

# **Falling Through The Net**

The Challenges for Returning Adult Ex-Combatants  
in Northern Uganda

**Observations and recommendations from research  
conducted by Human Rights Focus (Gulu)**

**with the support of Conciliation Resources (London)  
and a grant from Comic Relief (London)**

**August 2004**

# Foreword

By Mr. Otto James  
Executive Director  
Human Rights Focus

## Falling Through The Net

In northern Uganda the war between the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) and its predecessors, and the Government of Uganda, has focused on the Acholi Districts of Gulu, Kitgum and Pader and has been continuing since 1986. Its main victims have been civilians who have been targeted for killings, abduction, rape, and other atrocities. Many of those who have not suffered physically have been deprived of their homes, land and livelihoods. Additionally, despite being its main victims, the Acholi people themselves have often been blamed for the continuation of the war.

The abduction of children and adults by the LRA has been a particular feature of the conflict in recent years, and children have often been selected to be traumatised and used as child soldiers. After periods in captivity ranging from days to years, some escape and seek to return to civilian life.

This research report focuses on the experience of individuals who have returned as adults from the LRA. It has been compiled from the moving testimonies of former abductees gathered in 2003. As well as examining their experience of reintegration, the report also deals with the challenges that face some of the receiving communities.

While a number of programmes in northern Uganda focus on the reintegration of child returnees, relatively less attention has been paid to the needs of adults. The reality on the ground is that there is little provision tailored specifically to their needs. Our report is intended to inform the work of addressing this imbalance.

Northern Uganda has been marginalised ever since colonial times. On a national level over the past 18 years poverty has been reduced in Uganda from 56% to 35%; however, largely due to the insecurity, the North has not benefited from this progress. A household survey conducted by Save the Children (UK) in conjunction with the Office of the Prime Minister from June 2002 to July 2003 highlights this issue. It notes that those considered to be well off in the Internally Displaced People's (IDP) camps subsist on US\$ 25-50 cents per day, and that the general camp population cannot afford to make an investment of US\$3-6. It also observes that this same population cannot grow any crops that take more than 4 months from sowing to harvesting.

The scale of this problem, as well as the severity of the suffering, is enormous. Taking the Acholi sub-region as a whole, over 90% of the people are internally displaced. More than 1,000,000 people continue to be confined to the IDP camps where they endure severe insecurity as well as terrible poverty.

The research was conducted in a very volatile security situation. Following the signing of a number of protocols between the Ugandan and Sudanese governments, the Ugandan People's Defence Force (UPDF) were permitted to pursue the LRA into Sudanese territory, and in March 2002 they launched operation Iron Fist into Southern Sudan.

It was believed by the Government of Uganda that this would achieve a final military victory over the LRA. At the same time civil society peace advocacy organisations in northern Uganda predicted that this development would undermine their efforts, and lead to heightened insecurity.

Less than two months later the LRA re-entered northern Uganda in large numbers and continued their attacks on civilians and the military with renewed vigour. In addition to the Acholi districts of Gulu, Kitgum and Pader the conflict has at times extended into the neighbouring sub-regions of Lango and Teso.

The rates of abduction and displacement to the camps has soared, while relief access by the humanitarian agencies to the 62 IDP camps dotted all over Acholi sub-region has been severely disrupted.

In response to the failures of security experienced in Lango and Teso the Government of Uganda has in some areas resorted to recruiting, training and arming local militias. This has taken place despite the mounting ethnic tensions between these and neighbouring tribes, and the difficulties experienced in trying to disarm the Karamojong to the East.

In conclusion, I would like to emphasise that in this context of extreme suffering and widespread violence there is a need for action to be taken with the utmost urgency. I wish to echo an appeal mentioned elsewhere in this document – that the government must not only address the specific long term needs of adult ex-combatants post resettlement but also channel more efforts into addressing the economic deterioration in the region.

### Acknowledgements:

First and foremost I wish to thank those who have shared often painful and traumatic memories of their past, and have thus made this research possible. In many cases this must have been a personal sacrifice, and we are profoundly grateful to all those who assisted us in this way. As always it is the responsibility of the research team to ensure that their contributions are used to full effect. Secondly I would like to thank all the others who agreed to be interviewed by our researchers, many of whom contributed more than one interview for this process.

From our team I would like to thank the following: Our researchers for all their hard work in Gulu, Kitgum and Pader - your inputs were invaluable to us; our research assistants who worked so tirelessly and under very heart breaking security situations especially in Pader district; Dr. Abiodun Onadipe popularly known among those who know him in Uganda as Abbey; and Dr. Charles Alao - the guidance given under your very skilful hands and brains as always, paid off, in this case. Last but not the least, I pay a special glowing tribute to Comic Relief for making substantial resources available to HURIFO and our partners, without which the idea would have remained on the drawing board.

## **Aims**

This research aims to:

- Identify the main actors involved in the reception, rehabilitation and reintegration of adult LRA ex-combatants.
- Assess how the challenges of resettling adult LRA ex-combatants are being addressed by the state, the affected communities and NGOs.
- Investigate the challenges faced by adult LRA ex-combatants when they return to civilian life.
- Investigate the challenges faced by people and organisations working to support the reintegration of adult LRA ex-combatants.
- Document the concerns of adult returnees and those looking after them.
- Identify gaps in the current reintegration and support process that challenge a successful reintegration.
- Initiate a process to improve the reintegration of adult LRA ex-combatants.
- Initiate a process to empower adult LRA ex-combatants to play an active role in determining their future.

## **Scope of the research**

The research deals with the challenges faced by adult LRA ex-combatants from the Acholi sub-region in northern Uganda and the institutions helping with their reintegration. For this assessment field work was carried out between June and August 2003. It covers the three districts of Gulu (4 researchers), Kitgum (4 researchers) and Pader (4 researchers). In addition Kampala as the main city attracting former combatants from the war was incorporated into this research (3 researchers). Our findings were compared to research from other conflict areas, especially West Africa and the Horn of Africa, in order to enable comparative learning.

## **Methodology**

The assessment is based on extensive field work undertaken by the fifteen researchers originating from the Acholi sub-region who are familiar with Acholi culture and language as well as the history and dynamics of the conflict in northern Uganda. The team jointly developed a research structure as well as interview and discussion guidelines. They identified organisations and individuals to be interviewed and a process to generate conclusions and recommendations from the assessment. The researchers' findings were documented in individual reports and then combined into a single working document. This final report is mainly based on the views of ex-combatants, the communities receiving them, and the organisations and state institutions supporting the process. Where relevant, research from broadly comparable reintegration processes in other African regions has been added.

The views of the LRA ex-combatants were collected from the returnees themselves. They have been identified either through reception centres or contact persons in the camps for internally displaced persons (IDPs), where many of them are living. Most of those interviewed in the IDP camps had been out of rebel captivity for several months or longer, whilst those interviewed in the reception centres had normally returned only weeks or a few months before the assessment. Our researchers spoke to ex-combatants

whose time in captivity ranged from several weeks to over 12 years. Interviews were held both with individual returnees and in focus groups. Researchers used open though guided interviewing and discussion techniques supported by a list of appropriate questions to ensure that all topics agreed upon earlier were covered. The number of ex-combatants interviewed by each researcher varied, and depended mainly on accessibility and the local security situation.

The views of the returnees were complemented by information gathered from NGO representatives, government officials, community leaders and civil society groups in order to provide a representative overview of the situation and a broad approach for possible adaptations of the current resettlement and rehabilitation process. For reasons of comparative learning lessons drawn from other conflict areas were incorporated.

## Definition

Research of this kind is confronted with the question of definition: Who is a child and who is an adult? Being aware of considerable cross-cultural variations regarding the point at which children become adults, we worked with several different indicators and combined them in order to answer this question accounting for the complex situation. We would like to stress that this research's classification claims validity only in regards of the needs of the person affected and does not try to introduce a universally agreed concept or change internationally recognised ideas about who is a child and who is an adult.

First and foremost there is the indicator of age. According to Ugandan law anyone above the age of 18 is an adult. Then there is the indicator of lived experience. Almost all of the ex-combatants have been forcefully recruited into the rebel ranks at a very young age - often as young as 8 years - and have thus being denied a childhood and a school education. Instead they have been trained and forced to live as soldiers, an activity which by Ugandan law is supposed to be restricted to people of 18 years or over, and to commit atrocities and undergo immense hardship. Many have had to behave as responsible adults or parents; especially the girls and young women, some of whom were given to commanders and were raped as young as eleven, resulting in pregnancy and motherhood.

Last but not least there is the indicator of social status. Many of the returnees are too old to return to schooling. Since they are expected to support themselves even under extreme conditions they have to opt for income generating activities and shoulder the responsibility of becoming economically independent at an early age - thus again being treated as an adult.

The combination of these different indicators for adulthood resulted in a flexible working-definition of the term 'adult ex-combatant', which related to the local circumstances and to what is culturally acceptable. We would like to stress that this classification relates only to the needs of the returnees. In this respect we consider it adequate to abandon a strict definition of adulthood and work with a variety of indicators instead. This does not imply that we are of the opinion that children who have been denied a childhood once should be deprived of a second chance.

## Limitations

The research had to bear with several limitations; some of them were known ahead of the actual work, while others were encountered during the exercise.

