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The Heart of Forgiveness, in Light of Unforgettable Hurt: A Multi-Faceted Perspective on Reconciliation in Northern Uganda

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The Heart of Forgiveness, in Light of Unforgettable Hurt:

A Multi-faceted Perspective on Reconciliation in northern Uganda
Dedication

I dedicate this work to all the individuals I met during my time in Kitgum, who have opened up their hearts and welcomed me into their lives. It is truly incredible how enriching and fulfilling our lives can be when we take the time to engage in dialogue and get to know one another. As much as I try, I do not think I could ever truly understand the immense pain and horror that the people of northern Uganda faced during the twenty-three year war. Everything about the war and its effects is shocking, but perhaps most shocking is the strength and resilience you keep alive despite everything. For me, it is nothing short of awe-inspiring. When I spoke with you, I felt this internal tension, heart and mind struggling with whether it was right for me to be conducting this research, asking you to relive these agonizing memories again. I didn’t want you to look at me like a researcher, an outsider, or an intruder. Rather, I wanted you to see me as a friend, a confidante, and to see us as just people sitting together, talking about our lives in the pursuit of creating a more peaceful future. I hope that I achieved this.

You did not have to, but you nevertheless let me in and shared with me your lives. For that, I am eternally grateful. Thank you for your courage and hopefulness, and your ability to laugh and smile despite the hardships you faced and continue to face. I will share your story, your struggles and your strength with people wherever I may go in the hope that we together build a greater feeling of global solidarity. Even more than ever before, I am sure that despite our different experiences, we are invariably connected - you with me, and I with you. For your generosity and kindness, I dedicate this work to you, my brothers and sisters. Afwoyo.

Barbara Vi Thien Ho
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The following research study could not have been completed without the tremendous assistance and support of many people. Thank you Charlotte Mafumbo and Martha Wandera; your guidance and faith in my interests and passion helped carry me through. Thank you Miriam Lumonya and Helen Lwemamu for being there, making sure that every last detail is in place. I couldn’t have done it without you. Thank you Meddie Osundwa and Jennifer Wateta - for your patience and genuine kindness. Your smiles help make each day promising. Thank you to my friends on the SIT program for your passion for development, for challenging me and for helping me grow intellectually, socially and in faith. I would like to thank Nyeko Geoffrey Job - who knew that a little act of sharing could bring me such a good friend and assistant? Without your guidance and support, this research would not be what it is. Thank you Akao Janet for your enthusiasm and encouragement throughout my research study. Your support really helped me tie the loose ends of my research together.

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ABSTRACT

"The goodness of human beings is like the flame of freedom and of memory, which can be hidden but can never die."¹

As the prospect of a peace agreement in northern Uganda becomes more likely, there is no greater time than now to address reconciliation and reintegration of formerly abducted persons (FAPs). Rather than focus on the role of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and reception centers, however, the study utilized focus group interviews, informal and non-formal interviews and secondary sources to gain a deeper understanding of how the community approaches reconciliation and reintegration. The study takes a critical look at Acholi community’s traditional approaches to justice and reconciliation in order to understand its strength and weaknesses in providing true reconciliation and a positive homecoming to returnees and their community members. Even more, the study aims to look at how FAPs and locals understand notions of peace and justice, and how they propose peace and justice can be realized in their communities. This encompasses an analysis of how individuals believe the prospective return of the key figures in the Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA) conflict - Kony and his top commanders - should be dealt with in order to acquire peace and justice. Lastly, the study strives to identify potential avenues from which on the grassroots level, communities recognize their power to bring forth true transformation and reconciliation in post-conflict northern Uganda.

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INTRODUCTION

If development is a final goal to be achieved in Uganda, then stability and peace must first be realized in the northern conflict. Thus, the following one-month research in Kitgum District (on the border of northern Uganda and southern Sudan) focused on one imperative aspect of creating sustainable peace in the north: community-level approaches to reconciliation and reintegration of individuals who were either victims or perpetrators in the LRA conflict that has threatened stability in northern Uganda. The study strives to identify local mechanisms of reintegrating and supporting FAPs and to identify the missing gaps where improvements can be made. Because the work of NGOs and the international community is not sustainable, the study takes a truly grassroots approach, engaging the affected population in dialogue about the challenges returnees and their communities face, shedding light on how the community can become active agents in the reconciliation and reintegration process, and how sustainable peace and justice can be achieved in the greater community. Similarly, the research includes an examination of local opinion on the possibility of reconciliation with the key figures of the LRA, and the local opinion on the International Criminal Court (ICC).

BACKGROUND

Colonial tribal divisions have long divided the people of north and south Uganda. While the south benefited from some development during colonialism, northerners were recruited into the army and used as sources of labor. Neglected, too, by the Ugandan government, an Acholi named Joseph Kony formed an army to fight the government. When the National Resistance Army (NRA), led by current President Yoweri Museveni, took over in a coup in 1986, Kony transferred his forces to southern Sudan. Although in 1988, several attempts were made at a peace agreement, the development of a Holy Spirit Movement (HSM), led by Alice Lakwena destroyed any chance of peace in northern Uganda. In 1991, Kony took over for Lakwena and joined his forces with hers to form what is now called the Lord’s Resistance Army. Since 1987, northern Uganda has been caught up in a war that can be described as both a conflict between the LRA

and the Ugandan government as well as a conflict between civilians and the Ugandan government. An Acholi himself, Kony has notoriously been known for his army’s brutal abductions of children in northern Uganda, whom are used as soldiers, carriers or married off to commanders as spouses. Since the conflict began, over 1.5 million northerners have been displaced and affected by the war. Even more, the LRA rebels have destroyed lives and communities through their unrelenting acts of village burnings, massacres, and looting. Since 1994, the Ugandan government has made several attempts at peace talks with Kony and his commanders in an effort to end the conflict, with the most recent peace attempt taking place in July of 2008 in Juba. In 2003, however, President Museveni referred the LRA to the ICC for war crimes, and in 2005, the ICC issued arrest warrants for Kony and his top four commanders.

Although many members of the international community praise the ICC indictments as a message of the world’s steadfast position against the violence and atrocities committed by the LRA, others - namely, northern Ugandans - consider the looming arrest warrants the one factor preventing Kony from signing the peace agreement and peace being realized after twenty-three years of conflict. Some advocate, instead, for the use of traditional approaches to end the conflict, emphasizing reconciliation. In an effort to recognize the value of traditional approaches, the Amnesty Act was passed in 2000, and the Amnesty Commission (AC) established in 2002 by Parliament to assist in the demobilization, reintegration and resettlement of FAPs, and to grant amnesty to any FAP who returns from the bushes. Currently, there are six offices in Uganda, including one in Kitgum. Even further, traditional approaches are practiced upon the return of FAPs into their communities. Local religious and cultural leaders help conduct traditional rituals and ceremonies such as nyono tong gweno (stepping on the egg) and goyo-pii (cleansing) in order to welcome

8 Nyono tong gweno is a traditional welcoming ritual that is supposed to ward off feelings of alienation. The egg is placed on a slippery branch (opobo) and a stick with a fork (layebi). The egg symbolizes the purity and fragility of
home members of the community after a long absence, to give a blessing and to ward off cen\textsuperscript{10} (bad spirits).

While the ICC indictments against Kony and his commanders remain existent, returnees who come home and renounce the LRA are granted amnesty and returned to their communities. Even more, traditional leaders have played an integral role in the peace talks between the LRA and the Ugandan government. The Acholi Religious Leaders Peace Initiative (ARLPI), is a local, multi-denominational organization established in 1997 with a goal of realizing long-term peace and development in northern Uganda and eventually, all of Uganda. The organization unites heads of the Catholic, Anglican, Orthodox and Islamic religions, and involves nominated youth and women representatives.\textsuperscript{11} As influential religious authorities in northern Uganda, they have played a role in peace talks, serving as neutral observers and advisors to the mediator.\textsuperscript{12}

The picture of post-conflict resolution in northern Uganda is a mixture of traditional and modern approaches to justice and peace, and encompasses a variety of actors. As the possibility of peace looms over Uganda, the issue of how to face the aftermath of over two decades of pain and agony in Acholiland remains utmost pertinent. Uganda faces the challenge of revamping the peace agreement efforts in order to end the physical conflict. Even greater a task, however, is the more strenuous task afterwards of rebuilding northern Uganda’s communities and relationships after a war that made the line separating victims and perpetrators unclear and vague.

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9. Goyo-pii involves elders washing their hands in clean water. The water then is sprinkled over the returnee as a blessing or poured over the entrance of the hut so it drips on the person as he or she walks in (ibid, 28).

10. Cen is described as the entrance of an “angry spirit into the physical body of a person or persons that seeks appeasement, usually in the form of a sacrifice or, in the case of a wrongful death, compensation and a reconciliation between the clan of the offended and offender” (ibid, 12).


