to children
    LC I Chairpersons and Secretaries for children affairs

Focus Group Discussions

In each district 4 FGDs were conducted (with boys, girls, men and women). There were 8 children per group. Children were purposively sampled to include a wide variety of exposures, ages and living situations.

Data Analysis and Reporting

Data Analysis

Quantitative data: Data inspection was done at the end of each day by the researchers to ensure completeness. After fieldwork, it was entered into a database in Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) and analysed. Descriptive analysis was done. Measures of association analysis were also done. Comparison was then made between abducted and non-abducted children and factors associated with risk and resilience analysed for.

Qualitative data from the FGDs and Key informant interviews was progressively analysed. Data analysis within the current descriptive approach sought to summarize the informational content of the data. Within this approach, codes (i.e. descriptive categories) were systematically applied to data in order to identify emerging themes or

categories of information. It was then related to the original conceptualisation of the problem.

Reporting

The Research Team prepared a draft report of the assignment and submitted it to CSOPNU for comments that were addressed to refine the report.

"*Rootless?*"

3. Family Environment

Art. 5 of the UN CRC entitles a child to parental guidance according to a child's evolving capacities. Art. 18(1) and [(2) of the UN CRC acknowledge parental responsibility with assistance from the State when the parents are unable to meet their obligations to a child. The UN CRC also provides for family reunification, children deprived of a family environment and adoption. The Children Act of Uganda spells out the right of the child to live with his or her parents and the obligations of parents and guardians to provide for the needs of the child (Sec.4 and 5). All these are in recognition of the fact that a child 'for a full and harmonious development of his or her personality, should grow up in a family environment, in an atmosphere of happiness, love and understanding' (UN CRC Preamble). The loss or damage of a family environment deprives a child of the opportunity to develop to his/her potential and to learn to love and live with others in a supportive, harmonious and developmental way.

3.1   The Right to Belong

To live a full and meaningful life, especially in Ugandan societies, a child must know his nationality, clan and parents. The UN CRC provides for the right of the child to a name, nationality and to know and be cared for by parents (Art. 7). Art. 8 provides for the preservation of a child's identity. The Ugandan Constitution in Art. 34 states that children shall have a right to know and be cared for by their parents or those entitled to bring them up. Knowledge of who your father is leads to attainment of this right, largely because Uganda is a patrilineal society, with clans and families following the paternal lineage. Many children born in captivity have this aspect of their rights violated, leaving them 'rootless' and without clear identity and belonging.

The number of children born in captivity is not known. Though attempts have been made to separately document children born in captivity from Formerly Abducted Children (FAC), the data is not comprehensive and this practice rarely cuts across all the reception/rehabilitation centres. Questions regarding the nationality, kinship and identity of children born in captivity plague efforts to have them resettled. Children of child mothers on reintegration are settled with the mother's family and may not know their relatives on the paternal side. Some children born in captivity have come back unaccompanied (without the parents). Efforts are made by the reception centres to trace their relatives but this has not always been easy.

Other problems that plague children born in captivity aside from lack of identity include reluctance of their mothers (usually child mothers who bore the child as a result of forceful marriage or rape) to keep them. On occasion, it has been the child mothers who have actually threatened to kill their own children since they remind them of atrocities they suffered during abduction. Such instances are often worsened by their parents who reject children born in captivity, although they are prepared to receive the FAC. The plausible reasons for this were identified as resource constraints, fear of reprisal from rebels and stigmatization by the community. These children would benefit from a comprehensive tracing and resettlement programmes, birth registration and cultural ceremonies that would help them to belong to their clans and families. However, most of these initiatives can comfortably be carried out on the resolution of the conflict and return of combatants.

3.2   Orphanhood

Many children in Northern Uganda have lost their parents and other caregivers due to the

conflict leaving them with very little or no parental support. 53.2% of the children interviewed in this study were orphans. Out of the orphans, 14.8% revealed that they lost at least one parent due to the war. The majority of the double orphans are from Kitgum district 27.7% followed by Gulu district 24.3% while Kaberamaido has the least (4.0%). This is an indication that the orphan problem in the war affected area merits a concerted response.

3.3   *Displacement*

About 90%[7] of the population in the three districts in Acholi sub region (Gulu, Kitgum and Pader) is displaced. Estimates from the field show that 30% of the population in Katakwi district lived in camps, about 35% of the population in Lira are displaced, while 20,000 people from Apac district are displaced. Official statistics that are based on the number of people in gazetted IDP camps only, ignoring those displaced to trading centres, urban centres and other relatively safer areas, gives a false impression of the magnitude of displacement.

The displacement into IDP camps and loss of productive capacity has undermined the authority of the parents, especially the men as heads of households. Most men have taken up drinking as a coping mechanism thereby abandoning their families. Their inability to provide adequately for the family has forced the children to go out and look for work and fend for themselves amounting to a kind of *laissez faire* atmosphere where everybody does what he or she wants. This apathy has penetrated the community as a whole.

There is now a generation of people in the North and North-Eastern Uganda who were born in the camps and have not known any other life apart from camp life. These are people whose productive capacities are not being developed as they depend on humanitarian handouts. Thus the culture of hard work hitherto inculcated in to young people is being replaced with complacency and dependency. Living in camps has destroyed initiatives for indigenous skills and knowledge transfer that would occur in accordance with the child's evolving capacities. Before the war for example, an adolescent in Northern and North-Eastern Uganda was expected to have a personal garden and hut. But these are all impossible in the present displaced state where very little pieces of land are allocated to families for constructing a hut and farming is highly restricted and dangerous. The repercussions are grave as many of them are unproductive and unwilling to return to the villages, with the initiation of the return and resettlement of IDPs. In Karamoja sub region, the present state of lawlessness and biting poverty has increased the influx of children to the urban streets in search of survival[8].

3.4   *Shelter for Security*

Evidence of disintegration of family life in Northern and North-Eastern is further found in situations where parents have started renting small rooms in towns for their children where they stay with very limited parental supervision and guidance. For those in camps this is attributed to the fact that the close proximity of huts renders controlling of children impossible as they pick up bad habits from their peers. The parents contended that their children are these days stubborn and disrespectful compared to the behaviour of children before the war. In the past children belonged to the community (extended family), a situation that has changed due to conflict. Parents, if they are there remain the sole custodians of discipline for their children. This situation has paved way for child sexual abuse as children are exposed to unscrupulous sexual acts in the neighbourhood.

---

[7] Ministry of Health 2005, Health and Mortality Survey among Internally Displaced Persons in Gulu, Kitgum and Pader Districts, Northern Uganda

[8] Sarah Grainger, 2007: Summit Displaces Uganda Street Children @ http:/news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/Africa/6378969.stm

"Before the war, we would restrict movement of our children to limit their mixing with bad elements. This is now impossible as everybody is squeezed together in the camp"

Added to living in IDP camps and night commuting, these children face enormous challenges and have to sometimes adopt survival strategies that are very unorthodox due to lack of parental guidance and support.

3.5   Recommendations for Consideration

It is an established fact that families are the best place for children to grow up. Providing services that engage, involve, strengthen, and support families is the most effective approach to ensuring children's safety, permanency, and well-being. This calls for family-centered practice that is characterized by mutual trust, respect, honesty, and open communication between parents and service providers. Families are central to child safety and well-being, and they need support to play their role. Actions to help children deal with the impact of conflict MUST necessarily involve the family for full recovery and reintegration. All families can benefit from information, guidance, and help in connecting with resources as they meet the challenges of parenthood and family life both during conflict and in a post-conflict environment. For families with limited resources, the need for support and assistance is even greater. The resources that would best support the family are usually those that are community-based and build upon informal supports and resources

Development practitioners need to focus on supportive services for families with children and should invest in family preservation services for families that are strained and at risk of disruption, while keeping children safe. Families should be engaged as active participants in the development of interventions as active decision-makers in selecting services for themselves and their children however disrupted the family may seem. Family and child interventions must as a matter of practice, provide individualized, culturally responsive, flexible, and relevant services for each family, linking families with collaborative, comprehensive, culturally relevant, community-based networks of supports and services

Rebuilding the family structure and its values in community should be a central plank of any reconstruction programme. Social reconstruction should form part and parcel of the wider reconstruction programmes, along side economic reconstruction. In this way, the necessary resources will be availed to enable families better take advantage of the economic reconstruction that is being planned as a post- conflict measure.

Reconstruction and development programmes for Northern Uganda should include interventions that will target orphans and other vulnerable children. The Ministry of Gender Labour and Social Development (MoGLSD) should be part of the planning to ensure that programs specific to orphans and other vulnerable children are made an integral part of the recovery and reconstruction plan.

The Peace, Recovery and Development Plan (PRDP) currently being developed should include components of resettlement and reunification for unaccompanied children including children born in captivity.

4.   Cultural Orientation

Art. 31 of the UN CRC recognizes the right of the child to participate freely in cultural life and the arts. It urges States Parties to respect and promote the right of the child to participate fully in cultural and artistic life and encourage the provision of appropriate and equal opportunities for cultural, artistic, recreational and leisure activities. The Convention recognises the role that culture plays in providing a framework for the up-bringing of children. It obliges States Parties to respect the responsibilities, rights and duties of parents or, where applicable, the members of the extended family or community **as provided for by local custom,** to provide, in a manner consistent with the evolving capacities of the child, appropriate direction and guidance in the exercise by the child of the rights recognized in the present Convention. This notion is further upheld in the Uganda Constitution (Art.37) which guarantees the right of every person to belong to, enjoy,, practice, profess, maintain and promote nay culture, cultural institution, language, tradition, creed or religion. The realization of these provisions has severely been hampered by the conflict in the region.