The ongoing war obviously affected the research. The poor security situation made travelling in general very dangerous and prevented the interviewers from reaching many of the rural areas completely, forcing them to concentrate on towns and trading centres. In addition it influenced the overall atmosphere of interactions with all parties concerned. While the security forces and representatives of the Government of Uganda often resented being approached and remained opposed to sharing information, especially in regard to issues of national security, the returnees as well as the receiving communities feared that too much openness could attract attention and might eventually endanger them.

Research of this nature requires the establishment of trust. While this is hard enough in times of peace, it becomes even more difficult in times of war and ongoing violence. Initially ex-combatants and their communities were afraid that openness and sharing of information could lead to harassment by government security organs or attract LRA attention. Consequently a lot of time had to be invested in gradually building up trust between the researchers and the LRA ex-combatants as well as their communities. There was in many cases a belief on the part of the interviewees that they should be paid for their contributions, and that the researchers were holding back the funds which should rightly be theirs. This perception could best be challenged through the development of trust between researcher and interviewee. Bad experiences with similar research projects in which the results were never brought back to benefit the ex-combatants and their communities or the organisations supporting the reintegration and resettlement process proved to be an additional obstacle for creating an open and trusted environment.

Sound relationships also had to be built with NGOs, as sharing information is a sensitive issue in this context. The sheer amount of research especially relating to child-soldiers, and recent incidents in which researchers were under close observation by military and security organs, made the trust-building more difficult and led to a situation where some local organisations insisted on official clearance from the authorities before agreeing on interviews and the sharing of information.

## Observations

**Every year since the conflict began a significant number of adult ex-combatants have been returning and seeking to reintegrate into society.** The ex-combatants normally come individually or in small groups with or without their commanders. Since the war is not yet over they are not part of a comprehensive demobilisation and resettlement scheme. Instead they are processed by the various institutions individually. Their reintegration during the still ongoing violent conflict poses major challenges to all parties involved as well as to the overall stability of society in northern Uganda.

**Adult returnees are scattered throughout the Acholi sub-region and beyond.** While some of the adult ex-combatants live in the few towns of Acholiland or in other districts, the majority return to the camps for internally displaced persons (IDPs) from where they have been abducted and where more than 90 percent of the Acholi population currently live. Poverty in the Acholi sub-region is widespread and severe. While the socio-economic situation in the major centres such as Gulu and Kitgum is poor, the destitution in many of the camps is palpable and overall living conditions are dehumanising and degrading.

**The reintegration of adult ex-combatants from Lord's Resistance Army captivity is a central issue if the violence in the northern Uganda is to come to an end. The amnesty process offers a suitable framework for adult ex-combatants to leave the LRA, return to their communities, and start a civilian life.** By July 2004 approximately 6400 (Uganda Amnesty Commission figures) returnees from northern Uganda had claimed amnesty and resettled. This has had a significant positive impact on the security situation in Acholi (poor though it is). It has also facilitated the end of the Uganda National Rescue Front II rebellion in West Nile. In this context it is unfortunate that the Government of Uganda and the security forces, as well as the international community, continue to send mixed messages about the scope and timeframe of the current Amnesty Act. We observe that this has undermined the credibility of the amnesty process. Additionally, in future the proposal to prevent LRA commanders from benefiting from the Amnesty Act could reduce the possibility of large groups of LRA fighters returning from the bush.

**The needs of adult returnees are different from the needs of returning children, and thus their return poses specific challenges for everyone concerned with their reintegration into society.** Every step of the process – receiving the returnees from captivity, handling them while in military custody, caring for their health and well-being in the reception centres, preparing them and their communities for reunion, supporting them in education and acquiring skills, and providing follow-up support – has to be carefully designed to facilitate at the best possible reintegration into society. As a consequence every phase has to meet the special challenges returning adults are posing towards the society without singling them out. Currently these special needs are not fully taken into consideration during the reintegration and support process.

**The understanding of the special needs of adult returnees is still limited and thus responses often lack relevance to their reintegration.** There has been little research into the reintegration of adult ex-child combatants during an ongoing war. While the important task of supporting child returnees is well assessed and comparatively well resourced, the needs of adult ex-combatants are not well understood and approaches to cater for them are still at an experimental stage.

**Returning adult ex-combatants are a diverse group demanding a differentiated approach to cater for their needs.** Despite the lack of adequate research so far, our experience in northern Uganda indicates that the diversity among adult ex-combatants is often ignored. Our assessment in Acholiland as well as the literature survey, examining the experience of reintegration programmes elsewhere in Africa, found that there has been a tendency to design reintegration programmes around the needs of able-bodied men and boys. Mazurana and McKay found that 37% of returning girls in northern Uganda were pregnant with children conceived in captivity. They also stress the need to specifically prioritise practical assistance for the disabled, the illiterate and those with dependants. While larger NGOs have done good work in addressing the broader needs of both child and adult returnees, smaller NGOs have also played a vital role in addressing the specific needs of the less advantaged such as the disabled and school drop-outs.

**The ongoing violent conflict is a major threat to successful reintegration of ex-combatants into society and to all people connected with this process.** Due to the ongoing war and the massive displacement of people, family tracing, the preparation of communities to receive and assist returnees, as well as following-up of ex-combatants who have been resettled remain major challenges, especially in remote areas. Successful trauma counselling and psychosocial healing in an environment that remains violent is difficult to achieve. Establishing a positive new identity and creating income generating activities are other areas deeply affected by the ongoing war, and matters are being made worse by LRA attacks and threats.

**Societies in war areas undergo rapid social change.** This transformation is often accompanied by the fact that young people's involvement in the war will change their understanding of authority, and male youths in particular are often unwilling to return to the pre-war situation. As a consequence, communities are very fragile and have difficulties in dealing with external influences. Experience from other countries shows that the influx of poorly trained young men and women with military experience can be an additional big risk to the society's stability. This is often worsened when the local economy is not in a position to absorb large numbers of returnees, and the insecurity prevents them from becoming engaged in agricultural activities.

**Despite the continuing war, communities are generally open and welcoming towards adult ex-combatants. But our research also documents cases where adult returnees have been harassed and threatened, showing that the supportive atmosphere is fragile and cannot be taken for granted.** In general people state their almost unconditional willingness to welcome home former LRA combatants. But during our research some local leaders also reported their discomfort with returnees: "When excited, they narrate their experiences while in captivity in a way that suggests they feel what they experienced in the bush was good"<sup>1</sup>. Some people

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<sup>1</sup> researcher 1, page 31



fear the returnees for the atrocities they had committed while in captivity. An ex-combatant camp leader interviewed at Amuru illustrated the degree of isolation of returnees by stating how at times he wanted to help traumatised returnees, but was discouraged by members of the community and their perception that he was associating with rebels<sup>2</sup>.

**Despite the generally welcoming attitude of the communities, many adult ex-combatants feel rejected and isolated, and are sometimes threatened and harmed.** Returnees often find their new environment difficult to cope with. While male adult returnees encounter general obstacles pursuing a normal civilian life, finding a spouse and providing a living for their families<sup>3</sup>, female ex-combatants suffer additional stigmatisation. The vast majority of them have been sexually abused. As a consequence many are left by their husbands or face enormous difficulties finding a partner. Often their situation is worse if they return pregnant or with children born in captivity. Communities regularly show great reservations in accepting children born in captivity and many mothers are left with little or no assistance from their families and communities<sup>4</sup>. The perceived or actual community rejection of adult ex-combatants has provoked some returnees to dislike and fear life back in their villages. As one interviewee in Gulu testified: "When I escaped, I was rejected completely and I was looked at as a rebel. I escaped with my gun, but when I was rejected, I was tempted not to hand over my gun"<sup>5</sup>. Others considered returning to the bush<sup>6</sup>.

**Adult ex-combatants face considerable threats to their safety.** In addition to the constant threat of LRA attack faced by all community members in the camps and rural areas, adult returnees often face additional risks from revenge by the LRA and harassment by the security forces, especially if not provided with amnesty certificates.

**NGOs are widely perceived as the only institutions capable of dealing with adult returnees.** Although often over-stretched and understaffed, the efforts of NGOs in northern Uganda are highly appreciated by the ex-combatants, the local population and the authorities. They work in extremely challenging and often dangerous conditions to support ex-combatants and the communities receiving them. One of our researchers found that civil society sees "NGOs as gap-fillers that have more than often come to provide for the basic needs and services of the people"<sup>7</sup>. But some voices were raised that most of the rehabilitation approaches used in northern Uganda are Western imports and are not adopted enough to the local context and the Acholi tradition. One researcher found that rehabilitation centres are referred to as a white man's facility because of the nature of their formalities and the activities undertaken<sup>8</sup>.

