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Challenges Affecting Street Children in Post-Conflict Northern Uganda: Case of Gulu Municipality

Annie Weber
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Challenges Affecting Street Children in Post-Conflict Northern

Uganda: Case of Gulu Municipality

By: Annie Weber

Gettysburg College

School for International Training

Post-Conflict Transformation

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"Do you have family here?"

      "My mother is here in Gulu, but she's very sick so she cannot take care of me."

"What about your father?"

      "My father is not there…he died in the war."

"Do you have any other family members that could take care of you?"

      "No, they all died during the war."

(Rubangakena Godfrey, 13 years old)

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This paper is dedicated to the staff and children of the Charity for Peace Foundation for sharing their time and stories with me, and to Bongomin Benard, for caring about these children just as much as I do.

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Glossary of Abbreviations

AIDS: Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome

CBO: Community Based Organization

CFP: Charity for Peace Foundation

CRC: Convention to the Right of the Child

DPSWO: District Probation and Social Welfare Officer

HIV: Human Immuno-deficiency Virus

HSM: Holy Spirit Movement

IDP: Internally Displaced Person (People)

LRA: Lord's Resistance Army

MGLSD: Ministry of Gender, Labor and Social

NGO: Non-Governmental Organization

NRA: National Resistance Army

OVC: Orphans and Vulnerable Children

SIT: School for International Training

TASO: The Aids Support Organization

UNICEF: United Nations Children's Fund

UNLA: Ugandan National Liberation Army

UPDF: Ugandan People's Democratic Force
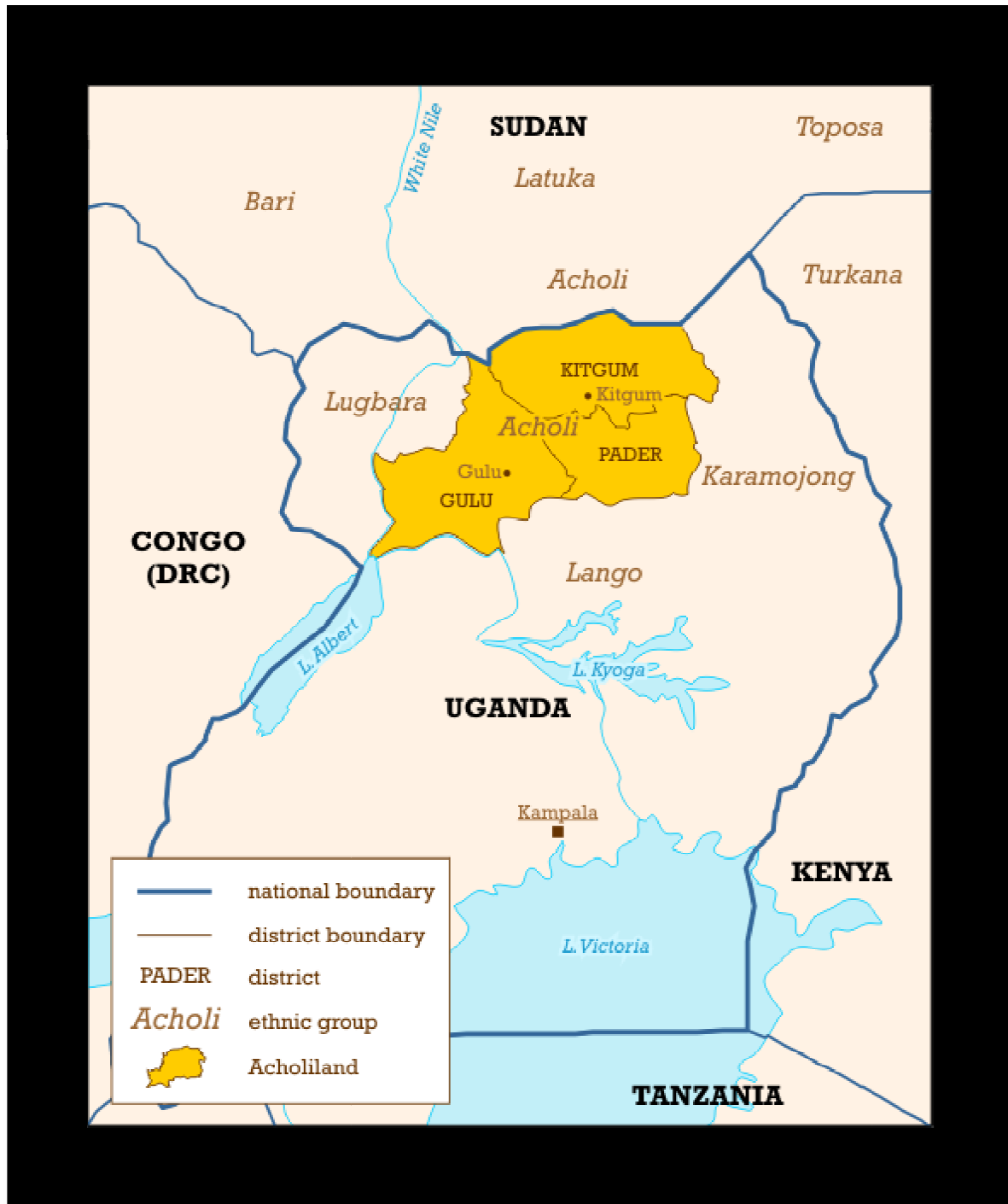
Map courtesy of Wikipedia, USAID (2004), Refugee Law Project, UN Department of Public Information (September 2002-Uganda District Boundaries), and Google Image

Abstract

Northern Uganda has been beleaguered with political unrest and rebellion for over two decades. The Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) has wreaked havoc on the entire northern population, causing lives to be lost and leaving a stain of physical and mental trauma that will last forever. Children, having been the most affected during the war, are still feeling the influence that the LRA has left behind. This study sets out to try to understand the phenomenon of street children in post-conflict northern Uganda, specifically in Gulu Municipality. The phenomenon of street children is considered to be one of the most prevalent issues in the developing world that demands to be addressed. The problem needs to be understood, attended to, and solved, lest it continue to threaten many societies in developing countries around the world.

Research was conducted within a four-week time frame, and included a part-time internship with the Charity for Peace Foundation (CPF) in company with a series of interviews with street children from Gulu Municipality, NGO workers from CPF, and additional informants. This paper finds that there is a strong relationship between the effects of insurgency and the factors that cause children to live on the streets of Gulu as well as the challenges that the children face. It also finds that there are few organizations and interventions put in place to assist this group of vulnerable children; And the few organizations in Gulu that are addressing the issue lack resources and funding to provide a comprehensive approach to handling this phenomenon.

Introduction

This research study is intended to understand the persistence of the phenomenon of street children in post-conflict northern Uganda, specifically in Gulu Municipality. The insurgency in northern Uganda has caused uniqueness among the street children in Gulu, compared to other regions and cities. This uniqueness and the general lack of studies on street children in Gulu Municipality make this research distinctive. Due to lack of literature on this topic, an investigation into the realities, challenges, and programs offered to assist this group of vulnerable children seemed appropriate to undertake.

The study has been conducted within Gulu Municipality. Gulu is the largest city and economic capital in northern Uganda today. It is approximately 320 kilometers north of Kampala, Uganda's capital. Gulu's population is roughly 150,000 and the population continues to grow rapidly (Concordia Volunteer Abroad Program, 2013). The Acholi people are the predominant tribe in Gulu and its neighboring districts. The districts in the north that house the Acholi people are called "Acholiland", even though some Acholis live in South Sudan as well. Gulu is one of the many districts in northern Uganda that has been victim to war from 1986 to 2006. Over two decades of conflict have taken a toll on the men, women, youth, and especially the children of Gulu. Acholis have experienced violence and oppression from various rebel groups and even their own government.

> "Armed conflict has been a feature of life in northern Uganda...for over two decades. An entire generation of children has grown up with no knowledge of peace. The terror of war has been their daily reality, underlining every aspect of their lives and preventing them from gaining access to the most fundamental services- healthcare and immunization, a sufficient diet, and schooling" (Fassera, 1998, p. 4).

These hardships were in the past. Many have returned back to their "normal" lives, but still many have not. Street children in Gulu are still feeling the effects of war. Some have been left orphaned, some are facing domestic abuse from family members, and some are caught within impoverished families who simply cannot care for them, leaving these children on the streets to fend for themselves.