4.1   Cultural Socialisation
Normal family life that ensured adequate parental guidance and passing of cultural values to children has been disrupted. Insecurity in general and lack of space in IDP camps can not allow for the fireplace talks (*wang oo* in Acholi and *wi otem* in Lango) which was a daily gathering through which the parents would educate the children through stories, riddles, etc. These were sessions for cultural orientation and identity strengthening, all of which do not happen now. Other social and cultural rituals such as marriage ceremonies, cleansing ceremonies and courtship have drastically changed shape to match the situation created by conflict. This means that the children in Northern and North-Eastern Uganda are culturally disoriented with very little cultural transmission owing to disruption of the family setting. The situation in other areas outside the IDP camps is not any different because fear of attacks stops families from lighting bonfires outside their houses and they normally sleep very early.

Before the war children in Northern Uganda were looked at as belonging to the community. People in Northern Uganda mainly settled around their kin therefore everybody took responsibility for child upbringing. This was made easier by the fact that families knew who their immediate neighbours were and had a lot in common with them. This is no longer so especially in camps. The IDP camp situation has brought together people from various parts of the districts, with only insecurity in common. The main push is trying to ensure survival of the family in the expectation that it is only a temporary abode and not permanent like in their normal village (original home) setting. This has relegated childcare, protection and well being to the nucleus family. Parents have in some cases disappeared from their children in the camps with the intent of avoiding responsibility of raising their children.

Even in communities that are not displaced, the social cohesion and support is greatly weakened by the conflict. Cattle rustling has completely disrupted the practice of extended families contributing to the well being of their kin. These were mainly during marriages, funeral rites, etc. because cattle which were central to such functions are no longer there. While in the past any adult would reprimand and correct any child found doing wrong, this is no longer so. The extended family system is rapidly disappearing from most communities in Northern and North-Eastern Uganda due to poverty exacerbated by the conflict. The collective responsibility of bringing up a child has been lost.

4.2   Sex and Marriage

The institution of marriage in the traditional sense has also been affected by conflict. Because of lack of resources a good number of people are just cohabiting with the attendant high rate of separation hence children are not staying with both parents. The elaborate process of courtship which used to take years in most communities now can be concluded in minutes if the girl perceives that it will release her from the bondage of poverty.

Children in Northern Uganda are being exposed to sexual activities at a very early age. The overcrowding in the IDP camps where members of the entire family are squeezed in small huts has not helped the situation. Shelter is one of the biggest challenges faced by people in IDP camps. 58.6% of the children interviewed in this study revealed that the houses they are living in have between 1-2 rooms. This is quite contrary to what used to happen before the war where boys from around the age of 10 years were expected to construct their own grass thatched huts which they would share with their younger siblings hence protecting undue exposure to adult sexual activities. The older girls on the other hand would sleep in another hut or kitchen leaving the adults the privacy they require to engage in sexual activity.

Because of redundancy, boredom and frustration people in the camps experience some have resorted to drinking too much alcohol which inhibits their sense of decency and self-respect when they return to their huts. This unduly exposes children to sexual scenes that are not good for their young minds. As a result, pre-marital sex which was almost unheard of in the pre-conflict days has taken centre stage in the region, putting many children at risk teenage pregnancies, HIV/AIDS infection and exploitation by adults.

Children living with step parents and relatives are more prone to being abused than those staying with their own parents. These children are more likely to be exploited and abused due to lack of parental support. Orphan girls are more likely to face early marriage as the guardians are more inclined to get some material benefit from the bride price, rather than bear the burden of raising the child with his own meagre resources. There are also cases of utter destitution where the parents feel that it would be better for them to give up their daughter to the care of another person, rather than watch her starve to death.

Another area in which the children's rights have been greatly violated is in relation to early marriages. There are several cases cited where, especially girls as young as 13 have been married off. This often happens because some parents are quite frustrated in life and have no source of income and so feel that they could earn some money through the bride price they get when their daughter gets married. In a number cases, some parents who have some property especially animals are too scared to keep because of the constant raids by the Karimojong and the rebels, so they force their young boys to get a bride while they can still afford the bride price, otherwise all the property may soon be taken away.

> *"… before the war, when you saw small girls like those ones carrying children, you would know straight away that they are baby sitters. This is no longer the case. Those children are carrying their own babies"* Old woman in Gulu about child mothers

4.3   Recommendations for Consideration

The need for initiatives to rebuild the social and cultural fabric that holds together and strengthens the family in its all important role in child rearing are necessary. However, given the situation prevailing in IDP camps this is a challenge. It is nonetheless clear that

efforts to strengthen the family need to be deliberate and should involve the communities themselves and should do so within an acceptable cultural framework. Because culture changes, efforts need to be made to establish ways in which affected communities can attain and retain values, customs and practices that support positive child upbringing. This can not be left to happen by accident.

"Healthy?"

5. *Basic Health and Welfare*

Art. 6 of the UN CRC provides for the right to life, survival and development. Art. 24 provides for the right to health and health services and Art. 27 provides for the right to adequate standard of living. The Uganda Constitution provides for the right of all Ugandans to a clean and healthy environment, right to medical treatment for all children and protection from any work that is harmful to children's health, physical, mental, spiritual, moral or social development (Art. 34 and 39). The Children Act (Sec. 5) specifically provides for a child's right to immunization, adequate diet, clothing and medical attention. Survival and development are basic fundamental principles in any matter involving children. Needless to say, without basic health and welfare, a child's life is precarious as is his future as an adult.

5.1 *A Healthy Environment and access to Health Services*

Displacement of people into IDP camps has impacted negatively on the health of children due to poor sanitation and overcrowding which makes it easy for diseases to spread. The District Directors of Health Services (DDHS) in the study districts reported widespread cases of acute respiratory tract infections, skin diseases, malaria and diarrhoea. These were directly attributed to poor hygiene, unsafe drinking water and congested living quarters in the camps.   One camp of about 3,500 inhabitants has only 3 boreholes with very small yield because of the dry spell, and the water has to be shared with animals. Climatic changes occasioned by environmental degradation (especially around the camps) have also led to drying of water sources further reducing access to safe drinking water. The DDHS also reported widespread mental health problems such as convulsive disorders, epilepsy, behavioural disorders, depression, and suicides that go largely unrecognised and unattended to.

The huts the people are living in are not well ventilated. This appalling housing situation is exacerbated by the frequent outbreaks of fire in the IDP camps which razes to the ground hundreds of huts because of their close proximity to each other. Those whose huts are burnt have no option but to sleep in the open as they struggle to rebuild them. This exposes children to malaria, pneumonia and other diseases.

The district general hospitals provide some basic health care, but because of the large number of patients involved, it is difficult to provide adequate health care. Most patients are provided with only prescriptions and they are expected to purchase these drugs in private clinics and yet the prices of most drugs are out of reach of most of the displaced persons. The coping strategies adopted include self (unprescribed) medication, use of rudimentary medicine and witchcraft which have all combined to accelerate child mortality rates in Northern and North-Eastern Uganda. The people who are living in the sub counties without IDP camps have a more reasonable level of health care.

The government has made some effort in attending to the needs of the displaced people by provision of free health care through the district hospital. They carry out other health care programs such as sanitation campaigns, encouraging the use of treated insecticide mosquito nets, and other basic health care programs with limited success because of the widespread socio-economic deprivation and hopelessness among the people.

The conflict has had a big impact on the health service delivery system in the war affected districts. People in IDP camps have limited access to basic health care, water and sanitation services. Although the infrastructure is in place, recent data from districts in Northern Uganda showed that majority of the facilities are not being utilized largely due to

lack of drugs and personnel. The breakdown of the operations is as follows; 58% of health facilities in Lira, 43% in Gulu and 25% in Kitgum were non-functional. Most of the health facilities in rural areas lack trained staff, equipment and drugs. At best patients only receive prescriptions but have to buy their drugs from outside and yet they have no funds. This may explain the high mortality rates in Northern Uganda compared to other areas of the country.

5.2   HIV/AIDS

HIV/AIDS continues to plague Uganda. The government target was to reduce HIV prevalence from 6% to 4.6% by 2005. The National Sero-survey revealed that the national figures now stand at 6.7% -worse than the 2000 situation. The situation in the North stands at 9.1% (Ministry of Health, 2005). This according to respondents is a very conservative figure. Data on HIV/AIDS infection among the general population in Northern and North-Eastern Uganda was not readily available. The people interviewed acknowledged that there is an increase in the spread of HIV/AIDS because of the current lifestyle of the general population, which is escalated by the congestion in Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) camps. Nevertheless, a lot of help is being provided at the moment by government HIV/AIDS programs and by the services provided by NGOs such as the AIDS Support Organisation (TASO) and Population Services International (PSI), Joint Clinical Research Centre (JCRC), AIDS Information Centre (AIC), just to mention a few. Free and voluntary counselling and testing has been availed periodically, but not all have been very willing to take this opportunity because of the stigma associated with the disease among the people.

There are known cases of HIV/AIDS among children, especially those whose parents died of the disease when they were still young, and others can be seen with symptoms. These children sometimes benefit from the services offered to their parents but do not receive specialised organised attention. Currently, the NGOs offering the services of voluntary counselling and testing have targeted adults making it difficult to ascertain the exact level of its spread among the children. However, this could also be said of children elsewhere in Uganda since there are no direct programmes for testing and counselling children.

With the increase in sexual activity among children as a result of the conflict, it is expected that the HIV prevalence rates among children in Northern and North-Eastern Uganda should be higher than the rest of the country considering that the current prevalence rate in the region is higher than the national figures. There is need here to establish specific HIV/AIDS programs for children in Northern and North-Eastern Uganda.