**NGOs' capacities to look after the returnees are increasingly challenged.** NGOs are confronted with rising numbers of returnees and a multitude of demands when they work with adult ex-combatants. Besides providing for their basic needs, psychosocial support and counselling services are offered, families are traced, the Ugandan Amnesty Commission is contacted, arrangements for continuing education or skills training have to be made and follow-up strategies have to be designed and implemented. Some of the

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<sup>2</sup> researcher 2, page 21

<sup>3</sup> researcher 3, pages 28/29

<sup>4</sup> researcher 3, page 63 and researcher 4 page 9

<sup>5</sup> researcher 5, page 21

<sup>6</sup> researcher 4, page 6

<sup>7</sup> researcher 6, page 47

<sup>8</sup> researcher 6, page 43

centres were found to be overwhelmed by the sheer numbers of people needing support, given the limited resources available and the special challenges adult ex-child combatants are posing. In addition staff members who are directly entrusted with providing psychosocial support for ex-combatants are likely to suffer secondary traumatising from listening to the horrifying stories of returnees; and they themselves sometimes experience hostility from returnees, communities and state representatives.

**The activities for adult ex-combatants at the reception centres are generally well received and appreciated.** Most ex-combatants interviewed at the centres said that their involvement in activities such as counselling, music, drama, and debate helped them to live on despite the horrors of rebel captivity, and helped to give them a new sense to their lives. One 17 year old male ex-combatant who chose to join the LRA at the age of 13 to avenge the death of his parents, thought to be killed by the Ugandan army, praised the treatment he had received at GUSCO: "It helped me get relieved from the trauma and the related problems of the bush life. I no longer experience nightmares and now I have friends who love and help me in my problems"<sup>9</sup>. However, some adult returnees complained about the activities in the reception centres, which according to their view failed to prepare them adequately for civilian life in the community<sup>10</sup>. Others felt simply bored and wanted to go back to their homes as soon as possible so that they could engage in more constructive activities.

**NGOs have established comprehensive psychosocial follow-up services for adult ex-combatants.** All centres have developed their own procedures for follow-up visits and continuing assistance for the returnees. The need for further psychosocial support is assessed according to how well the ex-combatants are adapting to civilian life after they have been resettled. Under ideal circumstances this support would be available for up to three years after leaving the centres.

**However, due to the war, NGOs have been unable to offer their follow-up services outside the urban centres, where most returnees live.** During times of insecurity vehicles are not able to travel to some camps for extended periods. Current support structures thus rely on a safe environment, and are not suited to a period of ongoing war. Consequently, with the current level of insecurity and the increasing number of returnees, NGOs are often not in a position to implement their follow-up procedures and adult ex-combatants and their communities are left to themselves. In Pader District the security situation has been particularly bad, and meaningful resettlement support is largely absent.

**Follow-up is important for a successful reintegration process.** The experiences from Acholiland, as well as lessons drawn from other war-affected areas, show the need for comprehensive follow-up schemes for reintegration to be successful. In practice reintegration processes seem to be focused on the initial arrival and a brief period at a reception centre. Experience in northern Uganda and findings from Sierra Leone by Williamson and Cripe emphasise that "persons who have been abducted cannot be healed and sent home. The family and community need to be part of the process of healing because they are part of the wound. Counselling may be part of a process of recovery, but is not sufficient in itself". Although there is sensitivity towards this issue, ways to address it have not so far been implemented.

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<sup>9</sup> researcher 7, pages 21/22

<sup>10</sup> researcher 8, page 67

**Little is known about the long-term effects on the individual and the society of LRA ex-combatants joining the Ugandan armed forces.** Currently, the Ugandan army (UPDF) suggests to many ex-combatants returning from LRA captivity that they join the UPDF. Some do so voluntarily, others because they see no other option or are pressurised into this decision. On 14<sup>th</sup> July 2004 the New Vision (Uganda's government controlled daily paper) reported that a UPDF battalion of 296 returnees from the LRA was established. Whilst little is known about the long-term effects of such recruitment on these returnees, it is likely that this will put an additional obstacle in the way of reintegration and will prevent psychosocial healing. The decision to join the Ugandan armed forces shortly after leaving the LRA cannot be seen as a voluntary one.

**Adult ex-combatants urgently need to be empowered to earn their own living. The demand for viable training options and income generating projects is immense.** Our researchers found that the majority of respondents expressed the need to acquire vocational skills. Current options available for returnees to benefit from vocational training and income generating activities are limited, and in some cases they show weaknesses and a failure to adapt to the complex situation in northern Uganda. Many adult returnees are illiterate, too old for formal education, and are often not able to attend regular classes. Many of the current training approaches are thus not suitable for them<sup>11</sup>. In addition some of the vocational training opportunities currently on offer do not relate to market realities in war-torn Acholiland, do not include training in business skills, and thus do not help returnees to make a living after returning to their communities.

**Local structures within the camps are often well placed to provide support, though may currently lack the capacity to do so effectively.** Many local structures are already overwhelmed with demands, and would require assistance to become more effective in this field. Since international and large NGOs without permanent representation in the camps are often unable to operate outside the major urban centres and cannot offer services where they are most needed, strengthening local capacities is vital.

**The local government's Community Development Programmes present positive opportunities for members of the society to contribute towards the rehabilitation of adult ex-combatants.** Through the local government there are structures in place to deal with the needs of the different groups of returnees like women, children, people with disabilities and others. However, our assessment found that they often lack capacity in terms of human and financial resources, training and co-ordination. In addition implementation of programmes is regularly stalled by slow release of funds.

**Despite the many initiatives in Acholiland, many adult ex-combatants are falling through the safety net.** Either by choice or circumstances numerous returnees are not passing through local rehabilitation centres and thus are not registered for material and psychosocial assistance. Many adult ex-combatants return straight to their families in the camps, where they are either looked after by their relatives and the communities or are on their own. Others decide to settle directly in one of the towns in the north. Without having gone through one of the reception centres, it is difficult for any support worker to establish relationships, assess the returnees' needs

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<sup>11</sup> Researcher 9, page 12

and monitor the health and psychosocial state of the ex-combatants. This poses a special challenge to all involved in the reintegration process, touching diverse issues ranging from financial/material support, healthcare and counselling, training and education to granting amnesty and being informed about their rights and duties. One 16 year old female ex-combatant interviewed in Pader spoke with concern about her health condition and her ability to relate to those around her since returning. She did not go to a rehabilitation centre and instead of having been transferred to a hospital was nursed by her sister for one month before staying with her parents<sup>12</sup>. This trend seems to have increased since NGOs have moved out almost completely from some parts of Acholiland. Out of a group of 235 ex-combatants interviewed by one research team in Pader, only 60 had gone through a rehabilitation centre<sup>13</sup>.

**The inadequate assistance provided to the majority of adult ex-combatants and the shortcomings of their resettlement process lessens their chances for successful reintegration into society.** Reception centres declared that some adult ex-combatants would find their way back to them after resettlement, because life in the centres was more comfortable and generally easier and safer than in the villages and camps<sup>14</sup>. One 18 year old female ex-combatant spoke of her fear: "Life back home is very hard. There is no money and no food. And I feel uncomfortable eating well and sleeping in the centre knowing that one day I will go back to the suffering my relatives are going through"<sup>15</sup>. Other adult returnees consider turning to robbery and thuggery or going back to the LRA, where according to the interviews they received more provisions<sup>16</sup> and could grab what they wanted at will<sup>17</sup>. The reintegration process is faced with the high expectations of returnees and the dilemma, that limited attention and support often made ex-combatants wonder why they left the bush, while special treatment may look like a reward for former atrocities and prevents reintegration and acceptance in the communities.

**The current reality of assistance focuses on returnees and doesn't build the communities' capacity to deal with the influx of adult ex-combatants.** The resettlement support for returnees has to take into account the needs of the individual ex-combatant as well as those of the receiving communities. Currently these demands are not well balanced, and the community's requirements can sometimes be completely ignored. With the social fabric of communities already fragile, programmes which exclusively benefit ex-combatants are likely to work against the overall goal of integration. This is the case despite well researched findings from other African regions which point out the weaknesses of approaches that focus too heavily on the individual rather than the community (e.g. Williamson and Cripe, Mazurana and McKay, Save the Children working paper no.1). Community-based approaches involving adult returnees alongside others in income generating activities and reconstruction have not received sufficient attention in Acholiland.

**Resettlement help is needed but the resettlement packages at their current levels and in their current design are inadequate.** With their resettlement packages returnees typically receive items for their daily life like a blanket, a mattress,

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<sup>12</sup> researcher 10, page 8

<sup>13</sup> researcher 11, page 18

<sup>14</sup> researcher 10 page 8 and researcher 4, page 28

<sup>15</sup> researcher 12, page 40

<sup>16</sup> researcher 5, page 37

<sup>17</sup> researcher 2, page 22

basins, hoes and a panga, seeds and often a one-off sum of money of around US\$125. Our research indicates that the packages have proven to be inadequate to equip returnees for their civilian life. In their scope as well as in their lack of focus they can hardly be used as a first step in a sustainable reintegration process.

**We observed that the resettlement packages even at current levels cause resentment within the communities and often create a gap between the returnees and their communities.** The provision of resettlement support is often insensitive towards the fragile social set-up and the communal psyche of the receiving villages, and thus creates division in the community. There have been reports of members of the community being jealous of the special attention and the resettlement packages given to the ex-combatants. Singling out adult ex-combatants for special treatment may increase community resentment and compound their isolation. One woman interviewed in Kitgum said: "Why do these non-governmental organisations reward the children? They are rewarded for looting, killing and abducting our people"<sup>18</sup>.