12. ibid.
DISCUSSION OF METHODOLOGY

The research was conducted utilizing primarily focus group interviews, formal and informal individual interviews in Kitgum District. In total, 11 individual interviews and 9 focus groups (51 participants) were conducted; and 4 community-based organizations (CBOs) and 2 reception centers were interviewed. Focus group interviews consisted of a group averaging six participants, with a range from three to eight. Focus groups lasted a duration of approximately two to three hours, while interviews lasted an hour or two hours. An observation of a traditional reconciliation ceremony, *tobong*[^13], was also completed in Mucwini sub-county. Even further, problem tree methods were also used in three of the focus groups conducted and secondary sources used to synthesize data. The secondary sources were gathered through internet searches, and from documents and books at the Human Rights House as well as the Resource Center at Kati House.

Although overall, the methods were implemented successfully, a varying number of challenges were faced. First, in an effort to be sensitive to the participants (particularly, the FAPs), the researcher attempted to get only a general idea of the experiences of the FAPs during their abduction. By not delving into the particular experiences of each individual, however, it is difficult for the researcher to analyze comprehensively the range of answers and responses given. The researcher faced an ethical dilemma interviewing FAPs upon realizing how much research has been completed with FAPs as the target group, and hearing from the interviewees how painful speaking of their time in the bushes can be. As a result of this, the researcher adjusted some interview questions and focused much more heavily on the present and future for FAPs rather than the past. The researcher considered distributing surveys, particularly to acquire more numerical data for comparative study. Due to the sensitivity of the subject matter, however, the researcher opted not to use this method, although it may have been beneficial.

Another dilemma that arose after completing the focus groups was the realization that a greater number of males had been interviewed than females. Although much

[^13]: *Tobong* is a compensation ceremony used to address indirect killings between clans. The compensation for the indirect killing of one person is 10 cows, 3 goats. Sometimes, money is exchanged instead, of animals (Bishop Macleord Baker Ochola II. Formal Interview. 3 Apr. 2009).
effort was put into keeping the number of participants balanced, due to a higher turn out in a couple male focus groups, and the cancellation of one female focus group, the numbers were skewed. In order to fix this dilemma, the researcher conducted a number of individual interviews with females. Unfortunately, this meant that although many females were individually interviewed, no formerly abducted males were interviewed. Conducting individual interviews with males would have been valuable to the study as it may have brought up more detailed and honest answers from the male perspective than provided by participants in focus groups.

All of the focus groups were put together with the assistance of outside parties. Two focus groups (with formerly abducted mothers and formerly abducted boys) were set up by CBOs. The focus groups with teachers, war-affected female students, and formerly abducted boys were mobilized by the headmaster of the secondary school. Three focus groups were set up by a local reverend in Mucwini sub-county where the research took place. In order to promote an atmosphere where the participants could speak openly and honestly about their experiences, effort was made to host the groups in a comfortable setting. Because many of the FAPs wanted to keep their status unidentified, it was imperative that the setting was private.

Although participants provided some thought-provoking answers and identified some key challenges to reintegration and reconciliation, it is likely that some responses were given and some other pressing challenges were not given because of the participants’ assumption that identifying certain challenges that organizations usually address would allow them to receive some assistance. As a result, although the research addresses some genuine problems facing returnees, other equally significant problems may have been unidentified. Furthermore, it was difficult to convey the focus of the research - *community-based approaches* - to the target participants. Even with an experienced translator, due to a popular desire for more NGO-based assistance and the dependency syndrome, it was difficult to get participants to think of solutions stemming from their own community.
JUSTIFICATION

The presence of NGOs and CBOs is abundant in Kitgum district, and they have played a significant role in helping FAPs reintegrate back into normal society. Due to funding and specific projects’ aims, however, their work is limited. As a result, although organizations play a key role in assisting returnees from the point of rescue, their responsibility often ends the day they are returned to their homes. After an experience as violent and traumatizing as returnees have witnessed in the northern war, however, continuous support during reintegration after the few weeks in the rehabilitation centers is imperative to a positive, full reintegration. Even if more assistance was provided by more organizations, one must beg the question, how sustainable is the work of these organizations and what will life be like for the community members when projects and programs end? In the attempt to establish stability post-conflict, are we not creating long-term instability and dependency?

When it comes to development, one cannot speak of sustainability without talking about stability and peace. No matter what development progress an area receives, the presence of violence and conflict always threatens to abolish all the progress seen. After twenty-three years of violence and conflict, true peace can finally potentially be realized in northern Uganda - it’s the getting there that is the challenge. In order to realize true peace, there must be full reconciliation within the communities. Stakeholders must find a way to cope with what has happened, and find a way to forgive one another and come together again. Individuals, too, must also find a way to handle the case of Kony and his commanders to create sustainable peace and prevent further violence from occurring in northern Uganda. Only by taking a multi-fold perspective to reintegration may true peace and sustainable development be realized.

OBJECTIVES

1.1. To identify the key challenges facing FAPs upon returning and reintegrating into local communities and school systems.

1.2. To identify the community members’ views on the reintegration process and their attitudes towards returnees.
1.3. To identify present and potential sources of support and assistance for returnees and reconciliation in the community.
1.4. To gain an understanding of how FAPs and local community members understand notions of peace and justice.
1.5. To examine how local community members think Kony and his commanders should be dealt with in order to achieve peace and/or justice.

RESEARCH FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

Brief Introduction

Examining what support was provided to FAPs at the community level demonstrated that even though initially efforts are made to welcome returnees home through the frequently performed traditional reconciliation ceremonies and/or prayer services, a severe lack of resources and assistance is provided to FAPs once they return to the community. For this research study, let us define community as consisting of the immediate family of returnees, the local educational institutions and the greater community members (village and sub-county).

Why Community?

Undoubtedly, the work of NGOs and reception centers have been critical to the reintegration and reconciliation process in northern Uganda. These organizations have helped provide the bulk of psychological assistance to FAPs, and have served to help ease the transition between the bushes and the home community. Upon escaping from the bushes, returnees are brought to the reception centers where they are provided with counseling and returnees and their families are prepared for their homecoming. FAPs, however, spend a brief length of time in the reception centers, averaging two weeks, with serious cases lasting only two to three months. When considering the particular experiences endured by the returnees, it is clear that the time returnees spend at reception centers is not adequate to address all the challenges that returning home may bring. The average length of time the participants in this study spent in the bushes was

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approximately a year and four months. Sixty-percent of males and ten-percent of females interviewed were forced to kill others while in the bushes. Seventy-percent of females interviewed were raped and fifty-five percent of them were impregnated during their time in the bushes or during night commuting. FAPs interviewed were twelve-years old on average when they were abducted. To witness and be forced to partake in such horrendous acts and injustices at such a tender age surely left permanent scars that a couple weeks of counseling and assistance cannot even began to heal. Limited by funding and capacity, however, organizations and reception centers can provide little more for FAPs. Most importantly, though, the work of NGOs and reception centers cannot be a substitute for the work needed in the communities where FAPs will return and hopefully, one day, consider home again.

As Julie, a 28-year old former abductee explained, the care packages provided by NGOs and the AC are appreciated, but receiving a similar gift from the community would help returnees “feel a connection to their home people and feel like they are truly accepted.” There is a difference in significance and sentiment when receiving aid from strangers and outsiders, versus neighbors and community members one lives among. Julie’s response hints at the incredible power to bring forth true reconciliation and reintegration, a power existent but not yet recognized in the community. Despite how vital the work of outside assistance has been in northern Uganda, projects and programs are “geared to more abstract, ideological goals” that are “short-term and results-oriented.” Communities cannot rely on organizations and aid to realize reconciliation and a successful reintegration, but instead, find ways to make the processes more community-owned.

The Community’s Perspective

Through information acquired through focus groups and individual interviews, there seems to be a discrepancy between the perspective of the reconciliation and reintegration process from the eyes of the community and local leaders, and that of the returnees themselves. While community members more likely looked favorably at the

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15 See Appendix: Charts for more information.
16 Statistic includes three girls who were raped and impregnated during night commuting.
17 The real names of FAPs and community members in this study are kept confidential to protect the individuals.
reconciliation and reintegration process, FAPs shared that on the ground, they faced many challenges upon returning home.

Focus groups\(^{19}\) were conducted with community members in Mucwini sub-county, where approximately two-hundred FAPs have been returned. In this sub-county, there was massive displacement of persons during the war, abductions of children, famine and now, land conflicts that threaten the security of the area. When asked about the relationships between returnees and community members, the community members shared that the relationships were very positive and that upon coming home, the community welcomes FAPs home with open arms. "Everyone forgives them," shared a focus group member from the community.\(^{20}\) He commented that there was complete forgiveness for the returnees as it was not their fault that they were abducted. Yet, these responses contradict with their later responses regarding specific treatments of returnees. In one focus group, for instance, five of seven participants identified name calling as an issue they have witnessed between individuals in the community and returnees. All seven participants also witnessed violence and verbal arguments between FAPs and their neighbors.

The community also shared a number of cases where returnees have acted out in violence, sometimes out of random and sometimes because of a reaction to name-calling or harassment. It was telling that while sharing these stories, participants seemed to not to understand fully why FAPs were so violent, as if their tendencies should be easily controlled if they wanted them controlled. Even though participants identified violence as a huge problem arising in the aftermath of the war, they did not identify ways in which the community could help transform how returnees dealt with their pain.