5.3   Child Mortality

According to a Ministry of Health study [9], the under five mortality rate in Acholi sub region is two times higher than in districts in non-conflict areas. The Northern region has the highest U5MR at 178/1000, versus 152/1000 nationally. According to Ministry of Health (July 2005), the crude mortality rate (CMR) in Acholi sub region stands at 1.54/10000 per day which is over three times the national average of 0.44, and under five mortality rate of 3.18/10,000 per day. The figure of Kitgum and Pader are double the emergency threshold for both crude and under five mortality rates. The immunisation statistics are estimated at 69% which falls far short of the national average of 80%. This is attributed to highly mobile populations because of the conflict in the region.

Maternal mortality in the sub region is estimated between 600 to 7000/100,000, way

---

[9] MoH et al, July 2005, Health and Mortality Survey among IDPs in Gulu, Kitgum and Pader districts in Northern Uganda

above the national average of 505/1,000. Adolescent girls account for 46% of all maternal death largely due to unsafe abortion, low antenatal attendance, low institutional delivery rate and poor referral of emergency obstetric cases. Malaria was the first self reported cause overall of that mortality with 28.5%, **"two Lango"** (which is linked to malnutrition) with 15.3% and diarrhoea was third with 12.6%. These situations are all linked directly to the poor sanitary situations in the IDP camps due to overcrowding and inadequate supply of nutritious food.

5.4   Recommendations for Considerations

As survival and development are fundamental principles in any intervention for children, health education should be a key consideration across the board- across sectors. The environment in which the inhabitants of the IDP camps live requires this. Communities need to understand the link between a healthy environment and their children's welfare but more, places where they can seek help.

With the high HIV/AIDS prevalence rates and the risky lifestyles prevailing in the camps, the need for information and services for HIV/AIDS is apparent. There is inadequate knowledge on paediatric HIV/AIDS (even in Uganda as a whole). For parents to be able to cope with children infected by HIV/AIDS, knowledge on how it affects children, and how its effects can be ameliorated needs to be made available to the communities in conflict areas alongside making available the requisite treatment and referral services. The challenge is in making referral work in a resource limited setting, but models do exist for exploration. One possible avenue to explore is the presence of Technical Service Organisations (TSOs) identified by the MoGLSD that are charged with coordinating district responses to the plight of HIV/AIDS affected orphans and vulnerable children.

More effort needs to be done to sensitise children on prevention of HIV/AIDS. Facilities for prevention of parent to child transmission of HIV need to be availed in Health Centres III because they are more accessible to the people than the general hospitals.

The inclusion of reconstruction and rehabilitation of health infrastructure in the Northern Uganda reconstruction programme is welcome. However, this initiative should go further to include community mobilisation (including children's participation) in the use of the infrastructure for the betterment of their lives.

There is need to regulate traditional health practitioners, including development of a policy on traditional medicine. Coupled with awareness raising on the dangers of self medication and strict enforcement of regulations on sale and use of drugs should help to scale down mortality resulting from unprofessional sale and use of drugs in the region.

6.   *Food and Nutrition*

Art. 24 of the UN CRC recognizes the right of the child to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health and to facilities for rehabilitation of health. The Convention emphasises the need to combat disease and malnutrition, through, inter alia, the provision of adequate nutritious foods and clean drinking-water. The Convention recognises the need for communities, in particular parents and children, to be informed and supported in the use of basic knowledge of child health and nutrition. The right of children to adequate diet is clearly spelt out in Sec. 5 of the Children Act with an attendant obligation of any person in custody of a child to assure this. Government committed itself to establish and maintain adequate grain stores for IDPs and other emergencies as a measure towards ensuring access to adequate food and nutrition for IDPs, including children[10].

4.1   *Access to food*

Whereas various reports state that malnutrition in parts of Northern Uganda have reduced by approximately 3%, there is acute food shortage across Northern Uganda. This region used to be the grain basket of Uganda. The real cause of this food shortage is the war that has led to the abandonment of vast farmland and displacement of parents who would otherwise produce enough food for their families if there was peace. Parents are not in a position to adequately provide food for their children. In the IDP camps farming is both difficult and restricted. Whereas the national IDP policy recognizes freedom of movement as a fundamental principle for all Ugandans including IDPs, this has not been the practice especially due to security concerns by the UPDF. Participation of IDPs in economic and social activities outside the camps has been very minimal.

Access to agricultural inputs is very limited as farmers cannot store planting materials but have to rely on inputs provided by humanitarian agencies that sometime come late. It was quite risky to grow crops in situations of displacement as movement from and to camps was restricted; many are not yet confident about the precarious peace that is a result of yet-to-be concluded peace talks. As a result, communities no longer have their means of food production. In some situations, children must also look for their own food either by hard work, stealing or scavenging in garbage dumps. There are reports of children lining up for food for several hours and end up collapsing in food queues. Some are known to miss classes on days when there is distribution of food aid.

Children in Northern and North-Eastern Uganda are not accessing a balanced diet as they used to in the past. For those living in IDP camps, a few fortunate children survive on food aid from humanitarian organizations. The food got through aid is mainly maize and beans and this is not the best for young children leading to malnutrition and stunting.

Most families eat one meal a day. The rich mix of food including several vegetables that used to be available before the war is no longer available as communities in camps do not have enough land for cultivation. Secondly the traditional way of preparing food with simsim/groundnut paste (*olel*) is giving way to dependence on frying with cooking oil, which is not as healthy.

Outside the IDP camps, the food situation is comparatively better as families can grow their own food and have varieties at their disposal. Communities outside camps have access to greens and other types of food due to availability of space.
However as a result of proliferation of arms, there has emerged a new phenomenon in

---

[10] OPM 2004: The National Policy for Internally Displaced Persons

communities in Northern Uganda where thieves masquerade as rebels and steal foodstuff from people's granaries and even gardens. Farmers reported that in some instances simsim has been threshed and stolen at night by thieves, right from the compound where it was stacked to dry! This has affected farm production and the quality of food produced and consumed in the region.

The impact of undernourishment and malnutrition is disastrous for children and if unchecked has long-term impact through their adult lives. There is both physical and mental harm caused by malnutrition. Aside from being weak and unable to engage in play, malnourished children have weak immunity, falling sick often. Malnutrition also retards their mental development putting their future lives as productive members of society at risk. The lingering impact on the minds of those who survive malnutrition often goes unnoticed. World Food Programme (WFP) notes that hunger in childhood can cause irreversible mental stunting, lower intelligence quotients (IQs) and reduced learning abilities. Even if malnourished children are able to go to school, they are often unable to concentrate on their lessons.

When affecting whole regions, the effects go beyond affecting individuals to affecting the country as a whole. "A population of hungry, unskilled adults creates a generation of children too hungry to grow, learn or develop the capacity to fight hunger, and who then go on to have their own hungry children. As a result, they become not an asset for development but in fact a drain on efforts of countries to develop," said Sheila Sisulu, Deputy Head of the WFP[11].

Humanitarian organisations such as WFP are distributing food to registered people in official IDP camps but this was found to be inadequate both in quantity and quality especially in terms of suitability of the food items to very young children. People in unofficial camps which spring up around military establishments and in urban centres are not receiving any help. There are "food for work" programs for adults and "food for education" programs where the children are provided with food when they attend school in parts of Northern and North-Eastern Uganda. Therapeutic and supplementary feeding centres are present in almost all camps in Northern Uganda.

6.2 Recommendations for Consideration

As communities ponder and some venture into returning to their homes and villages, food security and livelihoods programmes become essential. The plan to reconstruct the war affected region has to take this into consideration. Programmes should work to ensure that there is up-take among communities that are now unfortunately used to hand-outs and dependency. To aid this process, Government should embark on a demining process. A lot of anti-personnel mines were laid in the area by the rebels which may cause more deaths as people go back to reclaim their gardens. Government together with other agencies should put in place a programme for de-mining Northern and North-Eastern Uganda especially the Acholi sub-region. In addition, both local and central governments should work to support increasing access to markets. With the opening up of the Southern Sudan markets, families and households should be encouraged to grow food for both consumption and sale and to take advantage of the food routes that pass through Northern Uganda enroute to Sudan. This opportunity should be explored further to benefit the communities in war affected areas.

As Ms. Sisulu noted, education should be seen as an opportunity for fighting child hunger. i.e "Education is not just about literacy and numeracy," she adds that, "it can also give people knowledge about health, hygiene, nutrition in addition to basic skills or trades

---

[11] WFP 2006: World Hunger Series 2006: Hunger and Learning

which enable them to feed themselves and their families."[12]   It is essential that Government provides access to education for children and adults especially women. Increasing the percentage of educated women in a community can greatly reduce childhood hunger.

Hunger and malnutrition unfortunately do not wait until primary school. Infact, they are at their worst when they plague children under 5, not yet in primary school. This is one key reason as to why the therapeutic and supplementary feeding centers should continue functioning until the need for their services is reduced by household production and ability to cope. Comprehensive Early Childhood Programmes need to be part and parcel of the revamping of the education system in the war affected regions.   Eight is too late.   In addition, school feeding should be integrated into the UPE program.

This as well as other recommendations made in this section require the political will to recognize that an investment in nutrition and education is an investment in development, both economic and social. The ultimate knock-on benefits can include improved lives and livelihoods, leading to resources to produce or buy food and better the lot of the next generation.