**For adults seeking to return to civilian life a key issue is the need to earn a living.** Our research highlighted the problem that returnees face of there being few positive economic reasons to choose life in the community over that with the LRA. Desperate poverty in the camps, an economy too weak to absorb more poorly trained people, the difficulty of engaging in agriculture, and absence of many other opportunities to make a living make a return to life in the community an enormous challenge. This problem is even more acute for those with a disrupted education who may be unable to read or write. This is a problem more likely to be faced by those who have been in the bush for a longer period.

**The Acholi traditional leaders are essential in the reintegration and reconciliation process of adult ex-combatants. Their activities complement those of NGOs and the state.** While the traditional leaders play an important role opening communication channels between the Government of Uganda and the LRA and negotiating the release of captives, they are also of vital importance in holding welcoming and reconciliation rituals performed with ex-combatants and their communities. Rituals such as *mato oput* (ritually sharing a bitter herbal drink) and *nyono tong gweno* (stepping on eggs) have helped returnees to reintegrate successfully into their communities. However, researchers found that traditions have been undermined by the ongoing war and the disintegration of the Acholi culture. As one leader in Gulu put it: "With the continuing war, there is no guarantee that a child will not be abducted and made to kill once more. This poses a problem for us because the ceremony is not undertaken lightly. We cannot keep doing it every time they kill someone"<sup>19</sup>.

**Little is known about adult ex-combatants who migrate to Kampala and other Districts outside the Acholi-region.** Our research indicates that returnees often face mistrust from communities that are not familiar with the situation in the north and often do not understand the ex-combatants' background and the challenges they face. One 19 year old ex-combatant interviewed in the capital spoke of how some people enjoyed his stories about his life in captivity, and tried to sympathise with him and support him, whilst others didn't trust him and shunned him<sup>20</sup>. Other interviewees said they missed their homes and villages, but felt they were forced to live and work in the city due to the

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<sup>18</sup> researcher 13, page 23

<sup>19</sup> researcher 6, page 44

<sup>20</sup> researcher 14, page 24

ongoing war, to avoid re-abduction and due to the lack of economic opportunities in Acholiland. Many local councillors interviewed in Kampala viewed the Acholi adult ex-combatants with suspicion. Some even went so far as to attribute the increasing crime rate in certain areas of town to them. "They are the sources of fights in slums where they mostly live. Lately they have taken to playing pool and smoking *bangi* (marijuana). They are the reason the crime rate has gone up," stated an LC Chairman in a suburb of Kampala<sup>21</sup>. However, the efforts by many of these ex-combatants to find work in manual jobs has been regarded as a positive way of integrating them into the community. As one local official put it: "There is need to educate and train them on the normal ways of life. There must be jobs ready for them after leaving the reception centres. They should be kept busy so that they forget the life in captivity"<sup>22</sup>.

**Little is known about adult ex-combatants remaining in Sudan or moving to other African countries.** Our research highlighted the serious lack of knowledge concerning the legal status of LRA ex-combatants in Sudan and other African countries, the care provided for them (if any), their strategies to cope with their past experiences and their plans for the future.

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<sup>21</sup> researcher 14, page 18

<sup>22</sup> researcher 3, page 18

## Recommendations

The complex situation in northern Uganda demands a strong reintegration and resettlement process for adult ex-combatants. Changes especially in the following areas are needed in order to foster a better healing process for ex-combatants and better coping strategies for the communities, in order to improve reintegration and help stabilise society in northern Uganda.

### **The national and international legal and institutional framework.**

We recommend:

- a strong and sustained public endorsement of the Amnesty Act from the highest levels of government, local leaders and the international community to the affected communities. Such clear, unconditional and long-term commitment would contribute to building confidence in the amnesty on the ground. At the same time it would maximise the chances of commanders coming out in greater numbers and with their troops. In addition a clear and long-term commitment from the Government of Uganda towards the amnesty process would foster its effectiveness and solve some of the financial difficulties faced by Ugandan Amnesty Commission, since it would ease securing further funds.
- reconsidering the decision to exclude high ranking LRA commanders from the amnesty. The recent return of 'Brigadier' Kenneth Banya (reported 15<sup>th</sup> July 2004 on sources including UN OCHA's Integrated Regional Information Network IRIN), highlights their role in opening up this avenue for others.
- a proactive approach by the Amnesty Commission, and its empowerment to take a leading role in the reintegration and resettlement process. Co-ordination between security organs and civil society should be strengthened and the hand-over procedure of returnees has to be sped up, supervised by the Amnesty Commission. The Amnesty Commission must have immediate access to the returnees that is not subject to UPDF clearance. By placing one of the most crucial elements of the procedure back into civilian hands the amnesty process will help to build trust among the LRA-combatants and gain support among the local population.
- a thorough reconsideration of the possible implications of having the LRA's high command being charged by the International Criminal Court (ICC). The Government of Uganda, the country's civil society as well as lobby and advocacy groups abroad have to be informed about the consequences of the ICC's action and its effects on the war in Acholi. An open discussion with a representative forum is encouraged, which openly comes out with comments and recommendations. We strongly encourage comparative learning from similar processes in other parts of the world like Sierra Leone, Liberia, Rwanda, and South Africa.
- that the Government of Uganda takes the security needs of the adult returnees seriously and guarantees their personal safety. Their time spent in military custody has to be kept to a minimum (not at all would be ideal). Questioning of returnees for intelligence gathering should not be done in military installations, and should always be conducted in the presence of non-military staff and within a clearly communicated time-frame.
- that the UPDF does not recruit among ex LRA-combatants and that adult returnees are not immediately offered a military job. Such practices jeopardize the psychosocial healing and successful reintegration of returnees, and instead

- put them at risk once more. Forceful recruitment into the armed forces has to be prohibited and effectively prevented. These efforts have to be undertaken in Sudan where the UPDF is active as well as in Uganda.
- an assessment should be done of the needs of ex-combatants who decide to stay in Sudan in order to discover ways to enable them to benefit from reintegration and support programmes. In addition we urge for a clarification of their legal and de facto status.
  - more international involvement in monitoring the way in which former LRA fighters are received by society and the state, especially the armed forces and security organs. This monitoring initiative should cover the situation in Northern Uganda as well as southern Sudan.
  - that more resources are made available by the Government of Uganda and the international community to support this area of the reintegration process of adult ex-combatants.
  - that all parties involved co-ordinate their activities in a spirit of mutual trust and openness.

### **The families, communities, regions and the nation who receive adult ex-combatants.**

We recommend

- that all parties involved in the reintegration and resettlement processes of adult ex-combatants are sensitive to the fragile social fabric of war-torn societies. This implies adopting approaches to reintegration that engage in a holistic way with returning individuals and their communities.
- that the general good will of and welcoming atmosphere in the communities is not taken for granted. In order to increase the chances of successful reintegration, we urge ongoing sensitisation in the communities, especially in regards to the challenges of receiving adults and long-term abductees.
- participatory planning and decision making processes for the reintegration and resettlement of adult ex-combatants with early and constant involvement of the communities. This should be a central element of all planning for reintegration processes. We encourage approaches that enable community participation even in times of high insecurity.
- further research into how the war has changed the social structure and its mechanisms. In this regard we strongly encourage an assessment of how the experiences of young people challenge the pre-war authority structures and how this challenge is handled in the affected communities.
- more research on social and moral obstacles that keep people from accepting ex-combatants back in the communities.
- a thorough assessment of the capacities of the receiving communities to cope with the influx of adult ex-combatants. This should include an investigation of the experiences of earlier returnees, implications of the current security situation on these capacities, and the economic options for former LRA combatants.
- building up additional advice and support services for the community members and equipping the leaders in the communities with additional skills to handle possible social frictions due to the influx of adult ex-combatants. In this regard, lessons can be learned from other war zones and the way the reintegration processes were handled there.
- strengthening the roles of traditional and cultural leaders, elders as well as religious leaders. We encourage – where necessary and accepted – a clarification



- of the interventions of the leaders in regard to their contribution towards the reintegration process. Where necessary and agreed upon the involvement of the leaders could be adapted to the changing demands.
- actively engaging the communities to ensure the returnees' safety, e.g. through joint activities of the former combatants and the community members.
  - extreme sensitivity concerning the distribution of resettlement benefits for ex-combatants, in a way that fosters the returnees' reintegration and does not lead to further isolation/stigmatisation in the communities. A comparative study on the impacts of individual resettlement packages, joint resettlement help and community development initiatives is needed and strongly encouraged.
  - that resettlement packages are tailor-made for the demands of the individual returnee and the community welcoming him/her, based on a prior assessment.
  - that the Government of Uganda, local leaders as well as local and international organisations also attend to the needs of adult ex-combatants who moved out of the war-affected region. There is a need to trace adult ex-combatants wherever they are in Uganda and offer them the services needed for their reintegration.
  - that more resources be allocated to the reintegration process of adult ex-combatants, when this process is one that engages communities fully in their design, implementation, and as beneficiaries.