The general aim of this research is to investigate the challenges affecting street children in Gulu town and examine the effectiveness of the interventions by NGO's with emphasis on services being offered by the Charity for Peace Foundation. The study is expected to significantly contribute to reducing the number of street children by exposing the challenges they are facing and proposing appropriate intervention strategies which may help government, NGOs and other development partners in making policies that can address challenges faced by street children. The study will also be useful to researchers who may want to further studies on challenges affecting street children in other cities in developing and developed countries. In short, this study will provide information and suggest practical solutions that could potentially be used by government and NGOs to best approach the issues and challenges that surround street children and finally, the study is to help bridge the gaps between NGO's and the government of Uganda in order to effectively assist, rehabilitate, and reintegrate the street children of Gulu back to the communities.

Background to the Study

In the Background Section, the researcher discussed the insurgency in Uganda, Internal Displacement Camps (IDP), the loss of traditional culture and social system, the crisis of orphans, vulnerable and impoverishment by war, land conflicts and the CPF.

The Insurgency of Northern Uganda

Uganda, formerly colonized by the British, became an independent nation in 1962. Since this time, there have been successive wars and oppression that has been characterized by bloody regime changes and civil war, accounting for over one million deaths (Kelly & Odama, 2011). When the National Resistance Army (NRA) came to power in 1986 after overthrowing Tito Okello and his Ugandan National Liberation Army (UNLA), remnants of the UNLA fled to northern Uganda and formed the UPDA, Ugandan People's Democratic Army (UPDA). After this, more rebel groups were formed in the north, despite Museveni and the NRA being in power. For example, in 1985 Alice Lakwena formed the Holy Spirit Movement in the north where she declared that she had been given supernatural powers by the spirit Lakwena (meaning messenger in the Acholi language) in order to cleanse the Acholi of their "sins". In 1986, Alice Lakwena's group engaged in combat in order to protect the Acholi people from the NRA but was defeated and she fled to Kenya (Weber & Rone, 2003).

In 1987, Joseph Kony, who claims to be Alice Lakwena's cousin, took over her previous position by declaring that he had inherited the spiritual powers that Alice once had taking over the Holy Spirit Movement and its remnants. He changed the name Holy Spirit Movement to Lord's Salvation Army, then United Salvation Christian Army and lastly the Lord's Resistance Army or LRA (Weber & Rone, 2003). While Alice Lakwena mobilized volunteers to join her

movement, Kony has taken on a different approach by forcefully abducting the community members to join his rank, particularly children at a young age since they are easily molded and manipulated. Kony increasingly turned against the civilians of the north by accusing them of aiding the government. "The group soon started to become ideologically isolated and eventually lose all popular support due to its brutal tactics" (Jorge, Mathiesen & Larsen, 2013, p.10).

The young boys Kony abducted were used as his soldiers and laborers while the girls were used as sex slaves for Kony's officers. He brainwashed and indoctrinated these children with lies and manipulated them with his claim of spiritual powers. Kony often forced the children to kill their own families with machetes or other tools. At least every household in northern Uganda has been affected in some way by the LRA war that lasted for over 20 years. The heaviest attacks the LRA executed on the armless civilians was in the districts of Kitgum, Gulu, Pader, and Lira. The attacks led to much suffering that has systematically destroyed an entire society physically, economically, culturally, socially, and emotionally. According to the Ugandan Peace Foundation Initiative, "the extent of suffering according to international benchmarks constituted an emergency out of control…the livelihood, the culture, the children, the public health, and the family structure and life of a community…" has been shattered ("Ugandan Peace Foundation Initiative", n.d.).

It is said that the conflict between the LRA and the government forces have massacred tens of thousands of innocent people, abducted more than 30,000 children, and displaced 1.7 million people (Catholic Relief Services, 2004). After a number of peace talks derailed, in 2006, under the mediation of Sudan, the Ugandan government and the LRA began peace negotiations known as the Juba Peace talks. A ceasefire was signed between the government and the LRA, but the final peace agreement still remained unresolved.

Internal Displacement Camps

When the war in the north became unmanageable, the Ugandan government decided to create internal displacement (IDP) camps in an attempt to defeat the LRA and "…deprive the movement from sources of food and the possibility to abduct children" (Jorge *et al*, 2013, p. 9). These camps were "home" to roughly 2 million Ugandan civilians during the time of war. The conditions in the camp were unsanitary and the camps were extremely overcrowded. It is said that there were near 1,000 deaths per week due to lack of proper sanitation, hygiene, and health provisions (Jorge *et al*, 2013, p. 9). The camps that were supposed to provide Acholi people with safety turned into a death trap and disease-breading zone. Women and girls were forced to trade sex for basic necessities in order to keep themselves and their family alive. Rape and sexual abuse were very common within the camps. "As several reports have documented, rape and generalized sexual exploitation, especially by government soldiers (both those stationed in the camps and the mobile units) have become "entirely normal." The soldiers feel entitled to take any woman or girl and do anything they want with her, with complete impunity" (Ugandan Peace Foundation Initiative, n.d.). With high levels of sexual activity and rape and low levels of contraception use, HIV/AIDS spread rapidly. More people were becoming infected however the lack of income, healthcare, medication, and transport to the hospitals caused these people to receive little to no attention. With the little food provided by the World Food Program, people remained hungry and there was no way of making a living since people were uprooted from their lands. It has created dependency on account of loss of income, livelihoods, homes, healthcare, and education. A generation has been born and brought up in these horrible conditions of fear and uncertainty while the after effects still linger.

The Loss of Traditional Culture and Social System

Along with much disease and violence in the IDP camps, there has been a "near-total destruction of social networks, culture and norms" (Kilgour, n.d.). The death of the Acholi culture, lifestyle, value system, and family structure has caused lasting effects on its people. It's plausible that the social systems and cultural center of the Acholi people will never be the same again. The camps as well as the entire insurgency have played a role in eroding the Acholi culture. There has been a social breakdown due to the high levels of promiscuity, girls opting for early marriages, an increase in child mothers, and an increase in idle youth that have been "…left to self-destructive practices like drinking, unprotected sex, and early marriages" (IRIN Humanitarian News and Analysis, 2004). The war created horrible circumstances for the people of the north, and the once "communal ideology" has given way to "individual concern." Living in the camp meant abject poverty; there was a scarcity of food, water, sanitation, clothing, bedding, healthcare, and basic needs. This meant that one must take care of him/herself before another; even before one's family or children.

In the IDP camps, people were forced to live in small huts with the entire family unlike the traditional way of compound living. This further disrupted the traditional family setting "…and made it impossible to carry on cultural practices…because every day was consumed with the struggle of survival" (Cagney, 2010, p.115). The collapse of the traditional system, norms, and the moral degeneration of the Acholi can also be attributed to the forced abductions and brutal mentality of the LRA rebel army. The abductions and indoctrination of the children into the rebel group forced the children to viciously murder and it intentionally filled the young minds with war tactics. In the end, "…these children lost the socialization into Acholi norms they should have received to guide them through their lives and help them make good decisions.

The same can be said for those children who were born in the bush or in the camps" (Cagney, 2010, p.115). A generation has grown up in violence, terror, and abject poverty leading to the loss of this very generation.

Orphanhood, Vulnerability and Impoverishment by War

The nation of Uganda, especially in the northern region, is overflowing with an endless and increasing number of Orphans and Vulnerable Children (OVC), emanating from the spread of the HIV/AIDS epidemic, separated and broken families, and the insurgency itself. According to the 2004 report carried out by UNICEF and the Minister of Women Affairs and Child Welfare, "…orphans and vulnerable children are defined as "children under the age of 18 whose mother, father, both parents or primary caregiver has died, and/or is in need of care and protection" (UNICEF; Ministry of Women Affairs and Child Welfare, 2004). Another study by the Republic of Uganda's National Progress Report of 2006, states the following;

> *"Of the total number of children in Uganda, about 41% live in poor households and of the 9.5 million Ugandans below the poverty line by 2003, 60% or 5.7 million were children below 18 years an un-proportionately high representation of children among the poor and approximately 13% of children are orphans (UBOS 2005). Furthermore, an estimated 6.5 million children and women are living with the effects of conflict mainly in the northern districts…" (Republic of Uganda Ministry of Gender Labour and Social Development, 2006, p. 1).*

There has been an increase in the amount of orphans and vulnerable groups of children since the war of northern Uganda. In Uganda today, the number of orphans is estimated to be roughly 2.2 million children under the age of 15 (Africa Youth Ministries, 2013).

During the war, many women and girls were abducted by the LRA and they were forced to marry rebel officers and commanders of the LRA or they were raped within their villages or within the LRA or IDP camps. Soldiers of the LRA as well as the UPDF exploited girls and

women for sex. These experiences during the war "…have not only affected their bodies, but they have also damaged their social lives, especially for those who have returned with children or were infected with HIV/AIDS" (Cagney, 2010, p. 130). Children who are fathered by rebels or soldiers of the government or other rebel groups are often unwelcome when returning back to their villages or even rejected by their own families. This leaves the women with few options to provide for themselves and their children.