---

[12] WFP 2006, ibid

7.   *Psychological wellbeing*

7.1 *Trauma*

Severe and persistent trauma has widespread effects on the child. It destroys the child's impression that their parent or guardian is omnipotent and can protect them from anything. Children are the most vulnerable group of people during conflict situations. They are fully dependent on others for their well being. They are also still in the process of growing and any trauma to their mental health will often be woven into their developing mind and experiences.

Trauma in children at any age can lead to long lasting effects that may later affect the way they relate to people, respond to circumstances, and express their feelings and thinking. These effects can persist into adulthood. Symptoms of mental trauma in children depend on the developmental age of the child. Although all children are affected by trauma, they may express their psychological distress differently. Different types of war effects affect different age groups more than others.

7.2   *Psychological Distress and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder*

Thirty-two (32.2%) of children had significantly abnormal scores on the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ). This indicated a high level of Psychological distress. In this study, we found that children of either sex were equally emotionally and psychologically affected by the war. There was no difference in numbers of males or females with abnormalities in their psychosocial functioning.

Fifty percent (50.4%) of children interviewed had symptoms of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Many of these also had co-morbid major depressive disorder that required psychiatric treatment but continued to go untreated because of lack of facilities and knowledge. Most of the children with PTSD came from the districts of Kitgum and Apac (p=0.00) i.e. 31.1% and 31.6% of the children were having intrusive thoughts of the traumatic events and nightmares about the events years after the events while 20% had active flash backs.

There was no significant association between having PTSD and sex of the child (p=0.62). PTSD was significantly associated with being between the ages of 11 and 15 years (p=0.03).

Of the 1,118 children, 81.9% had been exposed to traumatic events. Of these, 60.3% had been traumatised within the last five years. Among these, 60.3% had had the trauma in the five years preceding the interview. 42.8% had been less than 10 years old when they first experienced the war. The commonest traumatic events children had been exposed to include inter alia; being involved or caught up in a war situation, abduction, forced to join the army/rebel ranks, providing sexual favours, abduction with rap among.

In another study of 169 former child soldiers in Uganda and DRC by Bayer CP et al, PTSD was found to be associated with feelings of revenge other than reconciliation. Children who showed more PTSD symptoms had significantly less openness to reconciliation (rho= -0.34, P < .001) and more feelings of revenge (rho= 0.29, P < .001).[13]

7.3   *Help and treatment*

Seeking help: Many children had gone to clinics or health facilities for help with their symptoms. However, most often presented with physical symptoms and had never

---

[13] Bayer CP, Clasen F and Adam H, 2005: Association of trauma and PTSD symptoms with openness to reconciliation and feelings of revenge among former Ugandan and Congolese child soldiers, Journal of American Medical Association; JAMA.2007 Aug 1;298(5): 555-9

spoken to anyone about their nightmares, poor sleep, easy startle, suicide wishes, extreme sadness or other psychological symptoms. Some of the abducted children had had up to 6 weeks intervention at the reception centres in Gulu or Lira towns. However, many had fallen through the cracks. Most of the reception centres are reluctant to take on children unless they have been brought in by the government forces as either rescued children or child soldiers or those that have returned and gone to the army barracks first. Children that returned directly to their communities rarely had any intervention following their experiences. Many of these still had severe psychological distress several years after their return and cried often during the interviews.

Treatment: 31%of traumatised children had sought treatment for their psychological distress and co-morbid somatic symptoms. These had been mainly at the local health centres (23%), the district hospital (16%) and self medication. A small percentage had sought help from the traditional healers (4.4%)

From the above results it is clear that children in Northern and North-Eastern Uganda, an area of persistent conflict, have been caught in the cross fire. They have suffered tremendously and continue to do so. The high prevalence of general psychological distress at 32.2% of the general child population is twice that of other districts sampled in Uganda (MOH, Mental Health Section 2006).

This high prevalence can only be postulated to be as a result of the ongoing civil unrest since the sampled children had other factors similar to the other sampled districts in the Ministry of Health survey. PTSD prevalence seen here is similar to that seen in children in conflict areas in other parts of the world (Kinzie et al 1986, Wein et al 1995, Nader, pynoos et al 1993).

We also found that children in Kitgum and Apac are currently exhibiting symptoms of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder much more than children in the other districts, especially Gulu. This is most likely because these communities were more recently involved in the war than Gulu. Also, the services available to the children at both community and other levels for addressing conflict related trauma are much less than those in Gulu district.

7.4   Recommendations for Consideration
To ensure accessible services to all war affected children on a more sustainable basis, volunteers should be trained within the communities to offer basic counselling and rehabilitation services to children within their own communities and to refer difficult cases to more competent service providers. In this regard government should train and deploy child counsellors and mental health professionals in health centres to help children recover from the psychological wounds brought by the conflict. Nothing should be done outside the family framework unless there is no family at all and must involve the parent or primary caregiver. Meeting the child's psychological needs and ignoring those of the caregiver may do more harm than good. Parental adjustment to a disaster is an important factor in the child's adjustment.

Setting up of community based child trauma treatment services that are culturally appropriate. Among these, one could consider the integration of cultural norms for cleansing and forgiveness with a cognitive behavioural model suited to the community.

Education of teachers on the psychological effects of trauma on children and training them as therapy aides for traumatised children is necessary. Since most children go to schools of some sort (including learning centres), teachers would be an invaluable

resource in handling and helping children with emotional and behavioural difficulties secondary to trauma.

	Total		Male		Female				
	n	%	n	%	n	%	Chi	df	p-value[*]
One Parent Killed	161		74		91		0.437	1	0.53
Both Parents Killed	68		32		36		0.79	1	0.79
Relative killed									
Ever been abducted	261	21.4	144		117		5.08	1	0.02
Ever been raped/ sexually abused	85		22		63		23	1	0.00
Ever been forced to join fighting ranks	117		105		72		8.85	1	0.03
Been forced to kill	86		54		32		7.02	1	0.09
Been Detained by the army	138		79		59		4.30	1	0.04
Ever suffered from Bayonet/panga/ Spear cuts	151		58		66		3.35	1	0.08
Attempted Rape	54		14		40		12.6	1	0.00

War experiences of the children
* Two-tailed p-value

"Stability?"

8.   Play

Art. 31(1&2) of the UN CRC provides that States Parties recognize the right of the child to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts. States Parties shall respect and promote the right of the child to participate fully in cultural and artistic life and shall encourage the provision of appropriate and equal opportunities for cultural, artistic, recreational and leisure activity.

8.1   Space to Play

By contrast, camp life has severely affected the children's right to play. The camps are severely restricted space wise, with no football fields or children's playing areas. Even in the learning centres where children attend school there is insufficient space for children to play. It was noted that even if the space was available, there are numerous other factors that prevent children from playing and generally having a 'normal' childhood. For instance it was observed that many of the children looked dejected, preferring to stay in a lonely and solitary environment.

The importance of play and leisure cannot be underestimated. Children's mental and physical health thrives on play. Play is one of the signs of a child's development and well-being. Play promotes children's emotional development and lack of it can lead to stress, anxiety or depression for many children (American Academy of Paediatrics (AAP), 2006). The psychological impacts on children unable to socialise out of doors means they miss out on the socio-cultural as well as physical benefits of out-door play, more so in Northern and North-Eastern Uganda where a majority of the cultural activities are based on outdoor activities.

Programmes in Northern and North-Eastern Uganda are not averse to the importance of play. In addition to encouraging children to engage in play, play is used as an entry point to psychosocial recovery from the impact of the conflict and as an entry point to delivering messages on health seeking behaviour, life skills and HIV/AIDS prevention. Programmes like the Kids League draw boys through football and girls through netball together and gives them opportunity to travel outside their regions to play in competitive friendly matches with similar groups round the country. Right to Play is another NGO that uses play to support children affected by conflict.

8.2   Recommendations for Consideration

The encampment environment meant that it was easy to mobilise children and young persons to come together to play. This should not in any way be diluted by the resettlement and return to villages and homes. With peace will come the need for families to start working hard again to sustain themselves, but this should not come at the expense of children's right to play and leisure. Planners and community leaders need to underscore to communities the importance of play and organisations engaged in this activity should endeavour to keep it going.

Play does not always have to be structured. Creative imagination enables children to create their own games. This is an element that risks being lost. Children and young people should be encouraged to create their own play and adults who interact with these children, including their parents, ought to be supported to know how to encourage this healthy development.

A leaf can be borrowed from the guidance provided by the AAP:
    Emphasizing the benefits of "true toys", such as blocks and dolls, in which children use

their imagination fully over passive toys that require limited imagination;

Supporting an appropriately challenging academic schedule for each child with a balance of extra-curricula activities. This should be based on each child's unique needs and not on competitive community standards;

Suggesting families choose childcare and early education programs that meet children's social and emotional developmental needs as well as academic preparedness.

"The challenge for society, schools, and parents is to strike the balance that allows all children to reach their potential, without pushing them beyond their personal comfort limits, and while allowing them personal free time," (APP 2006).

9.   *Education*

Education is a basic right of every citizen. The UNCRC recognises this and urges state parties to ensure access of every child to relevant education (Art. 28 and 29). The Uganda Constitution in Art. 34 provides for basic education as a right of the child, consistent with Sec. 5 of the Children Act. Despite the above, many children in conflict areas are not accessing education. Quality of education also remains a great concern. Of the children interviewed, 86% had attained some primary education. Two percent of the children, even though of school going age, had never been to school of any sort.