**The Returnees’ Perspective**

*Name-calling & Stigma*

Although most returnees described the first few days, particularly when traditional rituals and prayer ceremonies are held, as welcoming and helpful, most did not find this environment long-lasting. Eight-four percent (16/19) of females and all (19/19) of males shared that they have endured name-calling upon returning home due

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\(^{19}\) One focus group was comprised of mothers and fathers of abducted persons (returned and still missing), and another consisted of community members.

\(^{20}\) Elder. Focus group with community members from Mucwini sub-county. 18 Apr. 2009.
to their experiences in the bushes. Community members verbally harass them, calling them “killer,” “Kony,” or “bush woman.” Others tease them for having a “bush mind” that makes them have violent and mentally unstable tendencies to strike innocent victims - anyone at any time. Interviewees identified name-calling as one of the most prevalent problems within the community. “It is a constant reminder of the past even when you try to forget,” shared Jane, 20, a formerly abducted mother.21

With the name-calling comes great stigmatization from the community. As Tim, 25, described it, it's as if they [returnees] are living "on the line" in the community, for although they may be initially welcomed home, even the slightest mistake suggesting any lingering violent tendencies or anger will cause them to be labeled troubled and dangerous.22 As Tim was describing this tense environment in the community, other participants in the focus group nodded and mumbled in agreement with him.

Community members have a preconceived notion about the returnees, believing that they are not of a sound mind and that it is best to leave them alone. Charlotte, 19, a child mother, also shared that some individuals mistakenly believe that merely interacting with a FAP will cause them to be mentally tormented or disturbed, too.23 Others are simply afraid of being seen as a FAP themselves and being ostracized by the community. Another respondent, Mary, shared that although her child hasn’t even spoken his first words, neighbors already believe that he will follow his father's footsteps and go to the bushes. As a result, they tell Mary that there is no need to educate and invest in her child’s future.24 The verbal harassment endured by nearly all of the FAPs interviewed proves that there are indeed social challenges within communities when returnees come home that need addressing.

FAPs returning to school, too, face stigma and harassment. Many of the student mothers in the focus group shared that although female teachers tend to be supportive, male teachers used language that implied that they were mothers because of their promiscuity or actions rather than because they were victims of rape. Charlotte, a former night commuter who was raped during the journey, shared one experience of a male teacher who commented that her skirt was too short for a mother, as if that action

22 Tim. Focus group interview with formerly abducted male students. 18 Apr. 2009.
23 Charlotte. Focus group interview with formerly abducted female student and night commuters. 15 Apr. 2009.
must have caused her to be raped in the first place. As Charlotte shared her experience, she was not even able to look up, full of shame and clearly still hurt by the experience. The innocence of these children during these painful experiences - whether they were forced to kill, forced to carry heavy loads or were sexually abused - is irrefutable, yet all too often they are mislabeled perpetrators of the acts rather than the victims.

Challenges for the Family

Harassment is another challenge faced by returnees and by their family members upon their return home from the bushes. For many, despite the happiness and gratefulness they feel when their child is returned home, there is definite fear about how the community may perceive them. This is particularly true when one considers that a child may be returning home to the same community where he or she was forced to commit atrocities on neighbors. Formerly abducted women often come home as child mothers and despite the fact that they are victims, they are blamed and are constantly reminded of the “Kony child” or “bush child” they produced. Although the returnees themselves bear the brunt of the harassment, family members, too, are harassed and judged by neighbors who believe they did not raise their child properly or blame them for their child’s “mistakes.”

Other family members, however, are simply not prepared to receive their child home. Elizabeth, 24, spoke of the lack of support her family gave her when she returned home. Initially, her brother and his wife were somewhat supportive of her, although they took the support package provided to her by the AC. When they had finished using all the supplies given to her in the package, however, she began to receive heavy harassment by her sister-in-law. She was constantly reminded that she was a "bush woman" and told that she should have been killed in the bushes rather than to come home and disturb their family. Her brother did nothing to defend her and she was eventually forced to move out. Similarly, Mary, 18, endured physical and verbal abuse by her uncle upon returning home. He constantly reminded her that she is a child from the bushes and does not deserve the same treatment as others. She shared that because of the magnitude of the abuse experienced at home and in the community, she wishes

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that she would be able to return to the bushes again, where things are better. Because of the respect children are traditionally expected to give their uncles and the power that uncles are believed to have, reporting him to local leaders is not an option. Mary shared that if her uncle ever found out, he would be able to put a curse on her.\textsuperscript{27} Despite the great desire Mary has to stop her uncle’s harassment, she is silenced by traditional society expectations and norms that emphasize respect for the elderly. It is shocking that family members of these FAPs are sometimes the very individuals who are hindering the reconciliation and reintegration process of their own daughter, son, niece or nephew. It is clear that the preparation provided to family members while their daughter or son is at the resource center is inadequate at providing families a clear picture of challenges they face once returnees arrive home in their communities.

\textit{The Need for Psychological Assistance}

Another challenge relating to the harassment endured by returnees is the need for psychological assistance. The brief counseling services offered at reception centers is not sufficient to help returnees completely reintegrate back into normal societies. From the responses of participants in the study, there seems to be few avenues for counseling within the community for FAPs. Participants who were currently being counseled were served by organizations who visited their school, family members and/or their local religious leader. For the majority of interviewees, however, counseling was not available locally. Although minimal data was gathered about individuals’ opinion of counseling, fifty-seven percent (4/7) of males and ninety-one percent (10/11) of females believed that counseling would be helpful. The Acholi culture also strongly believes in cen, or the entrance of an “angry spirit into the physical body of a person or persons that seeks appeasement.”\textsuperscript{28} Because of the actions FAPs were forced to commit while in the bushes, many interviewees shared that cen disturbs them in the form of recollections, hallucinations and nightmares. Open dialogue and counseling are potential avenues that can help alleviate these issues. Various NGOs and a local youth center, Straight

\textsuperscript{27} Mary. Individual interview. 22 Apr. 2009.
Talk, offers counseling services to community members to address some of these issues, but due to their distance from the villages, it is not an ideal resource for FAPs. By providing counseling services in the immediate community for returnees, a variety of reintegration challenges can be tackled.

In the schools, although teachers shared that mandatory counseling was provided by NGOs on a weekly basis to all students, the focus groups with male students and female students uncovered that counseling services were actually less frequent. The girls shared that counseling was provided only three times a year, while the boys said that counseling was currently offered three times a term. Nonetheless, the frequency of counseling support available is lacking, and more work needs to be done in order to provide counseling to those who need it on a regular basis. The majority of respondents believe that counseling is beneficial when it comes to confronting their past experiences and transitioning back to the community.

One potential source for counseling was identified by teachers in the focus group. In an attempt to address the need for psychological support, teachers at Town College recalled that in the past, the school use to invite parents to come talk to students and offer words of encouragement. They suggested that this may be a program that could be re-implemented in the schools, especially at a time when returnees need guidance and support more than ever. Also, one teacher suggested that community elders could be a huge influence when it comes to speaking to youth about the negative effects of war, and emphasizing nonviolence after decades of war. Although some counseling support is currently being offered by outside organizations, it is neither enough to deal with the need nor is it sustainable. At Town College, psychological support is provided by NGOs. The services provided are very informal, and teachers noted that because there is no actual office for psychologists, privacy and confidentiality are huge issues during counseling. Formerly abducted students make a huge effort to protect their identity as FAPs, and in order for them to all have access to counseling in a comfortable and trusting environment, it is necessary that there is an environment at the school where they can have privacy.

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29 Finance teacher. Focus group interview with teachers at Town College. 15 Apr. 2009.
Even further, there is something largely impersonal about receiving support - in any shape or form - by outsiders rather than one’s own people. To echo what has been uttered by many returnees, aid given by local community members send a message of true acceptance and a genuine welcoming, something that cannot be said of foreign assistance. School administrators should work with local community leaders to provide counseling support to FAPs. By making it a community-led service, they can ensure that it is not only sustainable but more meaningful for FAPs as well.

Taking Violence Out of the Child

Interviewees with teachers, community members and family members also identified violence as an issue facing communities when FAPs return home to their communities and into the schools. In the focus group with community members, for instance, three of seven participants knew returnees among them who acted violently. In the focus group with family members, all seven interviewees knew of returnees in their community who demonstrated violent behavior. In the teacher focus group, two of five teachers identified violence as an issue. This comes as no surprise as data collected by participants show that 62% (8/13) of boys were forced to kill as child soldiers, and 10% (2/20) of girls were forced to kill. It would not be surprising, however, if these figures are higher than the data suggests. Even if an individual was not forced to kill directly, he or she most likely witnessed killings conducted by the rebels and by other children.