Children have also been orphaned by HIV/AIDS. The infection spread rapidly during war-time in Uganda due to close encounters, carelessness and the high levels of sexual activity in the IDP camps. Current UNAIDS statistics show that out of the 36 million people currently living in Uganda, between 1.4 million and 1.8 million people are living with HIV/AIDS. There has been an estimate of 63,000 deaths due to HIV/AIDS and about 1 million children (between the ages of 0-17), orphaned by AIDS (UNAIDS, 2013). In the past, it was the responsibility of the community and the extended family to take in these orphans, no matter how they were orphaned, but in today's society, this mentality has changed. Extended families as well as orphanages and children's homes find it difficult to properly care for these orphans and vulnerable children. Poverty and a number of overlapping factors force these children into horrible circumstances.

Land Conflicts

Much of the Acholi population has returned back to their ancestral homes; however a new set of economic and logistical problems has come into play. There continues to be a problem of undocumented land and property in the northern regions of Uganda. Disputes over land have escalated because the once displaced population has now tried to return home. Upon

arriving home, they have found others living on their property or someone else has "sold" their property to another family in their absence. Some of this land has been deserted due to death during the war, people have become refugees and left their land, or people have moved. In Acholiland, land "…is communally owned and elders [are] influential in settling any disputes. Such disputes have affected 1.7 million IDPs – about 80 percent of northern Uganda's population" (IRIN Humanitarian News and Analysis, 2011). There are over a dozen root causes that lead to land conflicts in Uganda. Due to decades of displacement, there has been a misinterpretation of the customary land laws. Displacement has eroded the people's understanding, especially the youth's understanding, about how the land should be traditionally governed. Girls and women who were abducted by the LRA come back to their communities without the father of their child and they are denied property and sent away. "Many are also ignorant of the rights of widows and orphans under customary law and as such, some have found themselves "chased away" from land that is rightfully theirs" (Acholi Religious Leaders Peace Initiative, 2012, p. 19). Abject poverty has led to greed which has then caused land disputes throughout the north. Well over half the population in northern Uganda was displaced during the war and as a result, some people, especially abandoned and orphaned children "…are unclear where their original homesteads are while others find it difficult to determine land boundaries upon returning after displacement" (Acholi Religious Leaders Peace Initiative, 2012, p.20). Another root cause of land conflict is the problem of division of once communally owned land. Some have declared ownership of land for personal or clan use without the consent of the community or appropriate stakeholders.

The elders who are the keepers of the customary law and boundaries have now died. There is much misunderstanding and misguidance when it comes to these laws and boundaries of

the land in the north. Foreign investors have also tried to purchase large portions of land for commercial use in this post-conflict location. The loss of boundary markers has also played a role in land dispute. "The children who grew up in camps do not know the demarcations, thus are unaware of land boundaries upon return. Some markers such as trees or streams have also disappeared making it difficult to distinguish boundaries" (Acholi Religious Leaders Peace Initiative, 2012, p.21). Weak institutions including the police force and judicial system have perpetuated the land disputes throughout the region. These matters are so vast and complex that leaders as well as the community lack the knowledge and the resources needed to effectively and efficiently resolve the conflict. Last, corruption is one of the major factors that is responsible for these on-going conflicts. People who have easy access to money are able to manipulate the leaders, the system, and especially the courts to rule in their favor. According to the Religious Leaders Peace Initiative, "even some cultural leaders have been cited in corruption cases alongside the other formal community leaders" (Acholi Religious Leaders Peace Initiative, 2012, p.21).

The Charity for Peace Foundation

Over the course of the month-long research study, I've worked as an intern with the CPF in Gulu. The CPF works towards development and empowerment of vulnerable children, women, and youth by working through community and local authorities. This organization works to provide community-based and child-focused programs that offer support to children, families, and the community of northern Uganda. CPF has a sector that is devoted to provide support to the street children of Gulu. Through the support of Action for Street Kids in the UK, CPF provides family tracing, center-based activities, on-street activities, guidance, and counseling that is aimed at reducing the levels of child neglect, providing assistance to current and former street

children, and to provide advocacy for these children. They also provide accommodation facilities, training in basic vocational skills, and again, guidance counseling.

Established in 2001 when Gulu was at the height of war, it was originally created in order to "…uplift the plight of children who roamed the streets at night, seeking accommodation, safety and security" (Charity for Peace Foundation, 2012, p. 2.) Prone to abduction, rape, sexual harassment, cold, and hunger, these children had a center where they were allowed accommodation at night. CPF continues "…to work with communities to break the cycles of violence, hatred, and despair by providing psychological, emotional, and educational support to the survivors of conflict" (Charity for Peace Foundation, 2012, p.2).

Literature Review

Understanding the Problem Worldwide

Street children are found in almost every city around the globe. They live in the streets, they sleep in the open, in abandoned buildings, wastelands, and under verandas, they have no parental guidance, no one to support them, and every day is an on-going struggle for existence. Street children suffer from assault, hunger, disease, drug and alcohol abuse, physical abuse and emotional abuse. Vulnerable to exploitation, victimization, and abuse of their civil rights, these children fight every day to stay alive. There is no international agreement on the true definition of a "street child" however; UNICEF as well as USAID has come to try to label these children so they fit into one of four categories. These include:

1. Children 'of' the street (street-living children), who sleep in public spaces and have no family support.

2. Children 'on' the street (street-working children), who visit their families regularly and might return home every night to sleep, but spend most days and some nights on the street because of poverty, overcrowding, or sexual or physical abuse at home.

3. 'Street-family children', who live with their family on the street. These children may be displaced due to poverty, war, or a natural disaster. These families live a nomadic life by carrying their belongings with them.

4. And street children in Institutionalized Care: who have come from homelessness of the lifestyle of living on the streets but who are at high risk of returning back onto the streets.

In 1989, UNICEF estimated that there are over 100 million children who have grown up on the streets and who are living on the streets as 'street children' all over the world (Gomes, 2011). It is nearly impossible to know the exact number of children living on the streets since the definition of a "street child" if so loosely defined and the status of the child is likely to change throughout his or her lifetime. It is also unclear whether the number of street children is actually growing or the awareness of the issue is increasing in societies around the world. An even more recent study has stated that "…the figure almost certainly runs into tens of millions [of street children] across the world and it is likely that the numbers are increasing" (Gomes, 2011). Another reason why the exact number is not known is because "…national governments often conceal the extent of the phenomenon in their respective countries, in order to avoid potential recrimination for not doing enough to address the issue" (Defense for Children International/Palestine Section, 2007). Last, the street child population is incredibly fluid. They travel from one city to another, often with no form of identification or birth certificates. It is difficult to locate, identify, pin down and accurately document this population. Moreover, as the definitions continue to evolve, statistics fluctuate, and circumstances change, the issue of street children remains.

Factors why Children are on Streets

There are multiple factors that drive these children to the streets; however it is true that every country and every city has different reasons that cause or exacerbate the problem of street children. These include, economic factors, poor or lack of family relations, inadequate education of the parents, large family size, migration from villages to urban areas, war, genocide, natural disaster, escape from domestic abuse, peer pressure, amongst other causes. The phenomenon of street children is quickly growing worldwide and Uganda, including Gulu, is no exception.

According to a study on street children in the Mauritius Islands, "…many stakeholders reduce the definition to just one aspect of the problem – that of "street living children" – and fail to recognize that the term "street children" is a fluid concept with multiple faces and that the causes of the phenomenon overlap with each other such that it is difficult to pin point one aspect of the phenomenon" (Ndeboc, Hosenally, Ferhat, Putty, n.d., p. vi). This phenomenon is also closely related to a country's past history and socio-economic status.

The Context of Uganda

Specifically in Uganda, there is a high level of poverty, HIV/AIDS, the loss of parents and guardians in the conflict, and general gaps in the national OVC response which has led to the overall vulnerability and neglect of the child population. According to the OVC Situation Analysis of 2012, 57.4 percent of the Ugandan population of 30.7 million is composed of children alone. The country places the level of vulnerability among children at 96 percent (Ministry of Gender Labor, and Social Development, 2012, p. 14). With the relatively new peace in northern Uganda, it is surprising that many children are still reluctant to get off the streets (Lamunu, 2012, para. 3). According to the Uganda Population Report 2012, there are many groups that are considered vulnerable, especially the youth; however, nowhere in the report does it speak of street children, "…one of the most disadvantaged categories of vulnerable children" (MGLSD, 1999, p.2). By not mentioning the street children phenomenon, it clearly shows the little emphasis the government has placed upon the plight of these children in Uganda.