### **The psycho-social well being of adult ex-combatants after returning from LRA captivity.**

We recommend:

- more research on the psycho-social needs of adult ex-combatants, and the psycho-social support needed for reintegration especially in the context of ongoing war. In this regard we encourage comparative learning from other regions where reintegration processes have been undertaken to draw lessons for improved services in northern Uganda.
- that – informed by further research – comprehensive psycho-social support programmes for adult ex-combatants increase their awareness of the diversity of returnees and acknowledge their diverse needs, thus increasing the prospects of successful reintegration.
- the development of services that ensure that returnees and their communities are reached where they live – currently mostly in the IDP camps. Services that are running in a conflict areas to support reintegration need to be designed to be operated within the prevailing security situation.
- sustained psycho-social support beyond the period immediately following the return to the communities, and better co-ordination between centre based counselling and rehabilitation efforts and the community based support after the ex-combatants have returned to their families and communities.
- further adaptation of the currently used Western concept of psychosocial care to accommodate local Acholi culture and an extension of the psycho-social services to the families and communities of returnees.
- programmes that prevent the isolation and stigmatisation of returnees.
- a higher degree of engagement with and support for local capacities to implement psychosocial support in the camps and rural areas. In order to establish an effective programme for psycho-social support in the ongoing conflict it is necessary to work through local structures that are present whatever the security situation, and to establish strong connections with local bodies that are able to operate from within the camps. Even through this route provision is

- likely to be patchy, but it could be a considerable improvement on the existing situation.
- a flexible approach able to respond to the situation on a camp by camp basis. The opportunities for delivering support through local structures are different in each camp, e.g. in some places the churches provide an excellent contact point. In others traditional leaders, or local government LC1 or LC3s are particularly active. Elsewhere community based counsellors, paralegal workers, peace committee members, training or self-help initiatives and others might provide a route through which support could be offered.
  - increased support for local, often small NGOs which address the specific and diverse needs of adult returnees such as mothers and women who are pregnant, the disabled, and the illiterate, and that are able to deliver services in remote areas.
  - establishing a culture of sharing among practitioners, government structures, researchers and funders.
  - better co-operation between government structures, local initiatives and NGOs and an integration of the rehabilitation process with other responses addressing the consequences of the war implemented in the area.
  - comprehensive documentation of the different approaches, their effectiveness and comparative learning from other conflict areas.
  - additional resources for increased support for psycho-social support measures for returning adult ex-combatants. In accordance with the finding of further research this support should be tailored specifically to the needs of adults – as opposed to those of children – and the complex situation in northern Uganda.
  - that funders take their responsibility seriously to ensure that more crucial aspects of the psycho-social support process are taken care of in programmes, that the healing also addresses the families and communities, and that people are reached where they are living. In many cases, agencies would need to make large adjustments to their practice.

### **The economic and social well being of adult ex-combatants after returning from LRA captivity.**

We recommend:

- engaging local structures early on in the resettlement process, especially in the camps and rural areas. They are well placed to deliver inclusive community based support and are essential to foster acceptance of, and build ties with, the returnees.
- the development of economic and social reintegration schemes that avoid the isolation and further stigmatisation of returning adult ex-combatants. Recent studies of other war areas have highlighted the particular importance of a comprehensive approach.
- that economic and social reintegration measures aim at increasing the ex-combatants' self-esteem and offering them different ways in which to rebuild a positive identity.
- that programmes design in from the start aspects that cater for the diversity of adult returnees in order to account for the complex situation in northern Uganda and the different backgrounds of the returnees.
- tailor-made help for adult returnees to become economically independent and thus ease their reintegration into society.

- the development of special catch-up classes for people with limited time in school in order to enable them to finish their formal education.
- offering vocational training opportunities for those returnees too old/too long out of school to return to formal education. The new training methods have to take into account the learning habits of adult ex-combatants and thus we encourage the development of suitable approaches for those who are illiterate or who find it hard to concentrate.
- short term courses which offer realistic opportunities in the communities; e.g. combining vocational training with teaching of business skills, enabling them to gain practical experiences and providing them with tools/starting kits.
- that the support for returnees should ideally be integrated with other initiatives in the community, e.g. reconstruction done jointly by ex-combatants and other community members. Through such an approach the whole community will benefit and the perception could be prevented that resettlement help is a reward for atrocities.
- investigation into the development of appropriate agricultural programmes where possible. This sector can absorb large number of poorly educated youth. Agriculture offers employment opportunities in rural areas for both women and men, and the adult ex-combatants could become change agents for new farming methods and improved agricultural skills. However, we are aware that the current security situation does not favour this recommendation.
- exploring possibilities of establishing mutual support structures among adult ex-combatants, provided this can be done in ways that do not compound their isolation and exposing them further to animosity from receiving communities. These support groups could be actively involved in constantly adapting the approaches used and in helping to formulate policies.
- the detailed documentation of the approaches used and their effectiveness. In addition we encourage a culture of sharing among practitioners and researchers on local, national and international level and comparative learning from similar situations elsewhere.
- that more resources are made available for this area of the reintegration process of adult ex-combatants, where those processes involve communities in their design, implementation, and as beneficiaries.

## APPENDIX 1: Acronyms

The following is a list of acronyms in the report, plus others that are in local use, or relevant to the war in Northern Uganda.

AAEP	Agago Adult Education Project
ACORD	Agency for Cooperation and Research in Development
ADA	Acholi Development Association
AEI	Acholi Education Initiative
APC	Acholi Pacification Committee
APG	Acholi Parliamentary Group
ARCDP	Agago Rural Community Development Project
ARLPI	Acholi Religious Leaders' Peace Initiative
AU	African Union
AVSI	Association of Volunteer Services International
BCP	Bricklaying and Concrete Practice
CAO	Chief Administrative Officer
CBO	Community Based Organization
CBVC	Community Based Volunteer Counsellors
CCF	Christian Children's Fund
CDO	Community Development Officer
CJ	Carpentry and Joinery
CPA	Concerned Parents Association
CPAR	Canadian Physicians for Aid and Relief
CPU	Child Protection Unit
CR	Conciliation Resources
CRC	Convention on the Rights of the Child
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
CVC	Community Volunteer Counsellors
DANIDA	Danish International Development Agency
DDMC	District Disaster Management Committee
DISO	District Internal Security Officer
DRPT	District Reconciliation and Peace Team
DRT	Demobilisation and Resettlement Team
EPPOVHA	Education for Peace and Prevention of Violence and HIV/AIDS
ESO	External Security Organisation
EU	European Union
FAC	Formerly Abducted Children
GUSCO	Gulu Support the Children Organisation
GWAD	Grass Roots Women for Development
HURIFO	Human Rights Focus

ICC	International Criminal Court
IDP	Internally Displaced People
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
IGA	Income Generating Activities
INGO	International Non-governmental Organisation
IOM	International Organization of Migration
IRC	International Rescue Committee
ISO	International Security Organisation
JFP	Joint Forum for Peace
KICWA	Kitgum Concerned Women's Association
KINGFO	Kitgum Non-Governmental Organisation Forum
KJFP	Kitgum Joint Forum for Peace
KTI	Kitgum Technical Institute
LC	Local Council/ Local Councillor
LDU	Local Defence Unit
LRA	Lord's Resistance Army
NGO	Non Governmental Organisation
NRC	Norwegian Refugee Council
PNF	Pader NGO Forum
PVP	People's Voice for Peace
RDC	Resident District Commissioner
SCD	Save the Children Denmark
STI	Sexually Transmitted Infection
UN	United Nations
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UPDF	Uganda People's Defence Force (the Ugandan national army)
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WFP	World Food Programme
WV	World Vision
YAD	Youth Action For Development

## APPENDIX 2: Returnees interviewed for this research

The names of individual interviewees have been withheld for their own privacy and protection. The figures below indicate their numbers and location at the time of the interview.

District	No.	Where interviewed
<b>Gulu</b>	1	Bungatira
	1	Patiko
	1	Paicho
	30	Omoro County (focus group)
	3	Lacor Hospital
	2	Unyama Camp
	1	Lacor Seminary Camp
	1	Parabongo trading centre
	1	Pabbo Camp
	1	Palenga
	9	World Vision reception centre
	<b>51</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Kitgum</b>	80	KICWA reception centre (focus group)
	4	KICWA reception centre
	4	CPA reception centre
	3	Kitgum town
	<b>91</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Pader</b>	5	World Vision reception centre
	37	Patongo camp
	2	CPA
	13	Pader camp
	11	Puranga camp
	235	Lapul, Pajule and Pader camps
	<b>303</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Kampala</b>	1	Kireka Olede
	1	Soweto, Namuwongo
	1	details not given
	2	Luzira Prison
	2	Kinawataka
	<b>7</b>	<b>Total</b>

## NGOs and INGOs contacted for this research

The following local and international non-governmental organisations kindly assisted us with the research work.

