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"Ugandan's Forgotten Children of War"[1]

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One of the impacts of the 18-year-old Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) - Government of Uganda (GoU) war in Northern Uganda has been the birth of thousands of children by girls abducted by the LRA and forced to become 'wives' to the LRA ranks. These children, born in the bushes of southern Sudan or N. Uganda, sometimes find their way along with their mothers back to the world of 'freedom'. Sometimes mothers escape back and other times they are released.[1] Upon return, there are measures in place to facilitate their assimilation into family and community. The children born in captivity have, however been largely overlooked by organizations reintegrating child soldiers.

This study was undertaken to unearth the experiences of children born in conflict situation in Northern Uganda between 1990 and 2003, with a special focus on children born of the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA). The research aimed to assess the impact of captivity on these children and to evaluate whether programming to reintegrate children from the LRA into Ugandan society is effectively addressing the particular needs of these children.

This case study is based on qualitative field work in Gulu Municipality, which houses at least two reception centres for former child soldiers, as well as the seat of Acholi leadership, carried out between September 2003 and January 2004 as part of a Masters Thesis for Makerere University Kampala. The research included structured and unstructured in-depth interviews with children born of the LRA, mothers of children born of the LRA,[2] and guardians/parents of the mothers, as well as staff of international agencies and individuals working with former child soldiers. Questionnaires were employed to help the researcher gather relevant data: the subjects were asked a number of questions relating to psychosocial status and experiences of children born in captivity as well as those born in ordinary Acholi settlement[5]. Data was gathered on 69 children born in captivity. Of these, 36 were aged below 1 year. 33 were above 1 year. 32 of these were

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[2]The mothers and not the fathers have been strategically singled out in this case because these children are conceived, born and remain attached to their mothers. The 42% (29) of the mothers of the 69 children sampled have begotten one child each as a result of forced relationship with the LRA army ranks while in captivity. The remaining 58% (40) of the mothers of the children sampled have other children in addition to the one sampled. These are either children born in captivity or children begotten in ordinary circumstances in normal Acholi setting.

males and 37 females. The mothers and/or guardians of all 69 of these children were also interviewed. This data was compared to a similar sample of 18 children born in ordinary families within the Acholi settlement to act as control.

As described by Mertus and Baxter in this volume, research on sensitivie topics carried out in on-going war-zones involved many ethical and methodological constraints. In this case, for example, the inhabitants of Gulu Municipality were suspicious of most people and too resignedly traumatized to contribute easily to change. Poverty has also wretched this part of Uganda so much that every one is viewed as a source of relief items/money for distribution. I attempted to counter-act these problem of access by cultivating a good working relationship with NGOs and the affected population and making it known that the research was purely academic and not aimed at affecting the political situation.

Direct interviews with the children and their formerly abducted mothers also presented the risk that singling them out would contribute to their marginalization. However, I proceeded with the research after preliminary interviews suggested this risk was primarily salient *outside* the reception centres where children were isolated and discriminated against. By contrast, direct interviews at reception centres was much easier and less ethically problematic as the interviewees easily identified themselves with all in the centre community. In the centres, they belonged with each other and spoke freely as though they were still with the rebels. Thus, in the end I gathered interview with children and their mothers primarily inside the centres.

However, this approach created one more set of risks: mothers who had escaped captivity rather than being released by the rebels feared revealing certain aspects of their background lest the rebels access that and trace them and their family with resultant death. I allayed their fears by stressing this was never going to be accessed by the media or directly by the rebels. To ensure the safety and confidentiality of the informants, I used numerical representation for each of the respondents and not their real name during the interview process.

The findings detailed below indicate that in the northern Uganda context both the formerly abducted and those born in captivity experience trauma requiring particular attention upon integration. Yet there are scarcely any specialized measures in place appropriate to support the assimilation of these children into Ugandan society once their mothers leave the LRA. Children born of the LRA face both the traumatic impacts of life in captivity and the subsequent rejection when introduced back in their mothers' families and communities. The provisions in place to assist with integration, however tend to be directed only at formerly abducted people.