Building a Future: Sustainable Livelihood

Another obstacle to reintegration and reconciliation is the lack of support provided by community members to help address sustainable livelihood for FAPs, either in the form of reentry into schools and/or vocational training. Of the nineteen male returnees interviewed, only seven (36.8%) of them and 10/19 (52.6%) of females currently attend or attended schooling after returning home. None of the male interviewees participated in any skills building or vocational training while 9/19 (47.4%) of the female interviewees participated. For individuals who participated in some type of sustainable livelihood, all except one was sponsored by NGOs or CBOs. This is telling

30 See Appendix: Charts for more information.
31 It is important to note that the figures may not represent the general population, as focus groups were not random and were of specific groups of returnees (i.e. former child mothers who were being trained in tailoring, formerly abducted students, etc.). This potentially skewed the figures slightly.
as without the sponsorship of outside organizations, it is troubling that a significant number of returnees would be unable to continue schooling and/or have any potential avenue to generate income. An observation of the NGOs and CBOs around Kitgum also suggest that many are addressing the needs of women and children, while none were addressing men and boys. In the pursuit of gender equality, it seems as if the needs of male returnees are neglected despite the injustices they, too, endured during the war.

All five formerly abducted young men, for instance, interviewed in Mucwini shared that they were deprived of continuing their education when they returned from the bushed because of school fees. A significant reason for this issue is the fact that sixteen-percent (7/42) of participants lost a family member, mainly parent and/or family member during the war. For child-headed households (CHH), problems over land disputes are even more greatly exacerbated. When returning home, they may find their family's land occupied by others and it difficult to regain their land back.

Returning home traumatized by their experiences in the bushes, they faced yet another added challenge: living in a child-headed household and now being the main income-earner. Without education and/or skills to make an income, it is difficult for returnees to heal from their past when there is no future to look forward to and every single day is a struggle to survive. Thirty-eight percent (23/42) of the returnees personally identified the lack of a future and inability to provide for themselves and their families as a challenge upon returning home. Some even shared that the feeling of having nothing to look forward to and the inability to contribute to their family and community made them want to return to the bushes.

Many respondents also shared that when they are busy working or going to school, they are able to focus more on the future rather than the past. These activities allow them to socialize and interact with their peers, a healthy alternative to being alone at home where it is easy to recollect the trauma of the past. Some interviewees described the burden they feel returning home to their family and giving their families another mouth to feed. Lawrence, a 23-year old FAP who spent six years in captivity, shared that despite his family's happiness upon his return home, he feels the tension of being in different places in his life than his relatives. As he explained it, his family has lived so much life and worked hard to create a promising future for themselves but for
him, he is still living "stuck in my experience" with nothing to help him forget or move past the trauma.\textsuperscript{32}

The most hopeful and optimistic FAPs interviewed were surely the individuals attending school. Even though the danger of LRA abduction made Janet, 18, commute nightly and eventually, led to her rape, she has coped well with returning home and living her life fully as a child mother. She attributes the successful transition to education, stating that "education allows for a full reintegration."\textsuperscript{33} Amous, a 19-year-old returnee, also in school, shared that with education, "You can't lose yourself."\textsuperscript{34} At such a young age, FAPs had yet to really find their identity before they were uprooted from their daily lives and forced to serve as child soldiers, mothers, and wives. Now, returning home, they are again lost, lost between innocence and their guilt, lost between being a child and being someone who has seen far too much horror to be considered a child any longer. But as Amous put it, having a promising future to look forward to - one that provides self-confidence and faith and allows one to shape oneself as one sees fit - opens the door to stability and security.

**Traditional Justice Mechanisms: Nyono tong gweno and the role of Truth-telling**

For centuries, traditional justice mechanisms have been utilized in Acholi culture throughout Africa in order to handle conflict, reconciliation and violence. Developed centuries ago after hatred and violence tore apart two brothers, the Acholi culture has made a deep commitment to this “culture of accountability, peace and reconciliation.”\textsuperscript{35} Although there is an abundant variety of traditional justice mechanisms practiced, nyono tong gweno, the truth-telling ceremony and goyo-pii in particular are widely used in the reconciliation process of FAPs.

According to traditional Acholi culture, when someone kills another, he or she is not allowed to enter the community with blood on his or her hands. The individual must stand outside of the gates, state his or her name, the name of his or her mother, father and uncle, confess to the offense, and the motive for killing. The community then takes collective responsibility for the individual’s crime. Elders then bring fresh eggs for

\textsuperscript{32} Lawrence. Focus group interview with formerly abducted males. 9 Apr. 2009.
\textsuperscript{33} Janet. Focus group interview with formerly abducted mother and night commuters. 15 Apr. 2009.
\textsuperscript{34} Amous. Focus group interview with formerly abducted students. 15 Apr. 2009.
\textsuperscript{35} Bishop Macleord Baker Ochola II. Formal Interview. 3 Apr. 2009.
the offender to step on before entering the village. This ritual, called *nyono tong gweno* (stepping on the egg) has three significant messages according to Bishop Ochola II. First, it represents the acceptance of the individual by the community despite what crimes the individual may have committed. Secondly, the egg symbolizes the fragility and innocence of life. The egg, with no open mouth has no ability to speak ill of others. The egg, too, is easily breakable and destroyed like life. Breaking an egg symbolizes the destruction and sacredness of life. Lastly, the ceremony also aims to stress how violence can destroy the life of the criminal himself or herself. In the act of killing another, one also kills oneself.  

Truth-telling is an integral part of the Acholi’s traditional approach to reconciliation. It is a huge step that demonstrates the offender’s desire to take responsibility for his or her actions, and it is an expression of remorse. Truth-telling is a public acknowledgment of responsibility, and it must be genuine and full. Only after the offender tells the truth and the offended hear it can the community deal with reality and even began to forgive. Rather than force the offender to confess to his or her wrongdoings, however, many respondents shared that they were given time to tell the truth and explain their actions to their community. As one in-depth study on Acholi traditional approaches to justice explained, “While ‘the truth’ is desirable, respondents were opposed to the idea of forced confession or a Truth Commission. Rather, a process that allowed traditional justice to take its course was preferred.” The emphasis, then, is not on simply admitting one’s sins, but the genuine guilt and wholehearted desire an individual has to be forgiven.

The results of the research study found that 72.2% (13/18) of male FAPs and 62.1% (11/18) of female FAPs underwent the process of nyono tong gweno upon returning home to their respective communities. Similarly, 68.8% (11/16) of males and 71.4% (5/7) of females took part in the truth-telling ceremony. Goyo-pii, the cleansing ceremony, however, was discovered to be a less practiced ritual, with only 29.4% (5/17) of males having participated while 57.1% (4/7) of females took part in the ceremony. The Acholi traditional approaches to justice and reconciliation are clearly a

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36 *ibid.*
38 See Appendix: Charts for more information.
widely used component of the process of welcoming and returning FAPs back into the community. If a family is very religious or does not believe in the usefulness of the traditional approaches, they often opt for a prayer ceremony in the church. Although these traditions have been widely used throughout northern Uganda in order to welcome and reintegrate FAPs into their home community, the research uncovered that these practices are some of the few existing services and assistance provided to FAPs by the community members.

For centuries, traditional forms of justice, reconciliation and reintegration have been utilized in Acholi culture to restore relationships and promote unity between communities and clans. Never before, however, has there been violence on such a grand scale in Acholiland, affecting such a wide range of people, clans and communities. From responses from interviewees in the focus groups and interviews, as well as the conversations had with local religious and political leaders, it is apparent that traditional justice mechanisms are the Acholi people’s ideal way toward reconciliation and reintegration. Seven-eight percent (7/9) of female respondents found traditional justice mechanisms helpful for reconciliation while only thirty-eight percent (3/8) of male respondents found them helpful.

While adults and elders generally believe that traditional rituals and ceremonies for reconciliation can bring long-lasting peace and justice, some youth and young adult returnees noted that although traditional rituals and ceremonies are beneficial, they may not be enough to bring true peace and justice to northern Uganda. When asked whether revenge or a backlash would occur if Kony and his commanders were forgiven and allowed back into the community, religious leaders and elders shared that the very process and act of traditional justice mechanisms guarantees further violence from occurring. Bishop Ochola II and one elder in the community focus group spoke of the covenant that is signed at the end of every mato oput\textsuperscript{39} ceremony, the ceremony that would be performed if traditional approaches were used to reintegrate former commanders. Others - particularly younger individuals - believe that even if Kony and

\textsuperscript{39} Mato oput serves to mend relationships between clans when there is intentional murder or an accidental killing. The process can last years as it involves many different stages (Liu Institute for Global Issues, Gulu District NGO Forum, and Ker Kwaro Acholi, \textit{Roco Wat I Acoli: Restoring Relationship in Acholi-Land: Traditional Approaches to Justice and Reintegration}, Sep. 2005. 54).
his commanders were forgiven and returned to their respective communities, there would surely be some individuals who will seek out revenge on them.