Level of Education of children Interviewed

11%   2%

87%

Legend:
- None
- Primary
- Secondary
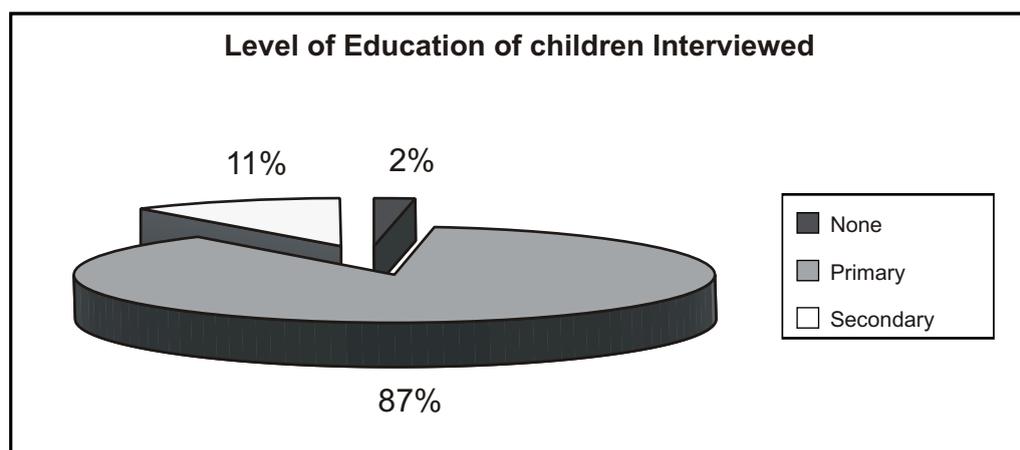
The conflict in the North and North-Eastern part of Uganda has had serious impact on the education of children in the following ways:

9.1   *Attendance*
There is poor attendance of school by both pupils and teachers. Discipline in most of the schools is not as good as it was before the war. It is very common to find hundreds children of school going age just loitering around the camps during the day. Another common sight in Northern Uganda is that of children strolling leisurely to school at around 10 a.m. Before the war, all school children would be in school by 8.00 am in the morning. This tendency that has developed is attributed to the fear of abduction. The study also revealed that Northern and North-Eastern Uganda has become 'a survival society' where the objective of education is not understood. Due to lack of guidance, children have been attracted to school not to learn, but as a way of enjoying the day's meal prepared at school under the schools feeding program facilitated by WFP.

Poverty, lack of food and other basic needs force children to seek alternatives. They can therefore make a choice between going to look for food and going to school.

Barriers to access to education
The LRA in its campaigns targeted children through abduction and this discouraged many children from attending school. The situation was compounded by severe household poverty and apparent inability of most families to provide adequate protection and food for the children. Most children have one meal a day thus seriously affecting their learning abilities. Most schools lack basic textbooks and reading materials, face shortage of teachers and teacher absenteeism leading to poor performance. These are among the leading factors for children dropping out of school.

There is a high limitation of children accessing education particularly Post primary education or other types of training opportunities. The categories of children that are

severely affected by this are; the formerly abducted children, orphans, children heading families and the girl child, who besides psychological damages brought on by the conflict, are supposed to cope with the burdens of meeting their basic needs.

Although many children get enrolled in primary one, the rate of drop out is high. There is also more drop out of children especially girls due to pregnancies and early marriage and lack of scholastic materials. In Kitgum district drop out rate was reported to be 30% and 7% for girls and boys respectively. In Katakwi district for instance, of 170 students who registered in senior one in 2002, only 62 were left by the end of senior four in 2005. This was a drop out rate of more than 63%. Many parents find the costs of schooling prohibitive, for instance, uniforms, books etc. especially as a result of high levels of poverty among the population.   Insecurity in some areas bordering Karamoja and in areas where LRA is operating affects school attendance.

Table showing dropout rates of Selected Schools in Conflict affected districts[14]

Name of School	Total No. of Students	Annual Dropout	Percentage
Gulu High School	1,029	256	25%
Oxford College- Kitgum	270	52	19%
Kitgum Comprehensive College	1,017	120	11%
Kitgum Progressive College	176	25	14%
Patongo Secondary School	483	13	3%
Lira Palwo S.S.	214	32	15%
Otwal Secondary School- Apac	302	29	10%

9.2   School Facilities

The conflict in the North and North-Eastern Uganda has impacted negatively on the education infrastructure in northern Uganda. The insecurity has led to displacement of the majority of primary schools to learning centres in IDP camps which are not conducive learning environments due to overcrowding and poor sanitation. Innovations for education service provision in the name of learning centres have emerged. These usually consist of different schools that have been displaced into camps and may consist of more than five schools sharing the limited infrastructure. They use tree sheds, classrooms or deserted buildings. The learning continues not according to previous schools but in a way that accommodates the combined schools. In these centres, teacher-pupil ratio is sometimes 1:400! While in some learning centres, each school conducts its own lessons, in others, for example like the one visited in Otwal Sub-county in Apac district the children from different schools were mixed in the same class. Performance is therefore generally poor for schools outside urban centres. Most of them do not get good grades in primary hence the foundation for further education is not well established.

Even in schools which are still operating, the buildings, furniture and textbooks were destroyed. In some schools the armed forces used the furniture as firewood. Some of the schools have closed down completely. Of the 239 primary schools in Gulu, only 69 are operating in their original locations while 170 (71%) have been displaced. In the case of secondary schools out of 36 registered schools, 31 have been displaced and only five secondary schools are operating in the original location. In Kitgum district out of 185

---

[14] UCRNN 2006: Studying in Armed Conflict: Challenges of Secondary Education for Children affected by Conflict in Northern Uganda

primary schools, 145 (78%) have been displaced because of insecurity and only 40 are in their original location. In Katakwi district, only three out of five schools are still functional, since both the students and teachers have moved out of the other two, leading to congestion in the functional schools.

9.3   *Performance*
While there is some learning going on in Northern and North-Eastern Uganda, there is no effective education going on and it is impossible under such circumstances to compete for state sponsorship, admission into *"first world schools,"* tertiary institutions and other education opportunities with children from other parts of the country. Discussions with the District Education Officers (DEOs) in the six study districts revealed that most of the secondary schools in Northern Uganda which were comparable to Namilyango and Buddo etc. (*"first world schools")* are now struggling to realise first grades and are lucky to send students to the university on private sponsorship, let alone government sponsorship. Schools like Teso College Aloet, Lango College, Comboni College, Dr. Obote College, St. Joseph's College Layibi, and Kitgum High School among others which used to send not less than 30 students to the University on government sponsorship yearly are now sending an average of 2 students per year. These schools used to attract students from all over the country.

The poor performance can be directly attributed to the two-decade-long conflict in Northern and North-Eastern Uganda. The region has become unattractive to good teachers and the recent years has witnessed massive exodus of good teachers from the region to relatively safer areas in search of both security and greener pastures. The latter because most of the schools elsewhere in central and western Uganda are either private schools that pay better, or government schools which offer fringe benefits which cannot be afforded by schools in Northern Uganda. Poor performance is also attributed to high pupil teacher ratio. In most learning centres visited, the teacher pupil ratio is estimated at 1:300/ 1:400.

9.4   *Recommendations for Consideration*
There is need to strengthen education service provision in the conflict affected districts in the following areas;

Government through the MoES should institute incentives for teachers working in the conflict area to prevent the migration and brain drain.

MoES should invest in infrastructure in the learning centres.

The reconstruction and recovery programme should have a major focus on education especially provision of catch up education for majority of children who would have missed out in the 20 year conflict.

Government should invest and ease access to community polytechnics as a way of supporting the over aged children.

CSOs should invest in education services and support educational programmes as a vehicle to bringing about sustainable development.

Approaches being used by NGOs such as Gulu Support the Children Organization (GUSCO) and CEASOP which includes attachment of children to local artisans for training should be scaled up in other areas of Northern Uganda. However, feasibility studies should be carried out to ascertain profitability of the different trades before they are encouraged.

The role of the Non-Formal Education Policy in the conflict affected regions should be further explored to allow more children access education.

"Safety?"

10. Special Protection Concerns

Child protection concerns in the conflict region are wide ranging. The disruption of the family and community network by displacement is one factor that has made children more vulnerable and thus caught up in the net of exploitation as a means of survival. The conflict has eroded the most basic protection mechanism that children had - the family network. Displacement has also weakened the social structures that would ordinarily provide protection and the safety net for children; that is probably the reason parents have adopted alternative strategies just to ensure their children are safe. Some of the strategies have put the children more at risk. These include night commuting; marrying off young girls only if they would be protected from abduction and also be provided with the much needed resources for survival.

Uganda has gone a long way in creating a protective policy environment for children. The Uganda Constitution (1995) and the Children Act Cap 59 forms the legal foundation for the protection of children. These laws are supported by various children's policies including the National OVC policy, the Child Labour Policy, the UPE policy, the Non-Formal Education policy among others. The national policy on internal displacement also has provisions aimed at ensuring protection of IDPs (children inclusive) and ensuring their access to services[15]. Various health policies, immunisations programmes, youth friendly health services, counselling and testing policies etc also directly address children and youth as target groups. The Poverty Eradication Action Plan (PEAP) also identifies priority areas that have a direct bearing on children. Subsequently, children are focused on in the Social Development Sector Investment Plan (SDIP) that is based on the PEAP. In all these laws, policies, action plans and sector strategies, children affected by conflict feature strongly. The challenge lies in translating this framework into practice. Key areas of concern in child protection are addressed below.