This chapter is organized as follows. In the first section I provide a background to the conflict in Northern Uganda, and outline the specific rights violations evident against children born in captivity, as well as the particular situation faced by their mothers upon escape from the LRA. In the next section I describe the services available for reintegrating and rehabilitating child soldiers in Gulu Municipality, with an eye toward whether these programs are effectively addressing the particular vulnerabilities of children born in captivity and their mothers. I conclude by suggesting the need for additional programming and fact-finding in this area.

Background to the Conflict

Gulu Municipality is located within Gulu district of Northern Uganda. It is the headquarters of administration in Northern Uganda. Majority of its inhabitants is comprised of the local Acholi tribe. Gulu Municipality is in the centre of a war that has raged on relentlessly between the Uganda Government army (Uganda people's Defense forces-UPDF) and a rebel group, the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA), since 1986.[1]

This war has devastated whole communities resulting into mass displacements into camps as well as neighboring districts. The camps are characterized by very poor living conditions and mounting insecurity[2]. Also peaking the character of the conflict is abduction of people, who are then used as porters, combatants, sex slaves, and many other uses. The social cultural norms and values have broken down. Mutilations & serious psychological/traumatic acts are the order of the day. This has gone on for over 18 years, spilling over to all the districts of Northern and some parts of Eastern[3] Uganda. Schools have closed or are not in normal functioning conditions, health centers, roads and other social amenities are not operational.

But perhaps one of the most outstanding facts about this war is that completely new categories of children have merged; thousands of children have been born during the conflict. These are either as internally displaced children and growing up in camps, children born in UPDF army detachments, or children born by girls abducted by the LRA.[4] Of all these mentioned categories, children born by abducted girls are perhaps the most forgotten category. Over 25,000[9] children have been abducted by the LRA since the on-set of the insurgency 18 years ago. Of this more than half are said to be girls[10] who are used as sex slaves among other things. By mid 2001 these girls had borne more than 3,000 children in captivity, and these, excluding those returned from captivity with children or girls returning with pregnancies. [11] By some estimates, this figure would form approximately a quarter of children held by the LRA.

As described in the section below, on the whole, children born as a result of sexual slavery in armed conflict are one of the most forgotten and vulnerable categories of war-affected children. These vulnerabilities are heightened when they return with their mothers into communities affected by the very conflict that saw their emergence.

Physical and Psychosocial Impacts on Children Born in LRA Captivity

The research revealed that the children have had different degrees of experiences. Those children born in captivity and then integrated into Acholi society have registered a similar trend in experiences gained both during time spent with the LRA as well as while back in their parents' community. The only disparity shows in the case that the accompanied have no immediate close person and therefore are emotionally choked whereas category (i) have at least their mothers with them. Children born upon return of their mothers are better off than the two categories mentioned above since they have had the due right to be born in deserving environment (of freedom and at least some medical support). The fourth category are those still holed up with the LRA. These children are worst off compared to the rest of the children. Besides denial of all basic rights pertaining to children they have either lost parents or have had their mothers escape without them or have gotten lost in the bushes in the confusion of battle and can never trace their way out of there. They know no relative apart from mother and/or father. Above all, they are still deprived of knowledge of what life is like on the other side of the world. All they are exposed to is a culture of war, crime, death and deprivation. This research could not

however reach out to this final category. Yet we know that a minimum, the findings of experiences attributed to the LRA enclaves will therefore automatically apply to all categories born in the hands of the LRA. The experiences of these same children while out of captivity shall automatically also apply to children born upon return.

Despite variations in the severity of their experience, as a whole, children born within the LRA are particularly vulnerable to a number of both physical and psychosocial deprivations. In the sections below, I compare the health and psycho-social situation of these children both to children within the broader Acholi settlement and to international standards for health and development in order to illuminate their particular traumas, need and vulnerabilities.