**Notions of Justice and Peace, and the Question of Kony**

Amongst conversations on reconciliation and reintegration, participants were questioned about the place these two processes have on the road towards peace and justice. Participants were asked to define peace and justice, and describe what it takes to achieve both ends. Results show that notions of peace and justice slightly vary amongst locals, but an overwhelming majority consider peace and justice forgiveness. Only forty-two percent of males (8/19) and twenty-five percent of females (4/16) thought peace and justice required punishment. While fifty-seven percent (16/28) say forgiveness brings peace, twenty-five percent (7/28) say forgiveness brings justice and eighteen-percent (5/28) say forgiveness brings justice and peace. One elderly from the community explained that in order for peace and justice to be realized, one must create an environment that is non-threatening. In order to achieve this in northern Uganda, forgiveness is required so Kony and his former commanders know that they can return home. Marie, believes that justice is forgiveness and that the commanders should be forgiven as she was by her community when she returned from the bushes.4" The commanders, like her, were once FAPs, too. For Beatrice, while peace is nonviolence, she defined justice as "holding back in your heart what your intentions are against someone." Thus, for Beatrice, even though her heart may desire for Kony and his commanders to be executed, justice is sacrificing what she wants and feels at the current moment for the sake of peace for the collective community. Fifty-eight percent of male returnees and seventy-five percent of female returnees believe that Kony and his commanders should be forgiven and returned to the community. Eleven percent of male returnees and twenty-five percent of female returnees think Kony and his commanders should not be forgiven and executed. Sixteen percent of male participants believe Kony and his commanders should be forgiven but arrested, and sixteen percent believe that they should not be forgiven and arrested. The collected data suggests that despite the harrowing experiences FAPs faced, nearly seventy-five percent of them are

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40 Elder. Focus group interview with community members from Mucwini sub-country. 18 Apr. 2009.
41 Marie. Focus group interview with formerly abducted mother and night commuters. 15 Apr. 2009.
43 See Appendix: Charts for more information.
ready to forgive their tormentors, and the majority believe they should be returned and reintegrated into their communities. Focus groups with teachers, community members, and even family members of abductees still missing echo the same message of forgiveness.

The capacity of the Acholi people to even consider forgiveness after more than two decades of torment and pain is nothing short of extraordinary, particularly when one considers the West’s tendency to view punishment as justice. Yet, for the people of northern Uganda, the interconnectedness of all individuals is a fact of life. As Father Matthew Ojera, an influential religious leader and member of the ARLPI reminded, in Acholi culture, we are all brothers and sisters, undeniably connected to one another. Despite the drawn distinctions we have created separating one another into “enemies” and “allies,” even Kony is a brother to all and thus, it is not even an option to ostracize one’s brother or punish him for his mistakes.44

The Acholi people seem to possess what John Paul Lederach would call, the moral imagination, defined as the capacity to imagine oneself “in a web of relationships that include our enemies45...to imagine and generate constructive responses and initiatives that, while rooted in the day-to-day challenges of violence, transcend and ultimately break the grips of those destructive patterns and cycles.”46 Like Beatrice, many of the interviewees, when asked how they think the LRA perpetrators should be dealt with, based their responses on what, in the long-term, would be best for northern Uganda collectively. Although some temporary satisfaction may come from seeing Kony suffer like thousands have for decades, respondents shared in the end, this achieves nothing. When one recognizes the interconnectedness of humanity, the relationship between the LRA rebels and their northern community can be viewed as broken rather than non-existent. The pursuit, then, is a “restoration of broken human relationships” and a complete transformation in the hearts and minds of the community members, something unachievable with punishment.47

46 ibid, 29.
This notion of forgiveness for the sake of peace and/or justice was conveyed through many of the interviews and focus groups conducted. The opinion poses a great dilemma in Acholiland and Uganda as a whole during a time when the international community is insistent on maintaining the ICC arrest warrants against Kony and his top commanders. Many consider incarceration an act that not only deters justice or peace, but an act that will exacerbate the violence already witnessed in northern Uganda. Many respondents foresee revenge by Kony and his commanders’ clans should they be arrested. By arresting some, many respondents noted that this would result in other commanders never coming out of the bushes and perhaps sustaining the violence. Others believe that whether the ICC arrest warrants is a practical mean to bring peace to northern Uganda, it should be an issue that is handled only after the safe return of all children remaining in the bushes. With the ICC arrest warrants still looming over Kony and his top commanders, peace and reconciliation stand no chance. Although some noted practical reasons why arresting Kony and his commanders would not bring forth peace, a significant majority also believe that peace and/or justice cannot come without the act of true, wholehearted forgiveness. As Bishop Ochola II so eloquently explained, “If relationships are restored, they will bring healing and transformation” among offended and offender, while punishment only leads to “polarization and disunity” which can only stall peace.48

Community Empowerment

Another critical finding was the overwhelming attitude of respondents that their communities are incapable of addressing their grievances, and the incredible amount of faith in the role that NGOs and aid can play in reconciliation and reintegration. Many identified a lack of resources in their communities as a main reason why communities cannot play a role in improving their return home. Others shared that although local community leaders are a potential resource for assistance, they hesitate to request assistance or address grievances to the leaders because they would expect something in exchange for any assistance they can provide. Some respondents also shared that even when they personally sought out the help of local leaders, the initial responses of the leaders was either to do nothing or to link the individual to an organization rather than

48 ibid.
think of ways in which they community itself can support returnees. Tim, 25, returned home from the bushes to find that his parents had been murdered by the LRA during his abduction. He came home finding that he was completely dependent on himself for survival. He approached the local leaders and asked for their support in helping him acquire skills to find a job. They helped connect him with an organization that supported sustainable farming and the organization provided for Tim a chicken so he could make a little income selling eggs to local merchants. Not soon after, though, the chicken died and no further support was given to Tim.\textsuperscript{49} Experiences like such is telling of how dependent communities are with NGOs and foreign aid. Communities are unable to see themselves as a vital source of information and assistance for the returnees themselves.

Furthermore, when focus groups were asked, it was stunning how few participants were able to identify examples of types of assistance or support they would want the community to provide for them. "We need to see change first before we can identify what we need," one respondent commented.\textsuperscript{50} Even when prompted \textit{what if} the funding and resources were existent and unlimited, what type of assistance they would like to receive from the community, participants were unable to identify. Participants commented that it is difficult to imagine the community providing any services to them when it is the community that stigmatizes them in the first place. Even though FAPs believe that support and assistance from community members would be more meaningful, the idea of community-based support was nearly unfathomable to many respondents.

Some community members, however, were able to identify some, although minimal, ways in which the community can provide support and assistance. If the resources were available, community members believed that providing FAPs with access to education or income-generating activities would be important. Respondents also suggested that helping them find spouses so they can start a family was another area where the community could provide assistance. One possible idea discussed with the focus group with parents of abductees was a community savings project. Every week, the community members would each contribute a small amount (i.e. 500 shillings) to

\textsuperscript{49} Tim. Focus group interview with formerly abducted male students. 18 Apr. 2009.

\textsuperscript{50} Faith. Focus group interview with formerly abducted mother and night commuters. 15 Apr. 2009.
the village funds. The money acquired would be saved, and used to sponsor future FAPs’ schooling or to help a returnee start up a small income-generating project/business.\footnote{Focus group with family members of FAPs and currently abducted, Mucwini sub-county. 18 Apr. 2009.} As this idea was shared, the respondents became very animated and talkative. From their actions, they seemed to be very excited about the potential of this community-based idea becoming reality.

**CONCLUSIONS**

The reconciliation and reintegration process in northern Uganda encompasses a variety of actors and components, but more locally-owned, community-based approaches are greatly needed. The return of FAPs is an act that does not only affect the FAPs themselves but the lives of the neighboring communities that surround them. When working towards reconciliation and reintegration, then, working merely with FAPs to prepare them and their immediate family members for their return home is not enough. Rather, effort must be made to reconcile the collective community.

Even more, northern Uganda has achieved relative peace within the last few years, despite the fact that a peace agreement has not been signed by the Ugandan government and the LRA. In the hope that a peace agreement will be eventually realized, the northern community must be prepared for the greater picture of reconciliation and reintegration - that of all the surviving abductees, and Kony and his top commanders. From the responses and data gathered by FAPs, the community has used traditional approaches to reconciliation and justice to help welcome them back home from the bushes, but the approaches have not resulted in the realization of true forgiveness and reconciliation in the communities. Most FAPs note challenges living amongst community members and challenges adjusting to normal society after their return home from the bushes. After decades of violence, war and pain, the healing of a community is a daunting task. The process towards a full reconciliation and reintegration will surely be slow and steady. Effort, however, must be made to help encourage its process for should Kony and his top commanders follow the same steps as other FAPs, it will be even more essential that community members are ready, willing and able to receive them. At the same time, the international community needs to
recognize the rights of the local northern community to practice their culture and beliefs. An extensive, inclusive dialogue must take place between international leaders, the Ugandan government, local Acholi religious and cultural leaders and the Acholi community regarding what is necessary to achieve stability and reconciliation. With the peace agreement signing in jeopardy, no time is better than now to confront the challenges of reconciling the biggest players in the LRA conflict.