The government of Uganda has several policies put in place to address the issue of OVC's, and street children fall under this category. The support that government gives to vulnerable children has mainly been in the form of enacting policies, registering vulnerable children and promoting community support to vulnerable children. The government of Uganda

launched the National OVC policy in 2004 as an overall strategy for addressing the plight of vulnerable children with three key focuses on education, healthcare and child protection (Kalibala & Elson, 2010). In 1996, the government enacted the Children Statute, now known as the Children Act, to provide legal framework for the protection of children. Uganda is also a signatory to the Convention to the Right of the Child (CRC) being spearheaded by Ministry of Gender, Labor and Social Development but it has been delayed by poor implementation (UNICEF, 2013). Other government initiations such as the Kampala City Authority has responded by rounding up the street children for rehabilitation and returning them to their home (Nangonzi, 2013). This was also said to have been done in the Gulu district, initiated by the Child and Family Protection Unit of the Police. In addition to government support, Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and the community have also played vitals roles in addressing some of the challenges of vulnerable children in Uganda. The government of the United States, United Kingdom and other donor countries have channeled funds to various NGOs and government agencies to support vulnerable children including street children (Kalibala & Elson, 2010). In June 2011, Uganda participated in the 21st edition of the Day of the African Child. This day was put together by the African Union in order to contribute to the widespread awareness of the dangers of street children and in order to take urgent steps to protect them.

In 1993, there were approximately four thousand street children in ten major urban cities in Uganda (MGLSD, 1999, p. vi). Today, the number is around ten thousand street children in Uganda's major cities. Nangonzi (2013) noted that in Kampala alone, at least 16 children join the streets on a daily basis. While these children are on the streets, there are many risks they are exposed to such as physical attacks, rape and defilement, inadequate feeding, lack of shelter, inadequate or no health services, unhygienic environment, unlawful arrest and imprisonment in

some cases (Munene & Nambi, 1996). These children are also vulnerable to hunger, cold, drug abuse and mob justice, and are engaging in various activities such as begging, picking from garbage heaps, selling scrap materials and pick pocketing.

Gaps in Literature

Unfortunately, many of these studies are carried out outside northern Uganda, leaving out Gulu entirely. In northern Uganda, the government and other development partners are now putting money into the rebuilding process of the post-conflict region; however, the issue of street children has been almost overlooked. The main question for this study is "why is the phenomenon of street children persistent in post-conflict northern Uganda with emphasis upon Gulu Municipality?" This study seeks to attempt to bridge the gap between government policy and NGO programs that provide assistance to these children.

Objectives of the Study

The main research question for this study is as follows: "Why is the phenomenon of street children persistent in post-conflict northern Uganda, specifically in Gulu Municipality?" Over the course of the month-long research period, four main objectives were pursued.

1. Examine the factors that lead (push factors) and keep (pull factors) children on the streets of Gulu Municipality.
2. Understand the challenges street children in Gulu face.
3. Assess the programs carried out by NGO's to rehabilitate and reintegrate street children in Gulu (specifically through the Charity for Peace Foundation).
4. Examine the effectiveness of the programs that the Charity for Peace Foundation is carrying out to rehabilitate and reintegrate street children in Gulu.

Justification of the Study

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Children Statute understand that "…all children shall enjoy equal rights without discrimination; [and] this includes street children" (MGLSD, 1999, p.8). Under this rule, every child has the right to live with his or her parents or guardians, and every parent has the parental responsibility to care for their child. Every child has the right to access education, an adequate diet, clothing, shelter, health care, emotional care and love, guidance, leisure time, and protection from harm and exploitation (MGLSD, 1999). And according to UNICEF's Convention on the Rights of the Child, "…children everywhere have the right to survival; to develop to the fullest; to protection from harmful influences, abuse and exploitation; and to participate fully in family, cultural and social life" (UNICEF, 2013, para. 4).

This study is important because the children living on the streets of Gulu are most certainly denied the majority of their basic rights as children. Local authorities, the community, and NGO's find the phenomenon of street children problematic because the problem is ever-growing and it is often unaddressed. In 1999, the Department of Child Care and Protection in addition to the Ministry of Gender, Labor and Social Development (1999) stated that this social phenomenon still required extensive research and workable approaches even though resources were limited. The 2009-2010 Situation Analysis of Vulnerable Children in Uganda (2009-2010) again stated that there needs to be more investigation into the street children of Uganda and "…more effort is needed to understand the factors causing children to go to the streets as well as the different types of street kids and how best they can be reached" (Kalibala & Elson, 2010, p. 78). These children still remain amongst one of the most vulnerable categories of children and there are still few organizations that solely focus on eradicating the plight of street children.

At a personal level, I hope my research can be used to successfully bridge gaps and provide useful information to NGO's, Community Based Organizations (CBO), nationally based organizations, policy makers and government officials, officers of the Ministry of Gender, Labor and Social Development (MGLSD), local law enforcement officers, local administrators, the District Probation and Social Welfare officers (DPSWO's), social workers, and future researchers. The world needs to address and take action to protect and assist these children and the first step is to understand the problem at hand. This research strives to provide the needed information to do so. This research is also important because there is a lack of specialized studies on the issue of street children in Gulu. According to the CPF's Project Report of 2012, "…current efforts to deal with the issues of street children are still, weak, inadequately

coordinated and under resourced" (Charity for Peace Foundation, 2013, p. 3). Exposure is the

key to understanding and advocating for this group of vulnerable children.

Research Methodology

Introduction

This portion will describe the methods that were used for data and information collection by the researcher for the study. The section discusses the study design, population of the study, sampling procedures, methods of data collection, analysis and ethical considerations and limitations of the study.

Study Design

Case study research design was used for the study. Case study research design was used because the context of the study was very essential focusing on a specific unit of analysis (Collis & Hussey, 2003). The study was descriptive (Collis & Hussey, 2003) and narrative (Creswell, 2009) in nature because the researcher was able to describe the current practice and able to study the lives of individuals and ask one or more individuals to provide stories about their lives (Collis & Hussey, 2003; Creswell, 2009). Using these approaches, the researcher was able to describe the practices in managing street children issues and present life stories from the street children themselves.

Study Population

The population of the study comprised street children under rehabilitation in CPF, the staff of the CPF, district leaders and the police of the Child Protection unit in Gulu.

Sampling Procedure

Purposive sampling procedure was used for the study. Both the site and individuals who participated in the study were purposefully selected (Creswell, 2009). Purposive sampling was used because the researcher was aware of the kind of data and information needed and selected only the individuals who could provide the needed information (Baumgartner *et al*, 2002). The category of people selected and included for the study provided useful information for the problem under study.

Table 1: Purposive Selected Population

Category of People	Number of People
Street Children under rehabilitation	11
Staff of Charity for Peace	4
District leaders	2
Police Child Protection Unit	2
Total	**19**

Source: Primary Data

Methods of Data Collection

The study used four data collection methods for gathering information for the study. The methods used were face-to-face interview, focus group discussion, observation and documentary review.

Face-to-Face Interview

The researcher used face-to-face (one-on-one) interview to gather data from the street children, district leaders and staff of CPF. The face-to-face interview was done with five street children, four CPF staff and two district officials. The face-to-face interview method was advantageous because it allowed participants to provide their life experiences and historical perspective concerning the study problem.

Focus Group Discussion

The focus group discussion was done in order to access the opinions and experiences of the group. The group in this study ranged from 2 to 4 individuals. There were three groups formed at different times for the purpose of the discussion. The first group comprised 4 street children and the second group 2, all from within the CPF center at Gulu. The last group comprised 2 individuals at the Police Child Protection Unit at Gulu [a police officer and social worker]. Forming groups as a mean for data collection was helpful because it encouraged dialogue and more in-depth discussion of the study problem.

Observations

The researcher used participatory unstructured observations to record mainly the activities in the center, how street children are treated and behaviors of the children. Another participatory observation was done in the process of reintegrating two of the street children with their families in Kitgum district. The participatory observations enabled the researcher to gain firsthand experiences with the participant while recording information as they occurred.

Documentary Review

The researcher also used documentary review such as government reports, NGOs reports, newspapers and journals to look for information about street children in Gulu, Uganda and in other parts of the world. Reviewing documents helped the researcher to compile some of the written evidence and statistics to support the study problem and to compile the literature review for the study.

Instruments for Data Collection

Data for the study was collected using two instruments. For the interview, the researcher used an interview guide with a set of questions to interview the respondents. The guide was also used for a focus group discussion. In the questionnaire for the street children and group discussions, the questions asked were: What led you to stay on the street? (Push Factors); Why do you keep living on the street? (Pull Factors); Are you able to go back home? What are the biggest challenges you face every day? What small jobs do you do? How has the CPF helped you? And how does the community treat you? The questions for Probation Officer and the Child Protection unit were: Whose responsibility is it to assist these street children? Why are these children on the streets? (Push Factors); Why do they stay on the streets? (Pull Factors); How does the community view these children? Do you think there is enough being done at the district level and NGOs level and what do you think can be done about this issue? The use of an interview guide and focus group discussion guide has allowed the researcher to ask the same questions for the different individuals and groups included in the study.