Physical/Health Impacts of Birth in Captivity

Based on the data gathered, it is evident that children born in captivity are deprived relative to children in the broader population in terms of food, medical care, and other basic means of life. They have also been exposed to violence and the threat of death since birth, and some have lost their mothers. All of these factors will impact the child physically and developmentally.

As children fathered by the LRA army ranks, these children originally formed part and parcel of an outlawed group hunted night and day by the UPDF, especially during the Operation Iron Fist (OIF), a government of Uganda effort to flush out the LRA once and for all. At the same time, other LRA enemies including the SPLA and sometimes the Sudan government troops poised a great threat to the security of the children during confrontations. During such ventures, many children's lives were lost alongside those of the mothers and the LRA. Some children were stuck onto their dead mothers' bodies and many may have been left undiscovered at the mercy of the wild; others sustained bullet wounds. To strap a baby on one's back and turn round to open fire at an enemy was not uncommon for abducted girls turned mothers.[7]

All the children born of the LRA have suffered starvation during the entire length of time spent with the LRA. For children born within the enclaves of the LRA to abducted girl soldiers, food was scarce right from birth because the breast-feeding mother did not have enough to eat. Supplementary foodstuff was also hard to come by in the unfriendly jungles of Southern Sudan and northern Uganda. It was often worsened by the need to be constantly on the run from the Ugandan army.[6] This has had an impact on the rate of growth and the general health conditions of the children.

Comparatively, the 18 children born in ordinary Acholi settlement were better off with adequate sources of food except in Unyama IDP camp, where families lived mainly on relief handouts. That the children born in captivity suffered starvation while marauding the bushes in the hands of the LRA is further emphasized by the percentage of children interviewed (29%) who singled out 'food' in the interviews as the thing s/he loves most.

Medical attention for these children while in the bush was also compromised relative to children in the Acholi settlement. Of the 69 children born in captivity, 66 were never immunized while in captivity but got immunized upon return. Two other children were not yet immunized at the time of the research because they had only just returned from captivity with their mothers. One other child was immunized back in the Sudan

LRA camp because he was son to a high-ranking Commander and thus had the privilege to benefit from the preferential treatment of accessing health facilities in Khartoum.[5]

The 18 children not born in captivity had all been immunized as recommended by the Ministry of Health Guidelines in Uganda, which is in line with that of World Health Organization (WHO). This implies that the health of these children as long as they remained in the enclaves of the LRA was jeopardized relative to the broader population. Exposure to immunizable diseases (including tuberculosis, poliomyelitis, diphtheria, tetanus, whooping cough, hepatitis B/haemophilus influenzae type B, and measles) could hamper the child's progress for survival and development.

Some children born in captivity and now back in Acholi community are now growing up into maturity without having undergone immunization. These are children who by-passed reception centres and joined their families immediately upon return. Since majority of abducted children are from the less educated families, they may not take it upon themselves to follow up on the child's health.

The 69 children born in captivity all had a near-uniform mention of basic issues centering on the lives of children while still in captivity with their mothers. According to the child mothers interviewed, parenting in the confines of the LRA enclaves was a most difficult experience. 100% of the mothers sampled acknowledged that life in captivity before motherhood was extremely harsh with inhumane conditions ranging from diseases, starvation, thirst, rape, and arbitrary punishment to imminent death. 64% (44) mothers however emphasis that life was even worse when one became a mother compared to 36% (25) mothers who thought life had a brighter lining for them the moment they became mothers while with the LRA. The 44 mothers gave reasons for worsening conditions which included extra responsibilities associated with raising a child in line with feeding, clothing, fleeing from enemies, tending to a sick child, having no access to pre- and post-natal services and as a result, the agony of watching one's infant struggle to overcome imminent death. The 36% mothers claimed better life in captivity as a mother because mothers were reportedly sometimes exempted from drastic task like going to battle, arbitrary punishment and, for mothers attached to high ranking LRA commanders, young captives were allocated as maids or helpers to support them.