Reconciliation in post-war Uganda encompasses innumerable aspects. It requires an aspect of wholehearted forgiveness: self-forgiveness, person-to-person forgiveness, and community forgiveness. It involves an active effort to reach out to individuals once perceived as “enemies,” to provide support and to allow support to be given, and the restoration of relationships. It requires the genuine desire of a whole collective body to come together not as victim and perpetrator, but simply as neighbors, in an effort to rebuild the identity of the community and to regain stability. Post-conflict reconstruction is too often simplified to mean the rebuilding of physical infrastructure when the rebuilding of relationships and lives is of utmost importance. In Bosnia-Herzegovina, after the war and genocide from 1992 to 1995 between the three main ethnicities, the Dayton Peace Accords were signed and praised as a success because it put a stop to the violence. After fourteen years since the signing of the agreement, however, the people of Bosnia-Herzegovina continue to live with hearts and minds unsettled, and relationships amongst the groups remain shattered. Development cannot occur when communities are holding on so firmly to the past. Thus, even if the peace agreement between the Ugandan government and the LRA is signed tomorrow, true peace and the prospect of development are a long time away from being recognized. Commitment on paper may achieve physical peace among people, but only a commitment between people can achieve authentic peace, and that is what must absolutely be pursued.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Need for Dialogue Among Community Members

The shock felt by community elders through the uprooting of their traditional culture and values is understandable. The Acholi culture strongly emphasizes respect
for elders and nonviolence. Thus, accepting and confronting the challenges of a culture where violence has been a regular part of life for the last decades and where youth are returning home with violence reinforced in them and knowing little to nothing about their cultural traditions is a grueling task. Without dialogue amongst returnees and community members, no understanding and true reconciliation can be realized. Community members are turned away by the disrespect and violent demeanor of FAPs, although they are not to blame for the habits they developed under the authority of LRA rebels. FAPs find the community members unwelcoming, cruel and untrusting, although their behavior is a result of fear incited by the LRA and violence conducted by former "rebels." If silence continues to be chosen as the solution to these false perceptions of one another, true reconciliation can never be realized.

Community-Based Counseling and Psychological Support

Reception centers, although their work may be imperative, can only serve as the very beginning of a much longer process of reintegration. The depth of the experiences faced by FAPs suggest that while some may not desire or need counseling to began healing, for many, counseling and dialogue is absolutely crucial. Jully, 16, is an example of a formerly abducted child who would benefit from counseling. While she was in the bushes, she was forced to kill a baby by beating its head and body against the tree. She was ten. She discussed her inability to deal with the guilt - the greatest challenge she has faced since returning home. In the FAPs' focus group with male students, one of the six participants shared that he did not find counseling beneficial. Amous said this, however, after he had participated in a physical fight with a passing student who was trying to eavesdrop on the focus group conversation. By trying to solve the issue violently, it was obvious that Amous had a lot he needed to talk about and was still living with that violence reinforced in him from the bushes. Amous was interestingly also the most outspoken during the focus group, consistently answering all questions and even sharing side stories that didn't always relate to the question asked. From what was gathered about Amous during the short time, it seems highly likely that Amous is probably the most in need of someone to talk to about his experiences as he also seemed to be reaching out for someone to care for him and show compassion. In order to

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53 Amous. Focus group interview with formerly abducted students. 15 Apr. 2009.
provide for a full, healthy reintegration back into their communities, psychological support needs to be provided to returnees, particularly to address the danger of violence.

**Reintegration of Returnees Into Schools**

Although teachers tend to be generally supportive and fair when treating returnees, more sensitization is needed to help teachers understand the important needs and specific experiences of formerly abducted students. For FAPs who can afford schooling or who have been sponsored, they are returned to their community only to be sent away to school. In these cases, they are not given a suitable amount of time to emotionally decompress from their experiences in the bushes or live in the comfort of their home community or family. Fearing stigma and isolation, these FAPs conceal their identity from their peers and sometimes, their teachers. In fact, among the twenty-seven student returnees interviewed, none of them were open about their status as FAPs. Some shared that they were only open to their closest friends and some teachers. Others shared that although they hide their identity, the sponsorship they receive from NGOs makes it obvious to their peers that they are FAPs.

After experiences that the world still collectively cannot fathom, these young pupils are supposed to suddenly become a normal pupil again. They are not given the proper environment to process and heal from their pain, but rather must choose between silence and being stigmatized. At the very least, school administrators and teachers need to create an environment where, should returnees desire to receive it, they are able to discuss and process.

**A Rethinking on Traditional Justice and Reconciliation Mechanisms**

Although traditional methods towards justice and reconciliation are the community’s ideal way of achieving reconciliation and reintegration, a rethinking on how these mechanisms are implemented is necessary in order to address the magnitude and scale of the conflict is crucial. Effort must be made to sensitize the community - FAPs and elders alike - on the meaning and significance behind the traditions so that these processes achieve their purpose rather than become a mere routine. One elder from Mucwini sub-county also raised concern over mato oput not being able to be performed for each individual Kony has been responsible for killing, as there have been so many individuals directly and indirectly affected killed by him. He suggested that the
tradition may need to be altered so that a representative from each clan can join
together for one grand mato oput ceremony.\textsuperscript{54}

Although the majority of FAPs found traditional approaches helpful, some
returnees shared that they did not understand the purpose behind the methods.
Abducted at a young age and essentially stripped of their childhood, FAPs did not have
the opportunity to learn about their culture and traditions. Thus, their perspective on
what is needed for reconciliation may be different than that of their adult counterparts.
In order to ensure social justice and personal healing for all affected individuals, it is
vital that effort be made by community leaders to help sensitize FAPs about the
significance behind these traditional mechanisms towards reconciliation.

At the same time that sensitization of youth must take place in order to help them
understand the benefits of traditional mechanisms for reconciliation, adults and elders
must also rethink and remind themselves of the significance of the processes. The
rampant name-calling, stigma and lack of community support suggests that while the
community may really desire reconciliation and forgiveness, truly achieving this,
however, is a greater challenge than initially thought. The war affected almost all
northern Ugandans. Therefore, even if reconciliation is the ultimate goal, the wounds of
the war have yet to heal and in the heart of some people, although they may participate
in the traditional ceremonies and accept FAPs back into the communities, there is a
difference in surface and true forgiveness. The challenge of forgiveness and
reintegration varies from one person to another, depending on their own personal
experience in the war. Some returnees, for instance, shared that they cannot even
fathom the idea of living amongst the very people who forced them to endure and
engage in such brutality without remorse. Communities are still learning to cope with
the return of FAPs and to provide the support and understanding they need. Working
towards true forgiveness and reconciliation for Kony and the commanders will be a
possible but surely challenging task.

\textbf{International versus Local Ideologies on Peace and Justice}

While the global community heavily emphasizes the use of courts and the
judiciary to equate justice to punishment, the Acholi equate justice to reconciliation and

\textsuperscript{54} Elder. Focus group with community members from Mucwini sub-county. 18 Apr. 2009.
forgiveness. As top UN official, Lars Erik Skaansar, states in regard to northerners and the LRA conflict, “I have never seen such a capacity to forgive.” The staggering data from the study demonstrates the true desires of the majority of the Acholi people for forgiveness and reintegration of the top perpetrators of the war. Despite the international community’s effort to deter such atrocities from happening again, the question must be raised whether the desires of the international community come at the expense of the local community’s desires. Who truly is benefiting from the ICC indictments? As Ifi Amadiume and Janetlahi An-Na’Im argue in The Politics of Memory, the “law is too cold, technical and sterile” to bring forth sustainable true justice and reconciliation. Instead, they suggest the international community “support or encourage more local, less abstract processes of moving towards justice about the past.” In northern Uganda’s case, this would mean recognizing the special importance and high regard given to traditional mechanisms of approaching justice and realizing the potential damage the ICC arrest warrants may have on the quest for peace. In a series of meetings in 2004 between the LRA and traditional chiefs and elders, the LRA shared that the potential prosecution by the ICC was one of the three main concerns preventing them from signing the agreement.

Sylvester Opira, Deputy Residential Commissioner of Kitgum District, noted that in a war as far-reaching as Uganda’s, the arrest of Kony and four commanders means nothing and surely, wouldn’t bring peace. Father Mathew Ojera echoes these sentiments, commenting, “The atrocities committed by Kony, who can repair it? It’s impossible.” Referring to Kony and the Acholi people’s communal way of life, Opira explains, “One life alone is not all that is on the line.” Kony’s actions affected his family, his clan and his people. Whether he is returned, arrested, executed or exiled, there are still countless individuals who must cope with the guilt and pain of his actions.