10.1 Night Commuting
A new phenomenon - 'night commuting' - emerged where children, fearing abduction, were forced to commute to and from their homes to urban centres and hospitals in search of security. These children were referred to as "night commuters". Children left their schools at around 5.00 pm, walked home to try to get something to eat before rushing back to the night commuter centres which they try to reach before 7.00 pm. In the morning they rush home for some semblance of break fast (leftovers from supper) before going to school. By the time they reach home in the morning their parents may have already left for the gardens. This leaves very little time for them to be with their parents.
Because they are not always with their parents, children have attained a level of independence. The night commuters, many of whom are without protection of parents face the threat of physical abuse, sexual abuse and insecurity. Girls are subjected to sexual harassment and abuse along transit routes and in the sleeping spaces in town centres. The children are increasingly exposed to the risks of contracting HIV and other sexually transmitted infections, and of early pregnancy, as many are left with no choice but to become involved in *survival sex* in exchange for food or money.

10.2 Child Labour
The UN CRC explicitly addresses the issue of child labour in Art. 32: States Parties recognise the right of the child to be protected from economic exploitation and from performing any work that is likely to be hazardous or to interfere with the child's education, or to be harmful to the child's health and physical, mental, spiritual, moral or social development. This is expanded in Art. 34 against sexual exploitation, in Art. 35 on the sale, trafficking and

---

[15] The national policy for Internally Displaced Persons (2004) guarantees freedom of movement, property rights, security of persons and property, protection from contagious and infectious diseases for all IDPs

abduction of children. Art. 36 states that 'State parties shall protect the child against all other forms of exploitation prejudicial to any aspects of the child's welfare'. The UN CRC is not against all forms of child work but focuses on those that are damaging to children. Similarly, the Children Act in Sec. 8 and the Uganda Constitution in Art. 25 and 40 provide for protection of children from slavery, servitude, forced labour and work under unsafe or unhealthy conditions.

The conflict has impoverished the communities and rendered parents helpless. Those staying in IDP camps are no longer in a position to adequately meet their needs let alone that of their children. As a result communities try to use available means to sustain them selves. Among these is the increase in hazardous employment of children or child labour.

Children are forced to work in order to supplement family income. Children engaged in work range from the age of 7 to 12 years. Majority of these children work in exchange for money or food. One of the children the team spoke to revealed that his days earnings from 8.00am -5.00pm is UShs 1,000/= (approx half a dollar). Child headed families are thus forced to keep working at the expense of education just to raise enough income for their siblings. Children are not allowed to play because it is considered a time waster. Because of the need to work and survive many children end up not going to school, many have in the process become money minded. They prefer "*here and now*" approach to life. The study also noted that children most engaged in labour are orphans; children form destitute families and immigrants from other districts.

Type of work children are engaged in

Boys	**Girls**
Construction	Housemaids,
brick-making	Barmaids
Stone quarries	Selling firewood
Hawking	
Boda boda	

The engagement of children in labour greatly affects their education. This ranges from increased absenteeism from school as children are busy working, poor performance and in most cases dropping out of school as children get more preoccupied with other activities rather than education.

Many children who cannot cope with the work pressure end up in theft and street begging. Children beggars are a growing challenge in Lira district. The begging children are between 5 and 8 years of age. Children are affected psychologically. They feel powerless and hopeless undermining their self-esteem and confidence.

Some of these children have a violent disposition because their work makes them more susceptible to beating and other forms of physical abuses. These children feel betrayed by their communities in that they think their relatives and community leaders are indifferent to their plight. So they become violent to vent their anger.

10.3   *Abduction of Children*

Over the last 18 years the LRA has abducted over 30,000 children. Of these, about 25,000 have returned and over 8,000 remain unaccounted for. In captivity, some children reported that the LRA forced them to kill their family members and friends in front of other children as a way of instilling fear and loyalty. This has caused devastating psychological impact on the children who are less likely to willingly return to a community in which they

participated in maiming and torturing family members, neighbours and friends. Both boys and girls are made to participate in combat while girls suffer the extra burden of being forced to be sex slaves to LRA commanders. Out of the children interviewed in the process of the study, 21.4% had been abducted.

FAC face quite a high level of stigma from communities, including their own families. This has led some of the children to take refuge back in the reception centres soon after reuniting with the families. According to a study carried out by Save the Children on the attitudes of child mothers towards their integration, it was found out that they don't like the idea of being resettled with their families. They prefer to be supported to resettle on their own. They also do not want to be treated as children anymore because in captivity they were "wives" of officers wielding a lot of authority.

It was also noted that some of the Formerly Abducted Children have not fully recovered. This is particularly the case with those who had stayed long in captivity. It was also noted that the counselling services provided when they report at the centre is not adequate to enable them fully recover. Some parents have lost hope in some of the FAC since they tend to be "very difficult children", rude and violent, and so the community views them as a social burden. This has led to name calling, such as "*Kony's children*", "*former rebels*", etc.   Some individuals even view them as enemies since some of the FAC committed atrocities such as burning community houses or killing some neighbours under the life threatening orders of their abductors.

10.4   Children in Conflict with the Law

Crime committed by children is a growing concern in North and North-Eastern Uganda. Conflict has contributed to increased juvenile crimes. Many of the juvenile cases are perpetrated by children living in the IDP camps, the streets and commuter centres. According to the Child and Family Protection Units (CFPU) in the districts of Lira, Apac, Kaberamaido, Katakwi, Gulu and Kitgum, the rate of juvenile crimes has been steadily increasing.

The crime committed by children range from simple theft to capital offences. The most common crimes include; drug abuse (mostly marijuana), gambling and thefts both domestic and outside, violent fights, and assault occasioning bodily harm, arson. All these criminal and civil offences are within the jurisdiction of the Grade II Magistrate court to hear and determine charges against the child.

There were isolated cases of murders committed by children, either on their own or together with adults. One murder case was of a twelve-year-old formerly abducted boy who killed his younger sister after she failed to carry the load he had assigned her. The other was a case of pupils playing violently in a classroom and ended up knocking the head of one of their friends hard on the desk and he died.

Most of the juvenile offences, apart from defilement that is largely committed by boys were found to be evenly distributed among boys and girls. It was also found that these crimes were greater and more severe in Sub-counties with IDPs than in other Sub Counties not affected by armed conflict and where most people were relatively settled.

10.5   When there is No Protection

Child abuse and neglect thrive in an environment where there is no social protection and the impact on the lives of children is devastating. The immediate physical effects of abuse or neglect can be relatively minor or severe. In some cases the physical effects are

temporary; however, the pain and suffering they cause to a child should not be discounted. As a result of any of the above highlighted social protection concerns, children can suffer impaired brain development, poor physical health and long-term health problems. The psychological consequences may include the immediate emotional effects of abuse and neglect (isolation, fear, and an inability to trust) that can translate into lifelong consequences, including low self-esteem, depression, and relationship difficulties.

Poor mental and emotional health, cognitive difficulties and social difficulties also arise from abuse and neglect. Difficulties during adolescence like delinquency, teen pregnancy, low academic achievement, drug use, and mental health problems, are common among unprotected children. Abuse and neglect increase the likelihood of adult criminal behaviour, alcohol and other drug abuse and abusive behaviour. Society as a whole pays a price for child abuse and neglect through maintaining a child welfare system to investigate allegations of child abuse and neglect, as well as expenditures by the judicial, law enforcement, health, and mental health systems to respond to and treat abused children and their families and the long-term economic consequences of child abuse and neglect. They can also include loss of productivity due to unemployment and underemployment, the cost of special education services, and increased use of the health care system (*Child Welfare Information Gateway 2006)*.

10.6   Recommendations for Consideration
The effects of the 20 year long conflict on communities particularly children cannot be over emphasised. There is therefore need for genuine political will to garner efforts towards resolving the conflict once and for all so that there is absolutely no need for the night-commuter phenomenon reappearing.

Child protection challenges that emerge including; sexual exploitation, night commuting with its attendant impact, child prostitution , child labour and juvenile delinquencies point to an urgent need to strengthen child protection mechanisms at community level. This requires collaboration among key actors in the design of interventions. There should be increased community sensitization on the rights of the child by child-focused civil society organizations, government institutions and the local community leaders.

Longer and holistic psychosocial intervention is recommended to enable the children recover. While the need for reintegration and family reunion is important for such children, the process of complete reintegration can only occur in an environment that is peaceful with no further threats or fears of re-abduction. This calls for a speedy end to the conflict as a first step towards promoting reintegrating of children.

The reintegration process should in addition be accompanied with mass awareness and sensitisation on the needs and challenges of children who have returned from captivity to facilitate their acceptance and integration. Community and clan reconciliation ceremonies should be encouraged.

The ability to cope, and even thrive, following a negative experience is sometimes referred to as "resilience." A number of protective factors may contribute to an abused or neglected child's resilience. Programmes working to help children recover from abuse and protect them from further abuse should encourage the followings:

For the individual child: optimism, self-esteem, intelligence, creativity, humour, and independence.

Protective factors should be built around the child. Important among these are: the family or social environment, such as a child's access to social support; in particular, a caring adult in the child's life can be an important protective factor. Community well-being, including neighbourhood stability and access to health care, is also a protective factor. An underlying requirement for these child protection factors to be effective is identification; identification of the family and community one belongs to. Hence the need for birth registration programmes. Programmes working in the area of social protection must as of necessity support birth registration.

11.   *Child Sexual Abuse*

11.1   *Child Prostitution*

Child prostitution is an emerging phenomenon in the urban centres in Northern and North-Eastern-Uganda as a direct consequence of the conflict. Before the war, in Acholi culture was   treat a sacred affair; premarital sex, sex outside homestead and sex work were treated as antisocial behaviours and taboo; even the few women who engaged in sex work were very discreet and were not seen on the street. Not to be ignored is the fact that other children are lured into the practice by means of small gifts that preying adults may offer, since the parents are not in position to provide these things.