100% of the children interviewed themselves mentioned severely lacking basic needs (food, medicines, water, clothing, and shelter). The children witnessed horrible scenes, suffered from horrible diseases which were in most cases never treated (particularly mentioned were diarrhea, cholera, malaria and worms), no knowledge of school what so ever and having to accompany mothers to battle grounds. Upon return, the children may continue to want for basic needs since their mothers are economically insecure.

Psychosocial Impacts of Birth in Captivity

In addition to physical deprivation, children born in captivity face a number of specific forms of psycho-social difficulty based on practices such as labeling, stigma, lack of parental care, negative labels, and lack of security and the ability to play.

All the 69 children sampled had been fathered by members of the LRA. Their mothers were girls abducted from northern Uganda and forced to become wives to the LRA ranks. All these (69) children had returned to freedom fatherless, either because their fathers had been tallied among the battle casualties (39 children) or were still

marauding the bushes of southern Sudan and northern Uganda (18).[8] This means 57% will never set eyes on their fathers again, while 43% may depending on what prevails later in terms of peace. This includes whether their fathers surrender or come out of the bush, whether they become interested in and manage to trace the children, and the willingness of mothers to acknowledge parenthood to the fathers.

Typically, mothers are with their children except in circumstances where the mother gets killed or lost during battle. Yet, as will be discussed in the next section, these mothers themselves are not receiving the support they need to parent effectively or raise their children. A few such children who have no parents at all have been discovered. [9] Some later get reunited with their mothers when they come back while others have their grandparents traced and brought on board as will be discussed later in this section under integration.

Naming practices affect these children's' identities, positive sense of self, and ability to reintegrate. All the 69 children sampled had acquired names upon birth. This rings true to the legal provision of every child having the right from birth to a name, codified in the Convention on the Rights of the Child. However, 49 of them had names with meanings depicting the plight of their mothers. Such names included '*Komakech*', meaning 'I am unfortunate', A*nenocan*, 'I have suffered', *Odokorac*, 'Things have gone bad', and *Lubanga kene*, 'only God knows why this happened to me.' These names compile all the bad experiences of a mother into a name[2] and give it a life in the nature of her baby. In this way the baby is turned into a live reminder of her sufferings so long as that baby is alive and staying with her. This therefore affects her integration as well, as the scars of her captivity will be by her side in the form of her child and confirmed by the meaningful name still on him.

On the part of the child, innocent as s/he may be, in the long run, the name can lead to self-chastisement as the child may consider him or herself an accident that brought an overwhelming suffering on his young mother. At the reception centres the social workers attempt to give these children fresh names with ordinary meaning, for example, *Komakech* is converted to *Komagum* (I am fortunate) and *Odokorac* to O*doko ber* (things have turned good). The mothers are however reluctant to pick up these changes. They prefer the old names.[3]

Nine children had ordinary names, not associated with any predicament. These children were conceived in captivity and delivered upon their mothers' return in the hands of reception centers. The officers at the reception centers then gave them ordinary names, mostly after relations of the mother. Another 11 children conceived or born in captivity had names given due to other circumstances. These include names given by the LRA father after his relatives or himself or his Arab friends and children named after the LRA leader Joseph Kony as a tribute. This has no negative implication except for the name of Joseph Kony, which is associated so much with suffering in Acholi.

In terms of nationality, all the 69 children, basing on the response given by their mothers and the humanitarian agencies, are considered Ugandans. The traditional leadership in Acholi also stressed this fact. All these people backed up their responses in line with the government of Uganda's 1995 constitution of citizen by birth. This is because both the LRA and the mothers of the children are citizens of Uganda by birth. For the children allegedly picked from battlefields by UPDF or others, such children are

also citizens of Uganda. Since they were found within battlegrounds either in Uganda or in Southern Sudan confrontation with rebel LRA who are also Ugandans.