District	Name of NGO/INGO	Acronym
<b>Gulu</b>	Acholi Education Initiative	AEI
	African Youth Development	
	Agency for Co-operation Research and Development	ACORD
	AMREF	AMREF
	Acholi Religious Leaders' Peace Initiative	ARLPI
	Association of Volunteer Services International	AVSI
	Caritas	
	Concerned Parents' Association	CPA
	Canadian Physicians for Aid and Relief	CPAR
	Education for Peace and the Prevention of Violence and HIV/AIDS	EPPOVHA
	Gulu Support the Children Organisation	GUSCO
	Norwegian Refugee Council	NRC
	Save the Children Denmark	SCD
	SOS Children's Village International	
	World Food Programme	WFP
	World Vision Psychosocial Project and Rehabilitation Centre	
<b>Kitgum</b>	Acholi Religious Leaders' Peace Initiative	ARLPI
	Association of Volunteer Services International	AVSI
	Caritas	
	Concerned Parents' Association	CPA
	Kitgum Children's Welfare Association	KICWA
	Kitgum NGO Forum	KINGFO
	World Food Programme	WFP
	World Vision	WV
<b>Pader</b>	Agago Integrated Rural Based Education Project	
	Caritas	
	Christian Children's Fund	
	Concerned Parents' Association	CPA
	International Committee for the Red Cross	ICRC
	Pader NGO Forum	
	United Nations Children's Fund	UNICEF
	World Vision	WV
<b>Kampala</b>	Association of Volunteer Services International Head Office	AVSI
	Alliance for African Assistance	
	SOS Children's Home, Entebbe	
	AIM Programme	
	United Nations Children's Fund Head Office	UNICEF

## Civil Society contacts

The following members of civil society assisted us with our research.

District	Individual/role	Location, organisation
Gulu	Local leader	Lacor Hospital
	Local leader	Unyama Camp
	Elder	Obia Village
	Father of ex-combatant	
	Member of community	Lacor trading centre
	Mothers of ex-combatants	
	Opinion leader	Laliya
	Radio One Reporter	Gulu town
	Radio Simba/Monitor Reporter	Gulu town
	Teacher ?	St Joe Primary School
Kitgum	Trader	Atiak
	Youth leader	Awer camp
		Kitgum local government hospital
	Administrator	
	Community volunteer counsellor	Amida sub-county
	Cultural leader	Amida sub-county
	News reporter	
	Religious leader	
	Teacher	Alango village
Pader	22 community members including traditional leaders	
Kampala	Retired civil servant	Namuwongo
	Youth leader	

## Uganda People's Defence Force (UPDF) contacts

	District	Location
Gulu	4th Division Officer	
	Public Relations Officer	
	Lieutenant	Katikati detach
	PC	Koro HQ
	Captain	Koro HQ
	PC	Unyama detach
	Child Protection Unit Project Officer	Gulu town
Kitgum	Officer	Kitgum town
Pader	Brigade commander	
	Officer	
Kampala	Northern Platoon Commander	



## Government contacts

District	Body	Location
<b>Gulu</b>	Amnesty Commission Regional Office	Gulu town
	LC5 Chairman	Gulu town
	LC representative	Laibi Central
	LC representative	Unyama Camp
	LC representative	Awera Camp
	Resident District Commissioner	Gulu town
<b>Kitgum</b>	Amnesty Commission	Kitgum town
	Community Development Officer	Kitgum town
	Assistant Community Development Officer	Kitgum town
	District Disaster Management Committee	Kitgum town
	LC1	
	LC3	
<b>Pader</b>	Chief Administrative Officer	Pader town
	Community Development Officer	Pader town
	District Disaster Management Committee	Pader town
	LC5 Chairman	Pader town
	LC representative Pajule	Pader town
	Resident District Commissioner	Pader town
<b>Kampala</b>	Amnesty Commission Head Office	Kampala city
	Community Welfare Officer	Kampala city
	LC5 Chairman	Kanyogoga
	Member of Parliament for Agago County, Latigo MP	Kampala city
	Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Dev, Project Co-ordinator	Kampala city
	Project Co-ordinator (probation)	
	Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Dev,	Kampala city
	Commissioner for youth and children Project Co-ordinator	
	Uganda Human Rights Commission Head Office	Kampala city

## APPENDIX 3: Inventory of Agencies Concerned with Ex-Combatants

### Inventory of Agencies: National and International NGOs

Name	Overview and Main Activities Concerning Adult Ex-Combatants	Area of Focus
Acholi Religious Leaders' Peace Initiative (ARLPI)	<p><b>Overview:</b> Established in February 1998 by Catholic, Protestant and Muslim religious leaders from Acholiland ARLPI aims to promote peace and development through negotiation, mediation and dialogue. It actively supports a peaceful settlement between the Government of Uganda and the Lord's Resistance Army and advocates for the rights of children and adults in conflict.</p> <p><b>Main activities concerning ex-combatants</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Research and documentation on conflict and peace issues</li> <li>• Peace advocacy and mediation</li> <li>▪ Advocating for children's and adults' rights</li> <li>▪ Peace education for local communities</li> <li>▪ Family tracing and transport of ex-combatants to reception centres and villages</li> <li>▪ Providing education opportunities for ex-combatants</li> </ul>	Gulu, Kitgum
Agago Adult Education Project (AAEP)	<p><b>Overview:</b> Founded in 1999 the community based organisation AAEP aims to promote social, economic and cultural empowerment of the war-affected population.</p> <p><b>Main activities concerning ex-combatants</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Promotion of vocational and non-formal education, training for school drop-outs, ex-combatants and people with disabilities</li> <li>▪ Community education in economic empowerment, human rights and HIV/AIDS awareness</li> <li>▪ Training of community volunteers for providing information and education</li> </ul>	Pader
Alliance for African Assistance	<p><b>Overview:</b> Founded in 2001, the Kampala-based Alliance for African Assistance aims to support child refugees. With UNHCR, the Alliance for African Assistance has recently extended its services to ex-combatants in Kampala and plans to build a resettlement centre in Gulu town in the near future.</p> <p><b>Main activities concerning ex-combatants</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Sponsoring of education</li> <li>▪ Organising recreational activities</li> <li>▪ Offering educational programs on HIV/AIDS, malaria and the importance of education</li> </ul>	Kampala, Gulu
Christian Children's Fund (CCF)	<p><b>Overview:</b> The CCF aims to develop the life of children by promoting self-reliance in the family and the community.</p> <p><b>Main activities concerning ex-combatants</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Sponsoring of children's education</li> <li>▪ Providing education material and classroom space</li> </ul>	Pader (office currently in Lira)
Concerned Parents Association (CPA)	<p><b>Overview:</b> CPA was established by parents of abductees from St. Mary's College, Aboke, in Lira in 1996. Its objectives include the immediate and unconditional release of all abducted children, the prevention of further abductions and awareness raising about the situation in northern Uganda.</p> <p><b>Main activities concerning ex-combatants</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Research, lobby and advocacy work</li> <li>▪ Campaigning against the abuse of children's and other human rights abuses</li> </ul>	Gulu, Kitgum, Apac, Lira

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Facilitate release of abductees</li> <li>Rehabilitation centres for returnees</li> <li>Provision of resettlement package for ex-combatants</li> <li>Training for staff and community volunteers in follow-up and monitoring of returnees after resettlement</li> <li>Sponsoring of education at primary and secondary levels as well as vocational training</li> <li>Promotion of income generating activities including provision of goats</li> </ul>	
Education for Peace and Prevention of Violence and HIV/AIDS (EPPOVHA)	<p><b>Overview:</b> EPPOVHA was formed to work towards the realisation of peace through prevention of violence whilst combating the HIV/AIDS scourge in Gulu.</p> <p><b>Main activities concerning ex-combatants</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sensitisation on HIV/AIDS</li> <li>Training on violence prevention</li> <li>Peace education/peace clubs</li> </ul>	Gulu
Grass Roots Women for Development (GWAD)	<i>not featured in research, no information available</i>	Gulu
Gulu Support the Children Organisation (GUSCO)	<p><b>Overview:</b> Established in 1994, GUSCO's work aims to improve the well-being of formerly abducted and war-affected children through rehabilitation and reintegration programmes. It also engages in capacity building of families and communities towards the realisation of children's rights through self-reliance. GUSCO opened a reception centre in Gulu in 1997.</p> <p><b>Main activities concerning ex-combatants</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reception centre for child ex-combatants</li> <li>Reception centre activities e.g. basic support, life skills training, and other activities</li> <li>Provision of resettlement package</li> <li>Needs assessment of returnees</li> <li>Counselling services and psycho-social support for returnees and their families</li> <li>Family tracing resettlement</li> <li>Follow-up of resettled returnee</li> <li>Training of teachers and community members in psychosocial support</li> <li>Community sensitisation</li> <li>Provision of revolving fund to income generating activity groups of war-affected families</li> <li>Provision of tools to children who have completed vocational training</li> <li>Children's rights advocacy through radio programs and clubs</li> </ul>	Gulu
Kitgum Concerned Women's Association (KICWA)	<p><b>Overview:</b> Established in 1998 by ten volunteer women who were concerned with the logistical and security difficulties at the time of having only one reception centre in Gulu. KICWA provides physical and psychosocial support to formerly abducted children. Through its reception centre in Kitgum, KICWA helps to rehabilitate returnees, reunites them with their families and integrates formerly abducted children in their communities.</p> <p><b>Main activities concerning ex-combatants</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reception and rehabilitation centre for returnees under the age of 18</li> <li>Reception centre activities e.g. dances, sport, music, drama, debates, health education, cooking and cleaning</li> <li>Training in business skills</li> <li>Family tracing</li> <li>Resettlement and reintegration of returnees with their families</li> <li>Follow-up and monitoring of returnees after resettlement</li> </ul>	Kitgum