57 Ibid, 5.
Kony, too, needs to process and confront himself, and despite the atrocities he committed, Opira pointed out that even the offender needs taking care of.\textsuperscript{62} As drastically different as these ideals of peace and justice are to that of the Western world, it is essential that the rights and wishes of the local community are respected. Even the Ugandan government recognizes the eventual harm that can come from the indictments. During the peace talks in late April in Juba, the Ugandan government promised they would ask for the arrest warrants to be revoked once a final agreement has been reached.\textsuperscript{63} Whether this promise will be kept or not, is a different point. In our pursuit of global justice and peace, we must not neglect the desires of locals. Dr. E. Wamala of Makerere University discusses the levels of rights. At the secondary level, the cultural rights of people to practice their way of life is emphasized, a right Wamala considers the most highly disregarded.\textsuperscript{64} At the third level, “solidarity and the rights embrace collective rights of society or peoples” in an effort to pursue sustainable development, peace and a healthy environment.\textsuperscript{65} Putting these rights together, it would seem that human rights should respect that people and cultures have their own way of realizing peace and resolving conflicts. Imposing Western ideals, then, would be nothing short of impeding on local rights. As Amartyr Sen questions, are there really universal social ethics and rights?\textsuperscript{66} Perhaps the question that needs to be asked is whether peace or justice is more imperative, and whether both can be realized simultaneously or sequentially, locally or universally. Nevertheless, the international community needs to put aside its quest for global justice and peace, and consider how their actions may impact the very people most affected by the war. Without being on the ground, engaging in dialogue with local community members and leaders, internationals cannot understand what is desired in the hearts of the people. In October of 2005 when the ICC first issued the arrest warrants against Kony and his top commanders, Richard Dicker, the director of Human Rights Watch’s International Justice Program stated in the media, “With today’s arrest warrants, the ICC has opened

\textsuperscript{62} ibid.
\textsuperscript{64} Dr. E. Wamala. History department, Makerere University. Lecture handout. 2 Mar 09. 7.
\textsuperscript{65} ibid, 8.
the door for justice to be done.” Without being the parent, the spouse, or the child who lived and confronted that war and who had to deal with its consequences, can we as outsiders, really grasp the concept of justice and peace for a whole community? Justice and peace are not universal terms. In order to achieve peace and justice on a global scale, recognizing peace and justice locally is essential.

**Recognizing Agency**

Perhaps one of the most pressing issue raised by the study was the community perception that they lack the capacity to provide FAPs with the proper support and assistance needed. The role of NGOs should be to sensitize community members regarding their own agency and to help them realize their capabilities. In a country with Human Development Report value of .493 - a rank of 156th out of 179 countries, it is irrefutable that monetary and physical resources are lacking in communities. Monetary wealth or lack thereof, however, does not translate into an individual’s or community’s worth or worthlessness. The man or woman living on the streets with an empty stomach and empty pockets may be the holder of the greatest wisdom, or the possessor of the greatest heart. Too often, we attach value to money when money says nothing about what we as humans have to offer. The Acholi community has an immense, resilient commitment to nonviolence and reconciliation. After so much pain and warfare, the people still have the ability to suppress the anger and resentment they may feel in order to think beyond the immediate present, to what Lederach calls the “two-hundred year present.” The Acholi people have discovered a nonviolent approach to reconciling clans and communities, an approach that recognizes efforts for reconciliation as potential for long-term conflict transformation. Lederach would argue that the people of northern Uganda recognize the very significance of this situation and moment, a time “pregnant with new life, which rise from what appear to be the barren grounds of destructive violence and relationships. This unexpected new life makes

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68 The Human Development Index measures three particular aspects of human development: life expectancy, adult literacy and pupil enrollment, and standard of living.
possible processes of constructive change in human affairs and constitutes the moral imagination without which peacebuilding cannot be understood or practiced." For the people of northern Uganda, they have based resolutions to the current conflict not by their immediate feelings and desires, but by looking towards the future and recognizing this moment as potential ground for building sustainable peace. How, then, in this creative and powerful community, is it that community members identify themselves as incapable of bringing positive change and reconciliation?

If NGOs play any role in the reconciliation and reintegration process in northern Uganda, it is to sensitize people on their own potential, and possibility, to contribute some initial funding. Projects and programs, however, must be headed by community leaders and ultimately community-driven. Small-scale projects ran and implemented by community members have the potential to be long-lasting and improved with time - something untrue of NGO projects which are short-lived. As one elderly from Mucwini pointed out, NGOs' work is problematic as it is based on specific mandates and their projects are time-bound, thus, it is difficult for NGOs to work towards a full reintegration in communities. Community members (elders, parents, FAPs, etc.) should work closely with local leaders (governmental, religious and cultural) and set up a two-to-three day workshop to brainstorm potential ways in which a program or project addressing these issues can be realized. Leaders should be elected and given the task of ensuring that the results of the workshop is analyzed and the ideas implemented. By taking a community-based approach to reconciliation, support and assistance have the potential to be ultimately transformative, significant and meaningful to FAPs.

71 ibid, 29.
72 Elder. Focus group interview with community members from Mucwini sub-county. 18 Apr. 2009.
APPENDIX:
Map of Uganda

**Description of Participants**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Days in bushes</th>
<th>Range</th>
<th>Age of Abduction</th>
<th>Range of Abduction Age</th>
<th>Age of participants</th>
<th>Range of Age</th>
<th>Attend(ed) Schooling Post-Return</th>
<th>Vocational Training</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Boys</strong></td>
<td>544.6 days</td>
<td>1 day - 6 years</td>
<td>13.1 years old</td>
<td>7 - 23 years old</td>
<td>21.1 years old</td>
<td>15-29 years</td>
<td>7/19 36.8%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Girls</strong></td>
<td>430.1 days</td>
<td>1 day - 6 years</td>
<td>11 years old</td>
<td>5 - 17 years old</td>
<td>17.9 years old</td>
<td>12 - 28 years old</td>
<td>10/19 52.6%</td>
<td>47.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>487.4 days</td>
<td>1 days - 6 years</td>
<td>12.05 years old</td>
<td>5 - 23 years old</td>
<td>19.5 years old</td>
<td>12- 29 years old</td>
<td>17/38 44.74%</td>
<td>9/38 23.68%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1 Data reflects the answers provided, although not all participants responded to every question.

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**Experiences of Participants**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Forced to kill</th>
<th>Forced to carry</th>
<th>Abducted</th>
<th>Child Mother</th>
<th>Raped</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Boys</strong></td>
<td>8/13</td>
<td>6/13</td>
<td>19/19</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Girls</strong></td>
<td>2/20</td>
<td>6/20</td>
<td>17/20</td>
<td>11/20</td>
<td>14/20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1 Includes three who were raped/impregnated during night commuting.
Charts - Traditional Approaches Used; Storytelling

3) Traditional Approaches Used

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Nyono tong Gweno</th>
<th>Truth Telling</th>
<th>Cleansing Ceremony</th>
<th>Traditional Approaches are Helpful</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Boys</td>
<td>13/18</td>
<td>11/16</td>
<td>5/17</td>
<td>3/8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>72.2%</td>
<td>68.8%</td>
<td>29.4%</td>
<td>37.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Girls</td>
<td>11/18</td>
<td>5/7</td>
<td>4/7</td>
<td>7/9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>61.1%</td>
<td>71.4%</td>
<td>57.1%</td>
<td>77.8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4) The role of Storytelling

Boys

- Selective story telling: 53%
- Story telling is helpful: 42%
- Story telling is hurtful: 5%

Girls

- Selective story telling: 12%
- Story telling is helpful: 41%
- Story telling is hurtful: 47%
Chart - The Desire for Forgiveness

5) Dealing with Kony & his commanders

- Male:
  - No forgiveness/Execute: 11%
  - Forgiveness/Arrest: 16%
  - Forgiveness/Return: 58%
  - No forgiveness/Arrest: 16%

- Female:
  - Forgiveness/Return: 75%
  - No forgiveness/Execute: 25%

100% of Family Members & Community Members interviewed wanted Forgiveness/Return.

Ho, 41
Interview Questions

Interview Questions for FAPs in the Community
1. What traditional approaches, ceremonies or rituals were performed?
2. Which of the above were or are helpful in helping you return home and reintegrate?
3. How long were you abducted and when were you abducted?
4. What services, assistance and help is provided for you by the community?
5. What services, assistance and help would you like to see the community provide for you?
6. How would you describe your relationship with community members and family now that you have returned? Do you feel like a community member or an outsider?
7. Have you faced any problems returning to your family, or have your family faced any challenges since you returned?
8. What is the role of story telling in the healing process? Is it helpful or exploitative?
9. Do you think Kony and his commanders should be forgiven and reintegrated into their communities, or do you think the international community should follow through with the ICC arrest warrants and punish them?
10. How do you think the community can help achieve sustainable peace after this war? How do you think sustainable justice can be achieved in northern Uganda? Do you think peace or justice is more important?
11. Do you feel you personally can forgive Kony and his commanders for the violence that have enacted in northern Uganda and your own personal experience in the war?