The interviews sought to evaluate what recreational games if any, these 69 children were attached to. This is in line with the internationally codified 'right to play', which is designed to ensure proper growth and development. Of these 74% (49) children were involved in games associated with violence. These games ranged from tying up fellow kids and marching them away, pretending to administer canes of the stroke onto a stubborn playmate, opening up imaginary gun fire on to playmates, and hurriedly tying up luggage to flee from an imaginary raid.[3] 15% of the children were engaged in ordinary child games like imitating phone talk, racing, football, peddling tires, blowing balloons and playing parent. 16% of the children were too young (still breast feeding infants) and not yet old enough for significant play.

The children interviewed singled out several issues that gave them sense of insecurity, especially in the event of their return from the LRA enclaves. The fact that none of the children sampled stipulated 'darkness' as cause for fear is interesting because ordinarily children are afraid of darkness. That these children find solace in darkness suggests of these children for survival: only in the cover of darkness can they go unnoticed and uncondemned.

57% of these children mentioned the Military as their greatest fear. Ordinarily, the military is meant to protect the civilians and the innocent from enemies. The LRA have been terrorizing the Ugandan populace for close to two decades and they have been under persistent fire from the UPDF. It is therefore not strange that these children fear the military above all else: they are part of the LRA and therefore have been hunted down by the UPDF whom they see as enemy. Whereas 11% of the sampled children were too young to respond, the remaining 32% of the sample however singled out other causes of fear ranging from death, strangers, losing mother, starvation and wild animals. These numbers compare to the 18 children born in the ordinary Acholi settlement, who all singled out their fears along noticeably different lines. Among these are issues like lack of school fees, fear of abduction, losing a parent and death. It can be concluded that nearly all children born in captivity have emerged into Ugandan society with a variety of physical and psychosocial vulnerabilities.

Upon integration into Ugandan society, these children and their mothers face a variety of reactions from the communities. 19 mothers interviewed acknowledged a good reception while back in the community, but nine reported a negative reception, including one mother who stated that the community through which she came nearly lynched her as a rebel but was rescued by the UPDF that fired in the air to disperse civilians.

Twenty-two mothers indicated that children they have bore in captivity are treated differently from those not born in captivity. Despite the fact that 94% of the child mothers expressed joy at being out of captivity, they also described negative consequences of integration, including above all, the negative reception of their babies and children born in the enclaves of the LRA. In two cases, mothers mentioned the option to go back to the LRA because of the stigma they were experiencing outside LRA captivity, and comparatively, they thought life was better for them and their children under the LRA. They further said while with the LRA, nobody discriminated against their

[3]Observed in GUSCO and World Vision reception centres.

children because all babies there belonged to the LRA and they had easy access to basics because they did not need to buy but to plunder from the civilian populace.

The fact that these children were forced on innocent girls with impunity has contributed highest in isolating these children from enjoying the privileges of normal growth and development. Also the fact that the LRA has meted endless sufferings on the same families and communities does not auger well with them. Thus, the children they father are taken as scars and symbols of the more than a decade long sufferings meted on them through rape, defilement, cold blooded murders and massacres, abductions, pillage and wreckage of the once very peaceful and progressive society as well as of displacement of whole communities, disruption and stoppage of social amenities including education and health services among others. These children are therefore automatically and unanimously blamed for the acts of their parents. And it does not matter whether they chose to be born or not. They grow up being looked at as a rebel, a thief, a murderer, an accident, an outcome of rape and defilement, a Joseph Kony among others.

The stigma by the families of their parents suffuses the entire community where they live. In these communities the children are regarded with disdain, as the evidence of atrocities committed on the community by their parents as members of the LRA. They are stigmatized even if a family decides to treat the child well. Such families then carry the burden of prejudice from the community to the extent that they are accused of liaising and therefore sympathizing with the LRA father.