Kitgum NGO Forum (KINGFO)	<i>no information available:</i> project stalled due to lack of adequate funding and conflicting interests of stakeholders	Kitgum
Pader NGO Forum (PNF)	<p><b>Overview:</b> The consortium of 18 civil society organisations was founded in 2002 with the aim of strengthening the capacity of CSOs in Pader, with the long term goal of eradicating poverty and creating demand for good governance. It seeks to co-ordinate CSOs for effective service delivery; and to promote transparency, opportunity for all, organisational integrity, collective responsibility and urgency.</p> <p><b>Main activities concerning ex-combatants</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Co-ordination of all government, non-government and international agencies working in Pader</li> <li>▪ Networking with stakeholders on humanitarian crisis</li> <li>▪ Advocating and lobbying for IDPs in Pader, Lira and Kotido</li> <li>▪ Monitor relief work</li> <li>▪ Update data on status of IDPs</li> <li>▪ Civic education programs in leadership and accountability, good governance and public awareness</li> <li>▪ Train CSOs to look after community and ex-combatant needs</li> </ul>	Pader
People's Voice for Peace (PVP)	<p><b>Overview:</b> Formed by a group of workers from ACORD PVP works to support victims of the war in and around Gulu Municipality. Initially focused on women they now work with both women and men. They work through a network of small self-help groups that they have established. Their work is not focus on but can include returnees.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Income generation schemes supported through small loans</li> <li>▪ Revolving goat project</li> <li>▪ Community based support/counselling</li> </ul>	Gulu

## Inventory of Agencies: International NGOs

Name	Overview and Activities Concerning Ex-Combatants	Area of Focus
Action Aid	<p><b>Overview:</b> Action Aid supports people's efforts to eradicate poverty. Its programmes focus on women's rights, basic education, agriculture, HIV/AIDS, peacemaking processes, relief and rehabilitation.</p> <p><b>Main activities concerning ex-combatants</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Supports the activities of AAEP in Pader</li> <li>▪ Supports community sensitisation programs in peace-building</li> <li>▪ Supports relief and rehabilitation programs</li> <li>▪ Advocates for rights of war-affected victims, especially children</li> <li>▪ Supports community initiatives in conflict and violence prevention</li> </ul>	Kampala, Pader
Agency for Co-operation and Research in Development (ACORD)	<p><b>Overview:</b> ACORD started out as an NGO engaged in community capacity building for self-reliance. It developed a programme for handling traumatised adults of the war and handling the psychosocial needs of war affected adults. Their objectives have now been expanded and include peace-building, food security, research, capacity building and micro-finance for adult returnees in 3 sub-counties.</p> <p><b>Main activities concerning ex-combatants</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Community capacity building and self-reliance</li> <li>▪ Psychosocial programme for war-affected adults</li> <li>▪ Training and raising awareness through handbooks, building manuals and video tapes</li> <li>▪ Support to religious, cultural, educational and health institutions in handling returnees</li> <li>▪ Supply of farming material to IDPs</li> <li>▪ Micro-finance projects for adult returnees</li> </ul>	Gulu, Kitgum, Pader
Association of Volunteer Services International (AVSI)	<p><b>Overview:</b> AVSI is an Italian humanitarian organisation which engages in psychosocial and health support, education and responses to emergencies. It also supports local NGOs such as GUSCO and CPA in these activities.</p> <p><b>Main activities concerning ex-combatants</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Sponsors education of disadvantaged children and university students, including ex-combatants</li> <li>▪ Vocational training of ex-combatants in e.g. bricklaying, carpentry and metal fabrication.</li> <li>▪ Training of community volunteer counsellors in helping reintegrate ex-combatants</li> <li>▪ Provides medical care to ex-combatants</li> <li>▪ Supports income-generating activities for families</li> <li>▪ Kitgum office co-ordinates activities of local NGOs</li> </ul>	Kampala, Gulu, Kitgum
Canadian Physicians Aid for Relief (CPAR)	<p><b>Overview:</b> CPAR operates a community-based programme for psychosocial support and reintegration of returnee children in 5 sub-counties in Gulu.</p> <p><b>Main activities concerning ex-combatants</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ psychosocial support and mental counselling for returnees and victims of war</li> <li>▪ supports treatment of STIs and other diseases</li> <li>▪ promotes environmental and landmine awareness</li> <li>▪ supports community based programs</li> </ul>	Kampala, Gulu
CARITAS	<p><b>Overview:</b> CARITAS is a social services and development agency which operates at a national level in Uganda and is a representative of the worldwide Catholic Church. Its mission is: to co-operate with partners to ensure that a strong sense of humanity and dignity is restored in former captives and war affected persons through spiritual and psychological therapies; to build</p>	Gulu, Kitgum, Pader

	<p>capacities of the community to handle psychosocial issues, by training community based volunteer counsellors; and to incite and promote solidarity in the community, with particular focus on justice and charity.</p> <p>With ex-combatants, it aims to cater for their physical and spiritual wellbeing through medical care, material assistance and psychosocial support, and to facilitate training of victims of war in productive skills that will promote economic empowerment and self-reliance.</p> <p><b>Main activities concerning ex-combatants</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ rehabilitation and reintegration of ex-combatants; reception centre in Pajule</li> <li>▪ counselling and spiritual healing for ex-combatants through psychosocial support programme (PSSP)</li> <li>▪ medical screening and treatment</li> <li>▪ follow-up and monitoring of ex-combatants after reintegration</li> <li>▪ community sensitisation of ex-combatants needs, in partnership with local cultural, women and youth leaders</li> <li>▪ training of community based volunteers to offer counselling services</li> <li>▪ material support e.g. blankets to families and the community</li> <li>▪ facilitates vocational training of returnees and other victims of war</li> </ul>	
International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)	<p><b>Overview:</b> The ICRC has a purely impartial humanitarian mission to protect the lives and dignity of victims of war and internal violence and to provide them with assistance. The ICRC opened a delegation in Uganda in 1997. The Kitgum office was inactive at the time of research.</p> <p><b>Main activities concerning ex-combatants</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Provides material support e.g. saucepans, soap, blankets to all war-affected civilians in Kitgum</li> <li>▪ Provides emergency medical aid to Kitgum Local Government Hospital</li> <li>▪ Provide basic materials such as jerricans, tents, blankets etc to reception centres and IDP camps</li> </ul>	Kampala, Kitgum
International Organisation of Migration (IOM)	<p><b>Overview:</b> IOM holds that humane and orderly migration benefits migrants and society. IOM acts to assist in the management of migration, advance understanding of migration issues, and to uphold the human dignity and well-being of migrants. <i>We have limited information on their activities relating to adult ex-combatants.</i></p>	Kampala, Gulu
Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC)	<p><b>Overview:</b> NRC is a humanitarian organisation which has been working in Uganda since 1997, mainly with food distribution and education programmes. It aims to improve international protection of refugees and IDPs and to provide humanitarian assistance regardless of race, religion, creed and political views.</p> <p><b>Main activities concerning ex-combatants</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Advocacy for and legal assistance to IDPs</li> <li>▪ Counselling of IDPs</li> <li>▪ Food distribution and logistical support</li> <li>▪ Human rights training and awareness through radio programmes, workshops and consultations</li> <li>▪ Training of paralegals to give legal guidance to the community</li> <li>▪ Facilitates training of teachers at schools in IDP camps</li> </ul>	Gulu
Oxfam	<p><b>Overview:</b> Oxfam works internationally as part of a world-wide movement to build a just and safer world. In Northern Uganda Oxfam is providing emergency water supplies, sanitation facilities and basic household items.</p> <p><b>Main activities concerning ex-combatants</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Provides farming materials e.g. tools, goats and cattle to IDP camps in Kitgum</li> </ul>	Kampala, Kitgum
Racheleri Child Rehabilitation Centre	<p><b>Overview:</b> Established in October 2003 by the Belgian Government and individual sponsors this rehabilitation centre for children in Lira providing accommodation and psychosocial support.</p>	Lira