Data Analysis and Presentation of Findings

The study was descriptive (Collis & Hussey, 2003) and narrative (Creswell, 2009) in nature. In presenting the findings, the researcher described the current practices surrounding the problems faced by the street children and solutions to some of these problems. In addition, the researcher also presented the findings in a narrative form especially those stories told about the situations surrounding the plight of street children in Gulu.

Ethical Considerations

To ensure ethical issues were observed, the researcher obtained an approval letter by the School for International Training (SIT) Local Review Board at Gulu. An introduction letter was given from the CPF to allow the researcher to gain access to the district officials and other organization which were deemed relevant for this research. An interview informed consent form was distributed to each interviewee before engaging in an individual, group, or focus group interview to ensure that the individual had control whether or not they wished to enroll in the study. The researcher explained clearly the purpose of the study to the respondents before conducting interviews and focus groups. To uphold confidentially, no identity was revealed unless the participants had already given written permission to do so through the written informed consent form. The informed consent form and the interview questions were translated by a translator to the children who did not fully understand English. All information given orally through interviews was kept within context to guarantee accurate representation. Another issue taken into consideration was the competency and validity of the answers of the children. Participation was voluntary, however a soccer ball and story books were given to the group as an incentive to keep them coming back to the CPF center for further interaction and interview.

Limitations

This research study had several limitations. The time frame limited the amount of time for interviews and further investigation into the issues of reintegration such as follow up of the children from their homes. The case study approach also limits the perspective of the study to one organization and Gulu municipality in northern Uganda. The language barrier and translation

posed a problem during the research process because at times the meaning behind an interviewee's words was lost in translation. Cultural miscommunications could have influenced the research as well as the interpretation of interviewees and observations. Conducting a cross cultural study can create bias within the research specifically on topics of perception of children and poverty.

Findings

Push Factors: What leads children to the streets of Gulu town?

In northern Uganda, children have been the most affected population by the two-decade armed conflict. Over 30,000 children were abducted and taken as child soldiers; their families have been murdered, they were unable to attend school, or gain access to basic needs. Unfortunately, the children are still feeling the effects of war up to today. It has been more than seven years since the guns fell silent and "…the first phase of the infamous Post-Conflict Recovery Program…" started, yet the plight of these children is still apparent. For this region, the "…exodus of street children started in 2006 when night commuters' centers were closed in northern Uganda and with the return and resettlement of the displaced population…" (Okumu & Akol, 2011, p. 1). In 2006, UNICEF and CPF conducted a survey on the population of street children in Gulu and they noted that "…there has been an increase in the number of children and young people living on the street of Gulu" (Okumu, 2013, p. 3). The population continues to fluctuate; however, the Probation and Welfare office census on 2010 put the number of children and young people living on the streets of Gulu at 785 (170 girls and 615 boys) and again in 2013, put the number at 510 (Okumu, 2013, p. 3). The population of children and youth living on the street continues to change, yet this drastic decrease (from 785 to 510) could have been a result of the different interventions over the years or due to the "…mobile nature of street children between towns and cities as well as transition to adulthood…" (Okumu, 2013, p.3).

The children living on the streets of Gulu hold a unique set of push factors, distinctive from those children living on the streets in the other cities and districts of Uganda. According to

Akol Anthony, CEO of CPF, "In the past, children were okay. There were no street children. We didn't have this situation there. There were only street children after the conflict" (Akol A., personal communication, October 29, 2013). The street children in Gulu and Kampala are living the same life but in Gulu, there are fewer activities to work…If you look at the history, there were night commuters, no street children, but not they are real street children. They sleep on the street, they eat on the street, they everything on the street" (Okumu C., personal communication, October 31, 2013). The children have come from IDP camps, their families are experiencing poverty because of war and displacement, they have been born in captivity to abducted mothers, they are left rejected amongst their communities, they have lost their family members in the war leaving the remaining members impoverished and unable to care for their children, they are children of rape victims, and these are just a few factors. Based on the above, the "push" factors, the reasons which make the children come to streets in Gulu town are summarized as bellow:

Effects of Poverty: Poverty is one of the main push factors that continues to lead these children to the streets. The conflict has created a prolonged poverty in northern Uganda. Families have become extremely poor and unable to provide basic needs for their children and the children then run away.

> *"The most common push factor is due to poverty because of the rebellion. The rebellion left very many people in a poor state. And secondly, there's a high rate of HIV infection. The majority are now orphans but you might find a few with one parent. Some have drug addict parents, they face domestic violence at home, they are children of former abductees who have come back and they don't have anywhere to stay due to poverty. Some were born from the bush, some have been abandoned by their mothers or their mothers might have been raped during the war so they just leave them" (Oryema, A., personal communication, October 29, 2013).*

As a result, the children are forced onto the streets to fend for themselves. They often come to find work to earn a small sum of money for themselves. A testimony from Okello Brian

(15 years old), a street child says: "I was looking for a job, I came purposely to get income to start a business but I've failed to get anything so far." When forced to look for a job at such a young age and with the high level of unemployment in Uganda, they often become unsuccessful and these children find themselves stuck. Large family size also plays a role in the struggle against poverty. According to the Uganda Bureau of Statistics, "... the fertility levels have remained high over the past 3 decades, with the Total Fertility Rate (TFR) of about 7 children per woman" (Uganda Bureau of Statistics, 2012, para. 3).With the growing number of children in each family, families have to struggle to feed and provide their own children with basic needs and school fees. The level of poverty in northern Uganda leaves some of the vulnerable children with no option but to try and join the street life which is perceived to be better than home life.

Domestic Violence and Abuse: Domestic abuse is another common factor that drives the children to the streets. Mistreatment at home often stems from alcohol and drug abuse by the parents, siblings, or caretakers. Trauma and mental illness as a result of the war can also lead to violence and maltreatment within the home. During a focus group with four of the street children, Okello Patrick, age 12, spoke about his experiences at home. He stated: "One day I was sent to tie the goats and I forgot to bring them back. My older brothers beat me and cut my legs." Another child named, Akena Francis, 13 years old, stated: "I am always beaten by my father because he smokes marijuana and he's always drunk." These two testimonies show the magnitude at which abuses have occurred in the homes; most times the perpetrators are the people who should be protecting the children. These children move to the streets with the perceived idea that there is no abuse on the streets. Odoch Idris, age 14 states: "I'm staying on the street because of a small problem. There's mistreatment at home. I've lost both parents and my caretaker mistreats me. It's better to stay on the streets because there's no mistreatment."

Orphans and Elderly/Sick Caretakers*: Again, some of these children have been orphaned by war or HIV/AIDS, forcing them to the streets. The number of orphans in Uganda is estimated to be around 2.2 million children under the age of 15 (Africa Youth Ministries, 2013). Another push factor is that caregivers or parents are often too elderly or ill to take care of their children. These caretakers do not have the resources or the energy to properly take care of the children or to effectively access services they might need. During interview with Rubangakena Godfrey, a 13-year-old street child, he expressed how his mother has been epileptic ever since he was a baby. His father was a soldier in Rwanda but he does not know if he is still alive or not because he's never met him. Godfrey has 10 older sisters, yet they reject him at home because he is from a different father. He now has no one to care for him at home and he has unfortunately been forced onto the streets. He states: "My sisters send me away. They are not willing to take care of me because my father is different. I don't know if my father is still alive in Rwanda. I've never met my father" (Rubangakena, G., personal communication, October 31, 2013).

Child Mothers, Children of Rape and Abduction, and Rejection*: Girls and women were abducted by the LRA and were forced to marry rebel officers and commanders in the army. Rape was also very common during the northern war. The children of these women and young girls were often born in captivity or they are children of a rape victim. Frequently, soldiers would marry or have sexual relations with women during the war and then leave once the conflict ended. The children of these individuals are repeatedly rejected by their villages, communities, and their own families because they are children of rape or defilement. Children who are fathered by rebels or soldiers are also unwelcome when returning back to their villages. This then leaves the mother with little resources to care for the child. Sometimes these children are then left or "dumped" on the streets because they are rejected or there is not enough to provide for them. As

stated by Akol Anthony, "Soldiers were also brought from all over the country to fight here…they married the women or the women were raped and then these women had children but the soldiers left" (Akol, A., personal communication, October 28, 2013). Soldiers defiled young girls, creating impoverished child mothers and their children are often rejected by the community and left to fend for themselves.