Agencies Supporting Assimilation of Children Affected by Armed Conflict in Gulu

Integration programs are assistance measures provided to former child soldiers and others affected by armed conflict that would increase the potential for their economic and social assimilation back into society. These may include both short term as well as long term activities ranging from health counseling, medical care, general education to job counseling among others. There are a number of agencies on the ground in Gulu carrying out such activities in support of children in armed conflict. Two organizations, GUSCO and World Vision, run reception centers. Others notably, CPA run follow-up programs for children reunited with families. Some other ones like SOS children's village in Gulu have adopted a few others and keep them in the village premises.

The research sought to evaluate whether existing programs a) specifically target the particular needs and vulnerabilities of the children born in the enclaves or b) adequately address their needs. The key finding is that while some programs, (mainly pilot projects) are in place to support child mothers returning from the enclaves of the LRA, almost no psycho-social programming is directed at the children of these mothers themselves, apart from four children in the care of SOS children's village. The only near effort is by the reception centres.

A closer look at the GUSCO centre reveals that such children fall into three categories: children may be born in captivity and come back unaccompanied, they may accompany their mothers back, or they may be born upon arrival if their mothers escape while pregnant.

In the case of unaccompanied children, GUSCO's response emphasizes connecting them to caregivers. So far GUSCO received 46 unaccompanied children aged 2 months-8 years. A concerted effort to trace for relations has enabled 26 of these

children to be handed over to relations of the mothers. 20 are still holed up at the centres without any clue whatsoever of who the mother or relations are.

While still at the centre, GUSCO attaches these unaccompanied children to child mothers returning from the LRA captivity. This would temporarily fill in the gap of no special provision for such children. Then the tracing effort ensues, with children returning being the key to most answers. In the case of the 26 already united, the maternal grandparents were traced and brought on board. Grandmothers are normally encouraged to come and stay at the centre so they get used to the children and also get basic skills on reproductive health, especially HIV/AIDS. Over 95% of the union however took place with the maternal side. Reasons being that in most cases the children were better traced using their mothers than their fathers and also in Acholi, children born out of wedlock customarily belonged to the maternal side.

In the case of children returning from captivity with their abducted mothers or while their mother is pregnant, GUSCO makes an effort to trace the parents of the girl mother. Pregnant girls start receiving anti-natal support and actually never permanently leave the centre except after giving birth. Upon arrival, children start accessing immunization and medical attention. Upon successful tracing the mother and her child are visited by relatives and parents. She stays in the centre for psychosocial support until she is considered better then handed over to her parents. Tracing is also done for the 'husband's' family. In the event that they both are successfully traced the two sides are brought together. Thus, both parties will sit and iron out their differences. Reunion of girl and 'husband,' if at all, is therefore not undertaken by the centre but handled by the two families.

The emphasis on reconnecting girl mothers with their babies to their families leaves a number of gaps. Many of the girl mothers do not wish to be treated as children now that they have children of their own. 74% (51) of mothers stipulated the desire to be empowered economically. This, they said would go a long way to make ends meet for themselves and their children. They would then not be destitute and look out for charity, which is all the same, hard to come by. None of the 69 mothers indicated the desire to depend on their families or any agency for needs.

Additionally, too little attention is given to whether the baby will be accepted by the girl's family. The fact that families find it difficult to cope with these children is very evident. One indicator is that most girls who come back with pregnancies are held back into centers until after birth precisely so that families do not force them to abort their unborn babies. Some child mothers who were already reunited with family escaped back into the reception centers citing unfriendly terms with family.

A good example is that of a child mother with no immediate relation alive. She was reunited with the family of the LRA fighter who fathered her child as the only option. This girl escaped back to World Vision centre with her son after a month long ordeal of life threatening experiences. These are the mothers calling for another try with the LRA, claiming it's a much better life, a life where one can comfortably identify one's child with the rest in the LRA community without any discrimination. This example is only a tip of the iceberg. All these are explained by the prevailing cultural norm and value that children born out of wedlock are illegitimate. This condition does not at all support the assimilation of these children in family and even community even if one of them becomes supportive.