Today there are places such as "*Apoli*[16] *lane*" in Lira town where young girls are openly offering themselves for sex. In Gulu and Kitgum on disco days there is rampant child sexual abuse as girls as young as ten go to trans-night dancing where they are abused. The children are reportedly given alcohol to douse their senses before being abused.

In the camps, young girls are reportedly being lured into sex by older men especially soldiers who are among the few people with access to money. Children especially girls are exposed to abuse while going to commuting centres. It was reported in FGDs that it is a common practice to see girls as young as 15 going to lodges to meet men. This was directly observed during the study.

According to the Probation and Welfare Officer Gulu district, commercial sexual exploitation of children has greatly increased. The cases he has witnessed are largely of children aged between 14 17 years engaged in prostitution. He also noted that there are some activities such as strip-teasing (nude dancing) that take place in bars and drinking places mainly conducted by children and young girls between the age of 12-17 years under the patronage of bar owners and other organized barons. This, in his view, predisposes children and increases their vulnerability to sexual exploitation.

> *"With the help of the police we arrested about 10 boys and girls between the ages 12 and 17 who were involved in strip- teasing. These days there are many young girls who hang around the town centre and sell themselves. We also arrested a group of young girls who had rented a room and were using it to engage in prostitution."*

The police family protection unit also acknowledges an increase in child prostitution and further notes that this is largely attributed to poverty and a search for survival. A new terminology "survival sex" has emerged in the district and seems to contribute to worsening of the behavior making it almost acceptable. Whatever name given to it, involvement of children in prostitution tantamount to a violation of children's rights.

> *"this war has brought the worst that we had never seen. In my youthful days we used to hear of such things as women and young girls selling themselves for money in Kampala. Our cultural heritage is completely eroded. We need to disband the camps"* An elder in Gulu District.

The children consulted gave the following as major reasons for engaging in child prostitution: homelessness, looking for school fees, the quest for survival, peer influence, as

---

[16] Apoli in Luo, literally is an antelope. However in current slang it is used to refer to prostitutes; after a Luo song that called badly dressed women and prostitutes "apoli"

well as supplementation of family income. The above have a direct link to poverty and deprivation, violence, abuse and vulnerability.

11.2   Defilement
Defilement is ranked as one of the leading criminal cases in North and North-Eastern Uganda today. The respondents confirmed that defilement cases are so rampant in the camps but in many occasions, go unreported or unknown because of poor handling of cases and above all the preference by parents to have out of court settlements.

> *"The main form of child sexual abuse and exploitation is defilement. There are two to three cases reported every week. The victims are in the range of 10-17 years of age, and a few but rarely 7-8 years! The perpetrators are schoolboys of the same age bracket, businessmen and village men". The Head, Child and Family Protection Unit Apac Police Station:*

Fifty percent (50.5%) of the children interviewed reported being sexually abused. The perpetrators of this abuse are LRA rebels, UPDF, teachers, businessmen and boys. For instance, among the different age groups that have experienced heterosexual rape (single), 61.9% fall within 11-14 years. Again, it is still the same group that has the highest percentage of attempted rape (72%) compared with those in the age group 15-17. However, those above 15 years have experienced forced marriage more.

The study also revealed that most of the children who have experienced sex in exchange for goods (food and other items) are as young 11-14 years (58.1%) and 41.9% for those between 15-17 years. It appears this due to the fact that it is easier to lure the young ones compared to those who are grown up.

11.3   The Impact of Sexual Abuse on Children
Child sexual abuse is widely regarded as a cause of mental health problems in adult life and also affects social, sexual and interpersonal functioning. The fundamental damage caused by child sexual abuse impacts on the child's developing capacities for trust, intimacy, agency and sexuality (Mullen and Fleming, 1998). It is therefore not surprising that marital dysfunction, is associated with higher risks of child sexual abuse. Sexually abused children exhibit poor academic performance and behaviour and this negatively influences later educational attainments, and impairs the development of the skills and discipline necessary to sustain effective work roles. Researchers have documented evidence of an association between a history of child sexual abuse and an earlier age of entering the first cohabitation and an earlier age at first pregnancy. Usually these attempts to establish relationships and families are more likely than not to fail. Women who have been sexually abused as children are at greater risk during adolescence of sexually transmitted diseases, teenage pregnancy, multiple sexual partnerships, and sexual re-victimisation. These are key characteristics of risky behaviour that predisposes one to HIV/AIDS. Exposure of children to the sexual advances and acts of adults places the victim at risk of later sexual problems. The more extreme and persistent forms of abuse produce greater disruption of the child's developing sexuality.

The children in Northern Uganda are at risk of suffering long term-effects of abuse. The sexual abuse they have suffered predisposes them to risky behaviour and therefore HIV/AIDS, unstable relationships, broken families and poor socio-economic status.

Sexually abused children not only face an assault on their developing sense of their sexual

identity, but a blow to their construction of the world as a safe enough environment and their developing sense of others as trustworthy. In those abused by someone with whom they had a close relationship, the impact is likely to be all the more profound.

11.4   *Recommendations for Consideration*

Abuse is not destiny. It is damaging, and that damage, if not always reparable, is open to amelioration and limitation. Those who have been abused but subsequently have positive school experiences where they feel themselves to have succeeded academically, socially or at sport, have significantly lower rates of adult difficulties. Those whose relationship with their parents subsequent to abuse was positive and supportive fared better (Romans et al. 1995).

School is a key institution for child recovery from any form of abuse if that school is well-organised and can provide all children with a positive experience academically and socially.   In accordance with the principle of non-discrimination, there is no need to identify and target abuse victims, but simply to make every effort to ensure adolescents have the opportunity to share in the enhanced social opportunities that school should provide all children. A safe environment is critical to a child's recovery. It includes improved parental relationships, reduced domestic violence, improved school opportunities and better social networks. These factors should be taken into consideration when developing programmes for children sexually abused.

More practically, alternatives to survival sex ought to be sought. These may include vocational skills training and provision of seed grant for income generation activities for older children who cannot go back to school. Alongside all these interventions should be education on HIV/AIDS prevention, protection care and treatment.

12.   Conclusion

That the population in Northern Uganda is very desperate, is reflected in the fact that all the people interviewed wanted someone to implement their recommendations! They cite a lot of studies that they participated in but without any feedback.

The children in Northern Uganda have suffered greatly from omissions and commissions against their rights. They risk becoming a lost generation unless concerted effort is made to salvage them from their current plight.

The conflicts in Northern and North-Eastern Uganda have taken two decades now, with grave impacts on the social, economic and cultural aspects of life. With entire livelihoods destroyed, a lot of work remains to be done. It might take another two or even more decades to reconstruct war-affected Northern Uganda.

Many humanitarian organisations are doing a good job helping the displaced populations with the much needed basic services, supplementing government efforts to mitigate the suffering of the people there. These are still not measuring to the magnitude of the problem though. There is a lot of trauma among adults and children alike. This means that the children suffer more as there are no fall back systems to support them deal with trauma.
Organisations providing psychosocial support do not have professional tools to do the work adequately. Additionally formerly abducted children take too short a time in the centres to gain psychological composure. Coupled with weak community follow up mechanisms due to limited staffing and funds, many of these children go into the communities still loaded with trauma. Of course trauma does not heal in a short time.

Discussions with several stakeholders point to the fact that as long as the conflict situation in Northern and North-Eastern parts of Uganda prevails the efforts of the various stakeholders providing services will not lead to sustainable improvements in the lives of children. It was described by one key informant as equivalent to treating a patient of a disease and sending him back to the environment in which he caught the disease. Without lasting peace, most of the other interventions only offer temporary relief and are band-aids on a festering wound.

The support structures and mechanisms in the war-affected communities need to be supported to play their role. Throughout this report, reference has been made to the importance of supporting the family structure and using community-based strategies to improve the well-being of children. For these strategies to work, the supportive policy and legislative frameworks need to be functional. For this to happen, key actors (like the judicial officers, probation officers, local councils and the police) need to have their capacities strengthened to play their role effectively. Supporting a child holistically means that these structures and their mechanisms need to be coordinated for better service delivery and sustainable impact. All these must work in collaboration with the communities, families and children. Government, NGOs and communities need to work together to turn these areas into places where children can enjoy a childhood.

We therefore recommend that all possible avenues for resolution of the conflict be explored.
Since the main cause of other forms of child abuse such as child labour is poverty as a result of insecurity the government and civil society organizations should be focusing their attention on finding a political means of totally ending the war in the North.

Annexes

Service delivery to children affected by war

The table below gives a snapshot of interventions by agencies operating in Northern Uganda. These efforts are scattered and need to be complemented by a massive intervention based on the good practice and workable alternatives that CSOs have tried out. Government should therefore draw lessons from NGO interventions and scale up services to children.