Displacement- Trying to Find the Way Back Home: In the CPF's Street Children Project Report of 2010, it was noted that "…with the return of peace to northern Uganda and the apparent movement of some of the displaced persons to their original villages, some of the children who were formerly night commuters and others whose parents are moving to the villages ended up on the street of Gulu…" (Akena, 2010, p.1). During the resettlement to the village, parents sometimes left their children behind in the town to work or "…the children did not want to go back to their villages with no education or healthcare and opted to stay in urban settings" (Amony, 2013, para. 8). Left alone and unguided, the children then face the everyday struggle of survival. After displacement and separation from their families, children and formerly abducted child soldiers do not know where they live, where their families are, or if they are still alive. Odoch Idris age 14 states: "I don't know where home is. My caretaker confuses me and says my father is from Kitgum or another district. I have discovered three places where my family is. Pece, Kitgum, and Nwoya but I don't know where my family stays. My parents died during the war. I don't know what killed my father and my mother died in the hospital."

Dependency Syndrome*:* A culture of dependency has manifested through handouts given out during the war and it has continued into the post-conflict period. During the time of war, when civilians were forced to live in the IDP camps, productive assets of the communities were destroyed and people had no access to land cultivation, livestock or any sort of income-

generating activities. As a result, it was mandatory that people relied on the handouts from NGO's, the UN agencies, and outside family members. Abject poverty was created, families became broken and hopelessness set in. The existence of NGO's and international aid has created this dependency syndrome among the Acholi population. There has been a loss of creativity and a loss in the active participation of trying to improve the standard of living. As a result, "Many children are being "dumped" by struggling families…a culture of dependency has been created, so relatives stop visiting, taking responsibility or providing anything for orphans and vulnerable children" (Kalibala & Elson, 2010, p. 50). Dependency syndrome also makes families and communities believe that the vulnerable child "belongs" to the NGO that is offering support.

Freedom and Peer Pressure*:* Peer pressure can also be responsible for why these children turn to the streets. Living on the streets allows for ultimate freedom due to the lack of adult supervision. Sometimes other children already living on the street try to lure their friends into living on the streets too in order to escape household tasks, school, and other responsibilities. The idea of freedom and lack of responsibility appeals to these children when life at home becomes demanding. As said by the Assistant Probation Officer of Gulu, Ouma Samuel, "…there's peer pressure. They have now dropped out of school, no one is there to take care of them, they are now earning money and eating good food" (Ouma, S., personal communication, November 11, 2013); However, while some children are lured by the promise of excitement, freedom, and lack of responsibility, "…the majority are pushed onto the street by desperation and a realization that they have nowhere else to go" (World Health Organization, n.d., p. 4). When speaking to Komakec Patrick, the director of finance at the CPF, he stated: "…some think they are having a good time on the street. Don't be surprised that some of the

street children are from better families" (Komakec, P., personal communication, November 1, 2013).They run away to escape reality; however reality hits even harder when on the streets.

Pull Factors: What causes these children to stay on the streets?

Pull factor are defined as those conditions that force or keep a person or group of people in a certain location. In the case of street children, a pull factor is that which that keeps the child living on the streets and makes them reluctant to go back home. There is no key distinction between the major pull factors for a child coming to the street whether in Kampala, Karamoja, Kitgum, Gulu, or any other city or district in Uganda. When speaking to Komakech Emon, a consultant at CPF, he stated that "…they [the street children] somehow stuck around Gulu. They were using it as a stopping point to hang around here for a few days and then proceed to Kampala, but they somehow have stayed in Gulu." Gulu, being the largest city in the north, is ideal for street children to earn little money to try to survive. The following are some of the major reasons which keep children on the street of Gulu town:

Earning Money: These children earn money by selling scrap metal, water bottles and recyclable plastics. They also earn by doing small construction jobs or working as porters at construction sites around town. The girls sell their bodies in return for a bit of money for survival (sex workers). After communication with Okumu Charles, the former Project Officer of Action for Street Kids in Gulu, he states:

> *"…the reasons why they are still on the street are because they sell petty things and get money. They steal for survival, others are involved in begging – some have lots of money which they squander in town, not thinking about their poor parents back home."(Okumu, C., personal communication, November 21, 2013).*

The street children steal and sell the stolen items in order to make money for food, alcohol, and drugs. They enjoy making money, even though it's a very small amount, because they would not be able to do this at home. They enjoy spending this money on "good" food such as biscuits and juice that they would not otherwise have at home.

The Streets are Better than Life at Home: Sometimes life on the streets is better than life at home. "According to them, living on the streets is much better than home because they get sympathy from churches, organizations like this [CPF], and they are able to have small jobs and they eat better food" (Oryema, A., personal communication, November 30, 2013). Organizations or the police force might attempt to take these children home, yet some return to the streets because there isn't anyone at home to care for them. The street seems like a better place or street life is all they know so they come back again and again.

> *"He's from very far from Gulu town but he walked 3 days to come to Gulu. He has been taken back 8 times. His father is a drug addict which leads to domestic violence against him so he leaves and he walks very far back to Gulu to live on the streets with the other children and to get a little help from the Charity for Peace Foundation" (Oryema, A., personal communication, November 30, 2013).*

Don't Know Where Home is: Another factor which makes street children reluctant to go back home is that they do not know where their home is due to displacement during the war or abandonment from their families. This forces them to go on the streets because they ultimately have nowhere to go home to. Ogenrwot Boniface, a street boy around 10 years old, voiced that he doesn't know where his home is. He goes on to say: "My mother died and my father is in another district but I don't know where. He's a boda boda rider" [motorcycle taxi] (Ogenrwot, B., Personal communication, November 8, 2013).

Forced by Home Circumstance*: The majority of street children are not on the streets because they want to be, they are simply "…forced by circumstances and overwhelmed by the burden of being on the streets. If they are rehabilitated their attitudes will change and they will become independent. These children are not lazy, they just lack guidance. They don't have anyone to show them the way" (Akena, I., personal communication, November 7, 2013). Broken families, the broken culture, the HIV/AIDS epidemic, poverty, amongst countless other reasons have forced these children onto the streets.

Challenges

Children living on the streets carry a heavy burden on their shoulders. Every aspect of their young life is affected because they are living on the streets. No matter how or why they landed on the street, they all face similar challenges and struggle for survival every single day. Their basic needs are not met including; shelter, food and water, medical attention, clothing, schooling, proper hygiene, and family support. They face peer pressure from the other street children when it comes to drinking, taking drugs, and stealing. A stigma is placed upon them by the community and the authorities. This stigma also affects job employment. Street children are threatened by physical abuse from the police, the community, and the older street children. The girls living on the street face similar problems; however they also suffer from rape, forced prostitution, defilement, child and early pregnancy, and unwanted pregnancies.

Basic Needs Not Met*: Lacking shelter, adequate food, clean water, medical attention, clothing, education, proper hygiene, livelihood and family support, street children are silently suffering. The phenomenon of street children is one of the most problematic and complex social issues in any society. Due to lack of guidance and protection, the basic needs of street children

are not met and their rights are violated. Earning a living by selling scraps, stealing and engaging

in exploitative work, the children still cannot sufficiently meet their basic needs. Akol Anthony

sums up the challenges these children endure below:

> *"They lack proper accommodation, clothing, employment opportunity, food. Some*
> *survive on milk or one meal a day. They face discrimination; there are a lot of*
> *stereotypes. Some people have a negative attitude towards them. The younger ones face*
> *bullying from the older ones. They are always beaten. They are arrested from police.*
> *They steal anything valuable. Sometimes they cut the roof of the house and they send the*
> *little ones in to steal. But they can't keep them in prison because there is not enough food*
> *to feed them. And they don't bathe frequently"* (Akol A., personal communication,
> October 29, 2013).

The children sleep under the veranda of a local church, sometimes on bags of fertilizer.

They go hungry when they cannot collect enough scrap metal or make enough money throughout

the day. "When I fail to collect cans I could sleep hungry…when we sleep, there are no blankets

and no food at night" (Rubangakena G., personal communication, October 31, 2013). The water

that they drink is often contaminated. When speaking to Godfrey, age 13, he explains how he

contracted typhoid from drinking the water from the streets. In an interview with Akol Anthony,

he explained how one of the street children died in June 2013, from a combination of typhoid

and malaria at the same time. The lack of medical care is also a huge issue. When the children

fall sick or become injured, they have no money to go to the hospital or to receive proper

medication or medical care.

Due to the lack of livelihoods and lack of family support, they cannot afford schools fees

to attend school, they cannot maintain proper hygiene, and they cannot afford to properly care of

themselves. In an interview with Obira Bob, age 19, he stated: "I started living on the streets

when I was 15 years old. I don't have anyone who can support me. My relatives can't support

me." The crisis of broken families and the broken culture have caused children to become street children, unable to appropriately care for themselves.