Some Acholi cultural practices could be of use in counter-acting this stigma, if international agencies were to pay more attention to drawing on them in support of this children as well as their mothers. One such practice currently being used to assist in integration of abductees is a ceremony called *dwoko ayo*. This involves domestic animals such as a goat, a cock, and a sheep slaughtered to ward off the evil spirit as their blood cools the earth and the troubled heart of the returnee, the evil is sent away with the 'eye of the setting sun - *wang cent otero ci otero.'* One major act opening this ceremony is that of stepping on an egg. This symbolizes the entrance of the returnee back into the family and keeps evil at bay. So far, this ceremony is specifically targeting the returnees and not their children directly, although they presumably benefit alongside their mothers.

A lot of hope however could still hinge on an equally old Acholi cultural practice that recognizes that these children legally belong to their mothers' clans. In this practice a father can only claim fatherhood of an illegitimate child upon payment of a heavy fine, normally in form of herds of cattle and goats. This avenue can be pursued through empowering traditional leadership in Acholi to encourage returned LRA fighters and the girls attached to them who may be willing to continue their relationship to turn round and appease this practice. These in turn call for tailor-made programs in order to support them to lead normal lives.

In short, while there are mechanisms in place for assimilation of children in armed conflict back into fairly normal lives, such programming inadequately supports the assimilation of children born in the enclaves of the LRA. This in turn has implications for the assimilating mother; the rejection of children by families and communities will directly negate efforts to assimilate the mothers. The mothers whose children are a reject prefer to stick with their pregnancies and babies other than their families and communities. For an effective reunification of mother, family and community, children born in captivity have to be programmed for to cater for their special psychosocial needs along side those of their mothers'. Efforts to draw on and support local cultural practices that support healing and integration could help. In cases where such transformation is ultimately not possible however, the mothers themselves require economic support in order to live independently.

CONCLUSION

It is increasingly recognized that challenges associated with the assimilation of children born in armed conflict require more systematic study. The UN commissioned a study on Women, Peace and Security in the year 2000 yielding a report, which has been submitted by the Secretary General pursuant to Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000).[16] This study acknowledged that children who are born of forced pregnancy by girls in armed conflict are one of the basic impacts of armed conflict on women and girls. But it also mentions that little is known about these children and how they can integrate with their mothers back into community. Moreover, such conflicts where girls are used as sex slaves are found the world over in most cases resulting into births of children. [12] This study has therefore the utmost importance in aiding the processes of programming and planning for the incorporation of such children into communities.

The phenomenon of young girls being abducted by insurgents and forced to become pregnant was a fairly new one for the people of northern Uganda. So too are the

complex details associated with the plight of the children they bear. The complexity does not only end with experiences gained while still with the LRA but increases with their emergence into the local Acholi communities. These communities have suffered the blows of the rebellion and will do anything to escape the scathing reminder in the form of a strange child suddenly cropping up with a once abducted daughter. This results in bitter rejection of the children. This is further compounded by the culturally rooted practice that shuns illegitimate children, that is children born outside wedlock.

Agencies and programs directed towards supporting the assimilation of children in armed conflict back to normal life do exist. These programmes however are geared towards psychosocial support to children in general without any tailor-made ones according to needs. The only near-specialized one is the recently incorporated program for child mothers. These programs are still in their pilot stages and focused only on the mothers. The psychosocial needs of the children they come back with are barely supported. Yet the psychosocial welfare of these children impacts greatly on their mothers' psychosocial status as well. If the children are not supported to integrate then neither can the mothers do so successfully. This means if the children are not welcome within a certain circle, then their mothers will feel left out as well. Researchers, however, should be wary of trying to provide a rigid pattern of guidelines to agencies for directing programmes for assimilation.