Agency & District: Concerned Parents' Association - Lira, Gulu & Kitgum
Services Offered:
- Education support -paying school fees & provision of scholastic materials including uniforms
- Advice and counselling services
- Treatment and appropriate care
- Rehabilitation

Agency & District: Gulu Support the Children Organization - Gulu
Services Offered:
- Education support, provision of food & clothing
- Treatment and care
- Rehabilitation

Agency & District: Police (CFPU) - Gulu & Lira
Services Offered:
- Carrying out investigations
- Apprehending culprits and producing them in court
- Advice to criminals
- Information gathering on child sexual abuse and exploitation
- Medical examination
- Counselling

Agency & District: KICWA - Kitgum
Services Offered:
- Counselling services
- Material support (food, non-food items)
- Psychosocial programme

Agency & District: IRC - Kitgum
Services Offered:
- Provision of tents for accommodation
- Training communities for income generation
- Radio programme on child sexual crimes

Agency & District: Oxfam - Kitgum
Services Offered:
- Provision of tents for accommodation
- Training communities in agriculture and other services

Agency & District: AVSI - Kitgum, Pader
Services Offered:
- Psychosocial programmes

Agency & District: HURIFO - Gulu and Kitgum
Services Offered:
- Help victims to open up cases against offenders
- Legal support

Agency & District: Legal Aid Project - Gulu
Services Offered:
    Help victims to open up cases against offenders
    Legal support/representation

Agency & District: PEARL
Services Offered:
    Training peer educators
    Information dissemination

Agency & District: ACET/Meeting Point
Services Offered:
    Counselling services to girls
    Offers protection guides

Agency & District: People's Voice for Peace - Gulu
Services Offered:
    Counselling services to girls
    Training communities for income generation

Agency & District: World Vision - Gulu, Kitgum
Services Offered:
    Formal education
    Psychosocial counselling
    Vocational training
    Community sensitization

Agency & District: Noah's Ark - Gulu
Services Offered:
    HIV/AIDS awareness among night commuters
    Spiritual guidance
    Basic needs blankets, soap, etc
    Counselling

Agency & District: Sponsoring Children Uganda Rachelle Centre - Lira
Services Offered:
    Advocacy for release of abductees and peace
    Networking
    Rehabilitation
    Counselling
    Feeding/nutrition
    Reintegration

Agency & District: Hospitals
Services Offered:
    Advice and counselling services
    Treatment and appropriate care
    Medico-legal testing/evidence

Agency & District: Apac Church of Uganda Vicarage - Apac
Services Offered:
    Moral sensitization of offenders
    Monetary support to victims

Agency & District: Agoro Community Development Association - Kitgum
Services Offered:
    General human and child rights advocacy seminars & radio programs

Agency & District: Youth Out of Poverty and AIDS (YOPA) - Kitgum
Services Offered:
    HIV/AIDS and STI awareness creation
    Reinstating school drop outs
    Encouraging/supporting reporting of abusers

Agency & District: Emergency Action Uganda
Services Offered:
    Paying of school fees
    Provision of clothing, food, utensils, etc.

Agency & District: Gulu Youth Development Association
Services Offered:
    Vocational Training
    Paying of school fees
    Micro finance
    Nutrition

Agency & District: Gulu Women Dairy Farmers' Association - Gulu
Services Offered:
    Dairy farming
    HIV/AIDS awareness

Agency & District: Save the Children in Uganda (SCiU) - Gulu, Pader
Services Offered:
    Accommodation for night commuters
    Counselling
    Legal services to victims
    Treatment
    Recreation services
    Clothing

Agency & District: Katakwi Children's Voice (KCV)
Services Offered:
    Counselling
    Treatment of victims
    Child-sponsorship
    Blankets and scholastic materials
    Community sensitisation Katakwi

Agency & District: United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA) - All the districts

Agency & District: World Food Program (WFP)
    Coordinating humanitarian assistance

STEERING COMMITTEE

CARE International in Uganda
The African PACT
Soroti District Association NGO Network (SODANN)
Save the Children in Uganda
Pader NGO Forum
Jamii ya Kupatinisha (JYAK)
Concern Worldwide
Oxfam GB
Uganda Child Rights NGO Network
World Vision Uganda
Uganda National NGO Forum
Concerned Parents Association

Member Organisations
MENNONITE Central Committee - Uganda
Foundation for Democracy and Conflict Resolution
COU-PDR
Save the Children in Uganda
War Child Holland
Oxfam GB in Uganda
AVSI
AMREF
SNV - Netherlands Development Organisation
Care International In Uganda
Jamii ya Kupatinisha
The Uganda National NGO Forum
CONCERN WORLDWIDE - UGANDA
International Rescue Committee
Abantu for Development Uganda
Media for Peace and Religious Tolerance Organisation (MPRTO)
World Vision Uganda
Uganda Child Rights NGO Network (UCRNN)
Africa Leadership Institute
Uganda People's Development Association (UPDA)
Uganda Support for Children and Women Organisation
Community Integrated Forum for Moral and Social Transformation (CIFMOST)
Family Integrated Services for Health and Development
Young Generation Health Club
Acan Akwo Kwo I Lwete
Par Peko Parent Support Group
Apala Widows and Orphanage Centre
Lango Environmental Development Foundation (LEDF)
Lango Agro-Producers and Entertainers (LAPE)
CETAWO/Hope Again International (HAI)
Rwot Ogena Parent Support Group
Concerned Parents' Association (CPA)
Acoke Rural Development Initiative (ARDI)
Concerned Children and Youth Association
Lira District Crime Prevention
African Youth Initiative Network - Uganda Chapter

District NFO Forum Lira
Development Training and Research Centre
Action for Rural Development (AFODE)
Koboko Youth in Development (KOYID)
Koboko United Women's Association (KUWA)
Kuluba United Group (KUG)
Care for the Needy (CAFON)
ESTEEM
The African Pact
Associates for Community Initiative (ACI)
Kanatemmy Foundation for Peace
Volunteers Across Nile (VAN)
Agoro Community Development Association
Alice Labol Foundation
Amia Anyima Youth Development Association
Youth Out of Poverty and AIDS (YOPA)
Kitgum NGO Forum
Kitgum Integrated Initiative for Development Action (KIIDA)
The Populace Foundation - Uganda (TPF-Uganda)
Community Coping Support Organisation
Fountain of Hope Ministries
Pader NGO Forum
Pader Youth Net - YSS
Women and Rural Development Network (WORUDET)
Norwegian Refugee Council
Coalition for Peace in Africa (COPA)
Quaker Peace and Social Witness - Uganda
Action for Humanity Africa
Lamogi Can Tute Group
Network for Peace - Building Initiatives (NPI)
Kapelbyong Child and Mother Development Association
Mpigi Women Development Trust (MWODET)
RIAMRIAM CSN
Youth Organisation for Humanity and Nature (YOHANA)

References

Bayer CP, Clasen F and Adam H, 2005: Association of trauma and PTSD symptoms with openness to reconciliation and feelings of revenge among former Ugandan and Congolese child soldiers, Journal of American Medical Association; JAMA.2007 Aug 1; 298(5): 555-9

IANSA, Oxfam and Saferworld, 2007: Africa's missing billions: International arms flows and the cost of conflict

Jenny Kuper, Military Training and Children in Armed Conflict: *Law, Policy and Practice* (Martinus Nijhoff, 2005)

Raising Voices and Save the Children in Uganda 2005, Violence Against Children: *The Voices of Ugandan Children and Adults*, Kampala.
Sarah Grainger, 2007: Summit Displaces Uganda Street Children accessed at http:/news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/Africa/6378969.stm

Ministry of Health 2005, Health and Mortality Survey among Internally Displaced Persons in Gulu, Kitgum and Pader Districts, Northern Uganda

Mullick MS, Goodman, R (2001) Questionnaire screening for mental health problems in Bangladeshi children: A preliminary study. Social Psychiatry Psychiatric Epidemiology 2001 Feb; 36(2): 94-9.

Goodman, R (1999) the extended version of the Strength and Difficulties Questionnaire as a guide to child psychiatric cases and consequent burden: Journal of Child psychology and Psychiatry, 40, 791-801

Goodman, R (1997) the SDQ a research note**:** Journal of Child psychology and Psychiatry. 38, 581-586

Pynoos R (1993): Traumatic stress and developmental psychopathology in children and adolescents. American Psychiatric Press Review of Psychiatry 1993; 12:205-238

Republic of Uganda (1995): Constitution of the Republic of Uganda, 1995

Republic of Uganda (2004): The National Policy for Internally Displaced Persons

Republic of Uganda (2004): Poverty Eradication Action Plan 2005/6-2007/8

Terr L. C (1991): Childhood traumas: an outline and overview. Am J Psychiatry 1991 Jan; 148(1): 10-20[Medline]

Kinzie, J.D., Sack, W.H., Angell, R.H., Manson, S. & Rath B (1986). The psychiatric effects of massive trauma on Cambodian children: The children. *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, 1986:* 25, 370-376.

Nader K, Pynoos, R, Fairbanks, L, Al-Ajeel, M, Al-Asfour, A (1993). A preliminary study of PTSD and grief among the children of Kuwait following the Gulf Crisis *British Journal of Clinical Psychology,* 1993:32, 407-416.

Pelcovitz D, Kaplan S (1996): Post-traumatic stress disorder in children and adolescents. Child Adolescent Psychiatric Clinic N Am 1996; 5: 449-496

The Children Act, Cap 59, Laws of Uganda, 2000

UCRNN (2006): Positioning Children in the Search for Peace and Reconciliation in northern Uganda

UCRNN (2006): Studying in Armed Conflict: Challenges of Secondary Education for Children affected by Conflict in Northern Uganda
Uganda Bureau of Statistics (UBOS, 2003): Uganda National Household Survey (UNHS), 2002/2003

UNAIDS, UNICEF and USAID (2004): Children on the Brink: A joint Report on NEW Orphan Estimates and a Framework for Action

UNICEF (2004): The State of the World's Children 2005: *Childhood Under Threat*, New York.

United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989

Weine, S, Becker, D, McGlashan, T, Vojvoda, D, Hartman, S. & Robbins, J. (1995). Adolescent survivors of >ethnic cleansing= on the first year in America. *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry,* 1995:34, 1153-1159.

WFP 2006: World Hunger Series 2006: Hunger and Learning

A publication of:

CSOPNU

Civil Society Organisations for Peace in Northern Uganda

P. O. Box 7280 Kampala - Uganda

Tel: +256 312 258100, Fax: +256 414 344295, E-mail: cuhq@careuganda.org