Peer Pressure*:* The peer group has a strong influence on street children because once on the street, it is very important to become accepted among the other children. The peer group provides a sense of belonging and protection against the dangers of street life. Street children help in one another's survival by forming social networks, business networks, and teaching each other how to survive. They share clothing, food, sleeping space, drugs, and alcohol. The influence of the peer group is so dominant when it comes to peer pressure. "The biggest challenge is the influence of the older ones on the younger ones. They smoke, steal, and abuse alcohol. Some use the younger ones to achieve these tasks of stealing, as if they were the boss of them and the young ones listen out of fear" (Komakech P., personal communication, October 31, 2013). There is pressure from the older street children on the younger children to give them the money that they have made that day. According to Rubangakena Godfrey, "…the older boys steal from us and if we don't give them our money they beat us" (Rubangakena G., personal communication, October 31, 2013). There is also peer pressure to try different drugs, such as marijuana or opium, and to drink alcohol.

Stigma*:* The mental, physical, and emotional growth of street children has been affected by their nomadic lifestyles and the lack of love and family support. As a result, society stigmatizes these children. These negative stereotypes are often anchored to non-empirical assumptions made by society as whole in order to label all street children. Negative stereotypes such as dirty, drug-abusers, alcoholics, unhealthy, mentally ill, lazy, beggar, thieves, and violent causes the community to dehumanize street children. The label often prevents the children from getting hired and it causes discrimination, and community mistreatment. When speaking to Obira

Bob (19 years old), he states: "You need an 'O' level (high school level) for employment so no one will hire me" (Obira B., personal communication, November 5, 2013).

The community views these children as thieves, criminals, substance abusers, and stubborn. They are often arrested or brutally beaten by the police because of their appearance and the pre-conceived notion that they might steal. When asked the question: "How does the community treat you/street children?" some of the responses from participants are as follows:

"Sometimes we are arrested and they beat us. If you steal anything, they harass and surround you" (Okello B., personal communication, November 8, 2013).

"My perception about the community is that most people think these children are stubborn children, they just don't listen, they don't believe there are push factors [pushing these kids out of their homes]. On the other hand, some are aware of the challenges. They know they are helpless but they can't do much. But the community thinks they don't have the resources they think the help should come from the outside and dependency syndrome has developed when in the camps" (Akena I., personal communication, November 7, 2013).

"The community views them as criminals. Others view them as workers, spoiled, disadvantaged children from broken families who need help. There's a mix of views" (Ouma S., Personal communication, November 11, 2013).

Inherent Danger and Physical Abuse*:* Inherent dangers including economic deprivation, lack of adult supervision, inadequacy of basic needs and abuse from others leaves street children at risk. They develop survival mechanisms such as stealing, pick-pocketing, prostitution, and drug and alcohol abuse that then becomes noticed by the community. These

consequences of the inherent danger are often "…confounded with the root causes of the problem, that is, the reasons why children escape from responsible adult control and support" (Ndeboc *et al.*, n.d., p. viii). Local authorities then respond to the children forcefully and irrationally, often unable to address the root cause of the issue. Physical abuse comes from the authorities, the community members, as well as the older street children. One child was killed recently when another boy threw a stone at him.

Girls Living on the Streets*:* Many of the girls living on the street have fallen victim to defilement, rape, assault, child and early pregnancy, unwanted pregnancies, and HIV/AIDS. They are vulnerable to trafficking for commercial sexual exploitation and other forms of child labor. They often have no choice but to engage in survival sex because it is the easiest available way to make money. "The male street children are found around Buganda Pub (a local bar in Gulu) and they rape the street girls. The girls are also defiled by adults. A lot of them are HIV positive (Akol A., personal communication, October 31, 2013).

Charity for Peace Foundation- Programs and Effectiveness

The Charity for Peace Foundation offers support through the identification and registration of street children, family tracing, center-based activities, street-based activities, vocational skill training, counseling, and reintegration of street children in Gulu. CPF seeks to reduce the level of child neglect, provide assistance to current and former street children, and advocate for these children to help reduce their plight. The programs offered are as follows:

Identification and Registration*:* Identification and registration of street children is one of the most important steps in the rehabilitation and reintegration process. CPF continues to register new cases of street children who enter the streets of Gulu. Social workers and the project officer move on the streets to identify and register these children using a developed registration form as a way of finding out if the child is a part-time or full-time street child. Home visits follow after registration in order to understand more about the child's family life and to build rapport with the family.

The Charity for Peace Foundation identifies the street children in Gulu through the use of previously identified street children who then identify their friends. Theoretically, the project officer of CPF should move out on the streets to also identify these children. There is a gap in this process because this has not been done in the last two months. According to the chairperson of CPF, this should be done on a weekly basis. Identification and registration does not require extensive funding or resources, so there is no reason why this should not be done more frequently.

Family Tracing, Resettlement, and Reunification*:* During the family tracing period, CPF talks to the children to try to understand why the child is on the streets and to figure out

where their home might be. The District Probation and Social Welfare officer of the child's

respective district becomes involved in the family tracing process. They track down the family

and they hold a discussion to prepare the family for the return of their child. Once the family

accepts, the resettlement and reunification process begins. The CPF "…is working towards

reintegrating children with their families as a lasting solution instead of providing residential

care" (Akena, 2010, p. 3). Resettlement also involves supporting the child in school and

vocational skill training, if necessary. Follow up through phone calls and home visits should be

done until the child is fully resettled. In 2010, a total of 19 children; 14 boys and 5 girls were

reintegrated into their families however, out of the 19, only 7 have been remained in their

villages and the rest have come back to the streets (Akena, 2010, p.3). In 2013, a total of 15

children were resettled at the community level (Okumu, 2013, p.6).

> *"We trace the families of the children. We get the family and talk to them and try to find*
> *out the cause of why their children are on the streets" (Oryema A., personal*
> *communication, October 30, 2013).*

The effectiveness of family tracing and resettlement varies from case to case, however

this process could become more effective with additional resources and funding. When speaking

to Akena Innocent, the chairperson of CPF, he states: "It would be ideal if we could accurately

conduct family tracing however, we don't have the resources" (Akena I., personal

communication, November 27, 2013). The reintegration of the child is also lacking effectiveness

because the root causes are often not addressed. CPF is "…aware that merely returning the street

children may not be a viable solution to the street children problem so there is a need to go an

extra mile to support the families since upon return to their home…" (Akena, 2010, p. 6). Again,

the funding for this sector is lacking, and income-generating activities and support for the family

is often not given. An issue of transportation also comes into play. As reported by a CFP report in 2010, "The social workers have difficulties visiting homes because they are far away and a cost implication is involved" (Akena, 2010, p. 5).

Center-Based Activities*:* Counseling and psycho-social support offered by CPF is a crucial part of the rehabilitation process for these children. The on-going services are offered by the project officers, other NGO workers, as well as outside individuals either in an individual or group setting. The counseling takes place every Tuesday and Friday, when the children are within the CFP compound. In 2011, "…out of 37 children engaged in counseling, 10 confessed that they will leave theft and 13 confessed that they will leave drug abuse…" (Okumu & Akol, 2011, p. 2). In 2010, CPF implemented home care counseling sessions that were developed to help the parents learn how to deal with their own problems and to also learn how to handle their child best. Other forms of support are offered in recreation and play, guest speakers, health check-ups, and center-feeding. On average, the children spend about 3 hours within the CPF center on Tuesday and Friday participating in group counseling, recreational activities, socializing, and eating lunch.

Health check-ups and testing is also a vital aspect of the CPF Action for Street Kids project. Gulu Regional Referral Hospital and The Doctor's Clinic in Layibi are partners in helping diagnose and treat illness and disease among the street children. Malaria, fever, abdominal worms, skin infections, wounds, STD's, and HIV/AIDS are just a few common ailments that are diagnosed and treated. In 2011, 24 children were tested for HIV/AIDS by Gulu Regional Referral Hospital and The Aids Support Organization (TASO). Out of these children, 7 were found to be HIV/AIDS positive. In 2013, 29 children were tested for HIV/AIDS and 4 were

found to be positive. On Tuesdays and Fridays, the children are also taken to a local restaurant for lunch.