Save the Children Denmark (SCD)	<p><b>Overview:</b> SCD primarily focuses on community-managed school construction, and the development and implementation of the Child Protection Unit/ education of UPDF in child rights. They have also developed a programme for recreational support for children and promotion of reconciliation and peace-building.</p> <p><b>Main activities concerning ex-combatants</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Development of UPDF Child Protection Unit, including training of UPDF in child rights &amp; reintegration</li> <li>▪ Supports community based construction of education institutions</li> <li>▪ Capacity building for child support agencies e.g. GUSCO</li> <li>▪ Provides counselling for ex-combatants</li> <li>▪ Advocates for child rights</li> </ul>	Kampala, Gulu
SOS Children's Village (part of SOS Kinderdorf International)	<p><b>Overview:</b> SOS Children's Village is a strategic initiative of SOS Kinderdorf International, an agency which aims to strengthen families and prevent abandonment. Working with the Department of Social Welfare and the district authorities, SOS Children's Village aims to mobilise and support community based responses to children whose families cannot adequately provide for their basic needs. The ultimate aim of this work is to reintegrate children into the community as responsible and independent citizens.</p> <p><b>Main activities concerning ex-combatants</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Reception and rehabilitation centre for ex-combatants below the age of 10</li> <li>▪ Day care centre for children under 6 from vulnerable or disadvantaged families</li> <li>▪ Provides care and support to children affected by HIV/AIDS</li> <li>▪ Training of care-givers, including mothers</li> <li>▪ Planned programme to focus on counselling and business training for returnee child-mothers</li> </ul>	Land allocated for construction of Village in Gulu; currently in Entebbe and Wakiso
United Nations Children's Fund	<p><b>Overview:</b> UNICEF advocates for the protection of children's rights, to help them meet their basic needs and to expand their opportunities to reach their full potential. It is committed to ensuring special protection for the most disadvantaged children including those who are victims of war.</p> <p><b>Main activities concerning ex-combatants</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Advocates for children's rights in conflict situations</li> <li>▪ Documents and researches the needs of children</li> <li>▪ Provides educational support to orphans</li> <li>▪ Builds schools</li> <li>▪ Provides psychosocial support through the Community Development and other programmes</li> </ul>	Office opening shortly in Gulu; works through CDO in Pader
World Vision	<p><b>Overview:</b> World Vision has been addressing the needs of the war-affected children since 1995 through its Ugandan Children of War Rehabilitation Programme in Gulu. Since its establishment, it has helped reintegrate over 7000 children.</p> <p><b>Main activities concerning ex-combatants</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Psychosocial support/reception centre in Gulu</li> <li>▪ Reception centre activities e.g. dance, music, drama, debate, sport</li> <li>▪ Provides health care to ex-combatants</li> <li>▪ Business training and micro-finance projects for communities and ex-combatants</li> <li>▪ Family tracing and reintegration of ex-combatants</li> <li>▪ Provides resettlement package e.g. food, clothes</li> <li>▪ Development of vocational schools/institutions to help ex-combatants</li> <li>▪ Distribution of relief to communities</li> </ul>	Gulu, Kitgum, Pader (currently working from Gulu due to insecurity)

### Inventory of Agencies: The Ugandan State: UPDF, Government and Local Government

Name	Overview and Main Activities Concerning Ex-Combatants	Area of Focus
Uganda Amnesty Commission	<p><b>Overview:</b> The Amnesty Commission was established in July 2000 to implement the Amnesty Act. Its Demobilisation and Resettlement Team work for arms decommissioning and the demobilisation, resettlement and reintegration (DRR) of reporters.</p> <p><b>Main activities concerning ex-combatants</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Implementation of the Amnesty Act</li> <li>▪ Facilitation of the return of ex-combatants through the DRR Team</li> <li>▪ Community sensitisation relating to the Amnesty Law through radio programmes</li> <li>▪ Promotion of traditional and other appropriate reconciliation methods</li> </ul>	Kampala (Head Office), Gulu (including the DRR team), Kitgum
Child Protection Unit (CPU)	<p><b>Overview:</b> The CPU is under the wing of the UPDF, and has centres within and outside the army barracks, where all ex-combatants are required to register before being taken to a rehabilitation centre or their villages.</p> <p><b>Main activities concerning ex-combatants</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Reception centre and psychosocial support for returnees</li> <li>▪ Transfers returnees to rehabilitation centres and villages</li> </ul>	
Chief Administrative Officer (CAO)	<p><b>Overview:</b> The CAO keeps records of all civilians in the district. S/he monitors the activities of NGOs operating in the area, and among other tasks is responsible for keeping up to date records of Internally Displaced People (IDPs).</p> <p><b>Main activities concerning ex-combatants</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Where possible, provide basic requirements e.g. clothing, food, cooking utensils and transport to returnees</li> <li>▪ Advocates for community support for ex-combatants</li> </ul>	All districts
Community Development Office (CDO)	<p><b>Overview:</b> CDOs operate at district level to address the immediate and long-term needs of the community. It has a District Implementation Team, a Probation Welfare Department, a District Planner and a Finance Department among others. They train members of the community in counselling, teaching and healthcare. It collaborates with NGOs to provide support to the war-affected population, such as the distribution of food.</p> <p><b>Main activities concerning ex-combatants</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Psychosocial support program, which includes community volunteer counsellors and representatives from disadvantaged groups e.g. women and children, people with disabilities</li> <li>▪ Maintain and update data on returnees</li> <li>▪ Community volunteers provide traumatised returnees with counselling and follow-up post-resettlement</li> <li>▪ Support tracing and reunion</li> <li>▪ Community sensitisation of needs of ex-combatants</li> <li>▪ Training of counsellors, teachers and health workers</li> </ul>	All districts
District Reconciliation and Peace Team (DRPT)	<p><b>Overview:</b> The DRPT in Gulu was set up by local government officials to co-ordinate their peace-building activities with those of the NGOs operating in the area. The team includes officials from the RDC's and Local Councillors' offices.</p> <p><b>Main activities concerning ex-combatants</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Co-ordinates activities of local organisations concerned with peace-building and rehabilitation of ex-combatants</li> <li>▪ Prepares community to receive ex-combatants</li> </ul>	Gulu



Joint Forum for Peace (JFP)	<p><b>Overview:</b> JFP operates to the same mandate as the DRPT in Gulu and District Forum in Pader, to seek to co-ordinate peace-building efforts by all agencies with local government activities.</p> <p><b>Main activities concerning ex-combatants</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Seeks to co-ordinate organisations concerned with peace-building and rehabilitation of ex-combatants</li> </ul> <p>Prepares community to receive ex-combatants</p>	Kitgum
Local Councillors	<p><b>Overview:</b> LCs represent the community from District level (LC 5) to parish level (LCI). They are responsible for maintaining law and order, and have local courts set up in the district to address offences involving misconduct by the police or army towards a resident of the area.</p> <p><b>Main activities concerning ex-combatants</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Council offices receive returnees and take them to World Vision/GUSCO etc.</li> <li>Monitor the way returnees are living</li> <li>Encourage parents and family to receive and accept ex-combatants</li> </ul>	Gulu, Kitgum, Pader
District Disaster Management Committee	<p><b>Overview:</b> The DDMC is headed by the CAO with the CDO as secretary. It aims to provide a co-ordinated and quick response to war-related problems.</p> <p><b>Main activities concerning ex-combatants</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Transports returnees to reception centres or back to their villages</li> <li>Monitors activities of NGOs operating in the area</li> <li>Identifies vulnerable in the community and camps</li> <li>Includes sub-committees addressing psychosocial, educational and other needs of the community</li> </ul>	
Pader District Forum	<p><b>Overview:</b> The District Forum has the same mandate as the DRPT and JFP in the neighbouring districts, and seeks to co-ordinate NGO activity with that of government in the District.</p> <p><b>Main activities concerning ex-combatants</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Co-ordinates activities of local organisations concerned with peace-building and rehabilitation of ex-combatants</li> <li>Prepares community to receive ex-combatants</li> </ul>	Pader
Resident District Commissioner (RDC)	<p><b>Overview:</b> The RDC as the political head and chair of the district security committee. S/he presides over the political functions on behalf of the head of state. S/he co-ordinates the administration of government services in the district and advises the LC5 on matters of national importance that may affect the district, its plans or programmes. The RDC monitors and inspects the activities of local government and carries out other functions assigned by the President or prescribed by Parliament.</p> <p><b>Main activities concerning ex-combatants</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sensitises the community on district and security matters, and government programmes and policies</li> <li>Promotes the Amnesty Act</li> </ul>	Gulu, Kitgum, Pader
Uganda Human Rights Commission	<p><b>Overview:</b> The UHRC is a constitutional body with a mandate to monitor and address human rights abuses in the country. As well as having the constitutional mandate to carry out investigations of abuses by state organs, it has its own tribunal to defend victims of human rights abuses. The Human Rights Commission seeks to maintain data on all human rights abuses brought to their attention within their area, and it does this within the limits of its resources.</p> <p><b>Main activities concerning ex-combatants</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The UHRC regional offices would be the first port of call for ex-combatants who are victims of human rights abuses, such as being tortured by state organs or detained illegally by the police.</li> </ul>	Kampala and regional offices

## APPENDIX 4: Further Reading

- Acholi Religious Leaders Peace Initiative *Report on the reintegration of LRA combatants at Pajule Catholic Mission, October-November, 2001.*
- Acholi Religious Leaders' Peace Initiative, CARITAS Women's Desk, Justice and Peace Commission *Seventy Times Seven: The Implementation and Impact of the Amnesty Law in Acholi, May 2002.*
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- Save the Children UK Working group on children affected by armed conflict and displacement *Working paper no.1: Promoting psychosocial well-being among children affected by armed conflicts and displacement: principles and approaches*.
- Taylor, Kaya (for Trans Africa Forum) *Child Soldiers in Africa: The Problem and the Solutions Fact Sheet*, 2000
- Twum-Danso, Afua (for Institute for Security Studies) *Africa's Young Soldiers: The Co-Option of Childhood*, (undated)
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**Conciliation Resources:**

173 Upper Street  
London N1 1RG  
United Kingdom

Tel: +44 (0)20 7359 7728 ext 224

Fax: +44 (0)20 7359 4081

Email: [uganda@c-r.org](mailto:uganda@c-r.org)

Website: [www.c-r.org](http://www.c-r.org)