The center-based activities including counseling, psycho-social support, health check-ups, recreational activities, and center-feeding, have been somewhat effective in the rehabilitation process for the street children, however a few challenges have arisen. The lack of funding for the street children project limits how much that can actually be done for the children. For example, the center-feeding only takes place on Tuesdays and Fridays at lunch-time. The rest of the days, the children may go hungry which impels them to "…go for stealing, pick pocketing and so on for survival" (Okumu, 2013, p. 7). This then extends the problem to the community, consequently influencing the stigma against street children. Lack of funding has also limited CPF's ability to meet the major medical needs of the beneficiaries. Health problems often occur due to the nature of the street children's living conditions and livelihoods and CPF does not have enough resources to completely address these issues. According to Okumu Charles, the former project officer for the Action for Street Children in Gulu:

> *"The counseling about stealing and HIV doesn't really work." (He says he's recovered so many stolen items from the children) …We counsel them about HIV, stealing, health, general things to give them hope. We invited a pastor to speak to them. It works sometimes but they still drink and do drugs. Others have left drinking and drugs and they don't steal because of the counseling" (Okumu C., personal communication, October 31, 2013).*

Vocational Skill Training: As a part of the rehabilitation of the street children, the children are given a chance to register for vocational skill training or an apprenticeship course. This year, "…a total of 54 children and young people were enrolled for the following courses during this period: Chapatti and Rolex making (10); welding and metal fabrication (5); hotel and home management (15); Motor vehicle mechanics (15); Hair cutting and dressing (4), and

building and concrete practices (5)" (Okumu, 2013, p. 5). The majority of the trainees were able to get some sort of employment after completing the course. The children are secured with start-up kits and tools to enable them to start up their own employment, if possible. Follow up support is also offered to ensure the greatest success possible. CPF also provides job placement for the children that complete training. Job placement is used to enhance the skills learned and to also expose the child to a true work environment. This has been successful for the most part, except for "…few cases of indiscipline related to theft of tools by some trainees…" (Okumu, 2013, p.5).

In 2013, 37.7 percent of the vocational skill trainees dropped out of training before completing (Okumu, 2013, p. 5). Vocational skills are employing some but some are getting used to handouts and they don't feel comfortable working. The vocational skills they are being taught are practical when in town, however once back in the village, chapatti making and welding, for example, are not as practical. The unemployment levels in Gulu are also prohibiting these children and youth from obtaining steady jobs. Also, after being on the streets for years, for some of the children, they have gotten used to quick and easy money, in the form of stealing. The mentality to work hard for a living is not always there and this is why sometimes the vocational skill training does not always work. "For them, they want easy money. We trained them in chapatti making but they escaped because they would rather steal" (Akol A., personal communication, October 29, 2013). Overall, vocational skills can provide a good means for these children to get themselves out of the street, however it must be done in the correct way and they must stick with it. When speaking to Odoch Idris, a 14-year-old street child, he voiced that "…the best way to help is to empower them with skills to do different things to support their lives. They shouldn't just be taken home because they will just come back on the streets" (Odoch

I., personal communication, November 8, 2013). It is also important to respect the desires of each child.

> *"Most of them are willing to work, but they have different desires. Some want businesses, some want to sit and work. Most don't want to go back to school; they want money in an informal way. Most of them don't want to go back to school because the process of school takes too long. They want short courses like 2, 3 or 6 months. If I study for 10 years it will be too long" (Odoch I., personal communication, November 8, 2013).*

Networking and Institutional Cooperation*:* Since CPF is a small NGO, it is essential to network, coordinate and collaborate with other local and international NGO's who work to address similar issues. This is done to properly meet the "…diverse needs of children taken off from the streets including health, education, clothing, food, spiritual and psychological needs…" (Okumu, 2013, p. 6). To ensure integrated and comprehensive service to the street children in Gulu, the CPF works with Action for Street Kids UK, Gulu Regional Referral Hospital, TASO, War Child Holland, Gulu Municipal council, Gulu Youth Development Association, Invisible Children, Save the Children, The Doctor's Clinic, amongst other organizations. Partnerships have enabled CPF to gain additional resources, services, and assistance to facilitate rehabilitation and reintegration for the street children of Gulu, Uganda.

Overall, the outreach to other NGO's and organizations is good; however more outreach can be done. Advocacy and outreach to the community is not fully utilized. There must be a concerted effort from the families, community, local leaders, security agencies, policy and law makers, and other NGO's and organizations that do similar work because the problem of street children should be the concern of everyone. In order to successfully deal with the plight of street children, "…there is a need for a broader mobilization and participation of all stakeholders to address the push as well as pull factors" (Okumu, 2013, p. 7).

Conclusion

The problem of street children in Gulu is often a forgotten matter. Street children are the casualties of economic deprivation, war and natural disaster, loss of traditional lifestyle and values, domestic violence, abuse, along with many other reasons. Every child has a push factor that drives them to the streets. Some are lured by the promise of freedom but, the majority of these children are forced by unfortunate circumstances. Living on the streets is a struggle for survival. These children are not living, they are simply surviving. Suffering from assault, hunger, disease, drug and alcohol abuse, emotional and physical abuse, exploitation, discrimination, and lack of love, street children remain one of the most vulnerable groups of children in the world. The lifestyle street children are forced to engage in clearly violates every law and policy put in place for child protection. The street children of Gulu are unique because most of these children have grown up in a war-torn or post-conflict environment. The war has caused much suffering and loss to the children themselves and to their families. Displacement, broken families, the HIV/AIDS epidemic, children born in captivity, and children fathered by soldiers are just a few factors that differentiates the street children of Gulu from other street children around the world.

In Gulu, there are few organizations working to address this problem. Second, the government of Uganda is not doing anything to handle this on-going issue. Third, "…the department of Community and Children Affairs, the Child Protection unit at the police, and the political wing that deals with child affairs are not doing much (Okumu C., personal communication, October 31, 2013). The policies are already in place to protect these children, yet implementation is the biggest dilemma. As said by the Assistant Probation Officer, Ouma

Samuel, "…we don't have any NGO's targeting this and if we do, they have no funding. There's a big gap" (Ouma S., personal communication, November 11, 2013).

Today's generation of children will grow up to become tomorrow's leaders. It is absolutely necessary that these children are nurtured and supported, as children should be. The well-being of the child "…should remain a top priority in community development" (MGLSD, 1999, p. 2). As individuals, a society, a country, and as a humanitarian, we cannot turn our backs on these children.

In the last couple years, progress has been made in providing protection, assistance, and organizations to support this group of vulnerable children, but today there is now a great need for sustainable, quality services to help address this increasing problem in the northern region of Uganda. We need to facilitate the children by providing them with the right to a healthy, happy, meaningful, productive life.

Recommendations

In view of all the above information, the following recommendations can be made:

1. *Rehabilitation Center*: It is essential that construction of the rehabilitation center is finished as soon as possible. The rehabilitation center is a place where the children can be easily monitored, advised, and guided in order to be properly rehabilitated. The center can include accommodations, a feeding-center, a school, and other essential establishments to supply the street children with the tools for appropriate rehabilitation.

2. *Policy Makers*: Policy makers must be sensitized to the issue of children in street situations and the detrimental effects this group has upon the society as a whole. The phenomenon of street children is overlooked because it is often hidden. More attention needs to be placed upon the policies and more specifically the implementation of those policies concerning street children and vulnerable children.

3. *Professional Orientation:* As a part of the reintegration and rehabilitation process, programs that are provided should include professional orientation in order to reinforce the children's professional aspirations. Motivation and a change in attitude is key for these children to get themselves out of the streets and to inspire them to pursue their studies.

4. *Networking and Community Involvement:* Strengthening the coordination and networking within Gulu, neighboring districts, Uganda, and internationally is important when trying to tackle such an issue. One single organization simply cannot provide everything for the group of children targeted. The best way to provide service is to create strong networks and encourage cooperation among many different sectors. The community also needs to get involved. The most sustainable and cost-effective programs are often those run by the

community groups. Interventions, community-based organizations and an umbrella network can help properly address the issue and it will increase the level of transparency. With increased transparency, the opportunities for abuse of resources directed towards vulnerable children will reduce.

5. *Advocacy and Information Campaign:* More advocacy and information needs to be provided to the public to further understanding and clarify topics of street children. Materials such as posters, radio talk shows, Facebook networking and other forms of media and communication should be put in place. This should be done within the community as well as internationally. These campaigns should include the issues of child rights and protection and the responsibilities of parents and guardians.

6. *Further Studies:* Further studies should be conducted on street children in Gulu and Uganda to seek to understand better initiatives and interventions that can provide assistance at the institutional level, the community level, and the government level.

7. *Income-Generating Activities:* Income-generating activities and projects should be provided to the families of returning street children. Poverty alleviation and self-help projects should be offered to the families of these children for sustainable livelihood.

8. *Fundraising:* Fundraising is one of the most important aspects for NGO work. NGO's should not depend upon international donors or handouts to help their local beneficiaries. The emerging culture of dependency needs to be done away with through the facilitation of community-based organization and community-centered fundraising.

9. *Prevention:* Prevention can stop more children from entering the streets in the first place. Prevention methods like income-generating activities, targeting of at-risk households, and

advocacy can help reduce the possibility of more children coming on to the streets of

Gulu to live.

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