Interview Questions for Students
1. When did you return home from the bushes and how long were you away?
2. Can you please describe for me with details your return home?
3. What rituals or ceremonies were performed if any, when you returned home?
4. How has the education system helped or hindered your return home?
5. How do you feel now that you are home?
6. What challenges are you facing reintegrating into the community?
7. What challenges are you facing reintegrating into the schools?
8. How would you describe your interactions with your peers in the schools?
9. How would you describe your interactions with teachers and faculty?
10. Do you feel there are enough services in the schools for you? What services are there?
11. What services in the school do you use?
12. What services do you think should be provided for you?
13. Are you facing challenges in the classroom? Do you feel as academically prepared as your fellow classmates?
14. What is the role of story telling in the healing process? Is it helpful or exploitative?
15. How would you define justice? Peace? Would you say that they are the same or different? Is one more important than the other?
16. Do you think Kony and his commanders should be forgiven and reintegrated into their communities, or do you think the international community should follow through with the ICC arrest warrants and punish them?
17. Are you involved in the peace clubs at school?
Interview Questions for Teachers
1. Do you know how many formerly abducted children attend this secondary school out of the total student population?
2. Do you know how many FAC you have in the classes you teach?
3. In your classes, are FAC identified by all staff and students, only staff or is it kept confidential?
4. How do other students feel about going to a boarding school with FAC?
5. Have you encountered any problems between other children and returnees?
6. If so, how did you handle it?
7. Have you encountered any problems or challenges with returnees in an academic setting?
8. What kind of interaction do you have with your students personally?
9. Do you think your students trust you enough to be able to discuss any of their problems with you?
10. Are returnees that you have seen in this school, do you think they are having the same experience now in school as their peers, or do you think it’s different? How?
11. Do you think returnees feel like normal students in the school?
12. Would you say most returnees are staying in school consistently year after year or do they usually attend for only a short time? Why?
13. What services, resources, reintegration assistance is provided to returnees?
14. What services, resources, reintegration assistance do you think should be provided to returnees?
15. Is the community involved in the school, especially with reintegration of child soldiers at all?
16. What role do you think the community could and should play in assisting FAC in schools?

Interview Questions for Family Members of FAPs
1. When did your child return? How long was he or she gone? At what age?
   - What experience did he or she have in the war?
2. How has the community welcomed or not welcomed your child back?
3. Do you think the traditional approaches help or hinder the reintegration process? Are they enough by themselves or are they inadequate at reintegrating FAPs?
4. Do you think the community has completely accepted your child back into the village?
5. Have there been any challenges or problems for your child since he/she returned?
6. Have there been any challenges or problems for you and your family since he/she returned?
7. What would you say is the biggest challenge facing returnees? What would you say is the biggest challenge facing your child?
8. What services, assistance does the community provide for returnees?
9. What services, assistance should the community provide for returnees?
10. How would you describe the relationship between community members and FAPs?
11. How would you say your child is doing - emotionally, physically, socially and emotionally?
12. Has your child experienced any of the following: name calling, violence, argument, any of the like?
13. How do you think the community can help achieve sustainable peace after this war? How do you think sustainable justice can be achieved in northern Uganda? Do you think peace or justice is more important?
14. Have you had dialogue with community leaders regarding your child’s status, needs, etc.?
15. Would you feel comfortable enough to ask leaders for support or assistance in any form for your child?
16. Do you think Kony and his commanders should be forgiven and reintegrated into their communities, or do you think the international community should follow through with the ICC arrest warrants and punish them?
17. Do you feel you personally can forgive Kony and his commanders for the violence that have enacted in northern Uganda and the pain they have caused your child?

Interview Questions for Community
1. How many FAPs do you know of in your village?
2. How was your affected by the war?
3. How does your community welcome or not welcome FAPs back into the village?
4. What traditional approaches, ceremonies or rituals have you witnessed in your community for returnees? Please describe.
5. Have there been any problems with community members and FAPs after they return home?
6. How would you describe the relationship between community members and FAPs? Why?
7. Do you think there is enough done in the community to assist, help and welcome FAPs back? If not, what kind of assistance do you think they need?
8. What kind of interaction do you have with FAPs in the community?
9. How would you describe the state of FAPs in the community - socially, emotionally, physically and mentally?
10. Is any of the following a problem in the community with returnees: name calling, crime, violence, argument/dispute, etc.?
11. Have you had or witnessed any health dialogue in the community about the returnee’s experience?
12. What do you think the community can do to help ensure peace? Justice? Are they different? Is one more important than the other?
13. Do you think Kony and his commanders should be forgiven and reintegrated into their communities, or do you think the international community should follow through with the ICC arrest warrants and punish them?
14. Do you think traditional approaches to reconciliation is effective to deal with this current war? Is it enough by itself?
List of Interviews, Focus Groups and Observations

Individual Interviews (11 participants)
2. Julie, 28, FAW (April 8, 2009)
3. Sylvester Opira, Deputy Residential Commissioner (President of District of Kitgum) (April 21, 2009)
4. Marie, 13, FAW, Lagotcugu Primary School, Pajong Parish, Mucwini sub-county (April 22, 2009)
5. Penelope, 14, FAW, Lagotcugu Primary School, Pajong Parish, Mucwini sub-county (April 22, 2009)
6. Mary, 18, FAW, Lagotcugu Primary School, Pajong Parish, Mucwini sub-county (April 22, 2009)
7. Beatrice, 13, FAW, Lagotcugu Primary School, Pajong Parish, Mucwini sub-county (April 22, 2009)
8. Noreen, 16, FAW, Lagotcugu Primary School, Pajong Parish, Mucwini sub-county (April 22, 2009)
9. Ally, 12, FAW, Lagotcugu Primary School, Pajong Parish, Mucwini sub-county (April 22, 2009)
10. Father Matthew Ojera (Christi the King, Acholi Religious Leaders for Peace Initiative) (April 24, 2009)
11. Okem Atwoma, Elder (April 25, 2009)

Focus Group Interviews (51 participants)
I. Formerly abducted men, beneficiaries from Live Again organization (April 9, 2009)
   1. Michael, 28
   2. Dan, 23
   3. David, 23
   4. Walter, 29
   5. Jim, 23
   6. Trevor, 21
   7. Christian, 20
   8. Moses, 22
II. Formerly abducted mothers, beneficiaries from Kitgum Women Peace Initiative (April 14, 2009)
   1. Jane, 20
   2. Elizabeth, 24
   3. Justine, 23
   4. Juliet, 20
   5. Marie, 23
   6. Eve, 21
III. Teachers of formerly abducted children, Town College (April 15, 2009)
   1. Aileen, Geography and History teacher (Secondary 1,3,5)
   2. Isaac, History teacher (Secondary 3,5,6)
   3. Jerome, Finance teacher (Secondary 1,2,3)
   4. Julius, English teacher (Secondary 5,6)
IV. Formerly abducted female student and child mothers, Town College (April 15, 2009)
   1. Jill, 18
   2. Faith, 18
   3. Janet, 18
   4. Charlotte, 19
   5. Jennifer, 13
V. Former abducted male students, Town College (April 15, 2009)
   1. Edward, 17
   2. Matt, 19
   3. Amous, 19
   4. Fred, 18
   5. Cedrick, 20
   6. Robert, 21
VI. Family members of FAPs and currently abducted, Mucwini sub-county (April 18, 2009)
   1. Father of abductee
   2. Father of two abductees and one returnee
   3. Father of abductee
   4. Mother of abductee
5. Father of abductee
6. Mother of abductee
7. Father of abductee and one returnee

VII. Community members of FAPs, Mucwini sub-county (April 18, 2009) (7 participants)
   1. including Reverend Vincent Okot, Mucwini sub-county

VIII. Formerly abducted men, Mucwini sub-county (April 18, 2009)
   1. Roger, 21
   2. Carl, 20
   3. Tim, 25
   4. Luciba, 16
   5. Will, 15

IX. Formerly abducted mothers, Kitgum (3)
   1. Violet, 23 (April 24, 2009)
   2. Winter, 18 (April 24, 2009)
   3. Spirit, 18 (April 24, 2009)

CBO Interviews (4 organizations)
1. Kitgum Women Peace Initiative (CBO) w/ Ochola Geoffrey (Field Officer) (April 6, 2009)
2. Amnesty Commission (CBO w/ Patrick Okot (Information Counselor Referral) (April 8, 2009)
3. Elders' Voice to Children and Youth (April 8, 2009)
4. Acholi Religious Leaders Peace Initiative (ARLPI) w/ Lokwiya Francis (Program Officer) (April 21, 2009)

Reception Centers
1. Concerned Parents' Association (CPA) w/ Oryem Andrew (Field Officer) (April 6, 2009)
2. Kitgum Initiative Children and Women's Association (KICWA) (CBO) w/ Kidega Samuel Okwe (Program Officer) (April 20, 2009)

Observation
1. Tobong - Mucwini sub-county trading center (April 4, 2009)
Written Consent Forms

Participant Written Consent

Principal Investigator: Barbara Vi Thien Ho

Title of Study: Community-Led Approaches to Reintegration and Reconciliation in northern Uganda

You are invited to participate in this focus group/interview on the topic: “Community-Led Approaches to Reintegration and Reconciliation in northern Uganda.”

Your participation in this study will require participation in a focus group/interview and possible completion of a questionnaire. This should take approximately 1.5 hours of your time. Your participation will be confidential/anonymous and you may be contacted again in the near future for further research. You will not be paid for being in this study. This focus group/survey does not involve any foreseeable risk to you and there are no direct benefits. However, the benefits of your participation may impact your community by providing insight on how individuals can come together to rebuild the community after years of violence and conflict.

You do not have to be in this study if you do not want to be. At any time during this study, you have the right to withhold information and to terminate your participation completely. I will be happy to answer any questions you have about this study. If you have further questions about this project or if you have a research-related problem, you may contact me, Barbara Vi Thien Ho at 0777896344.

Thank you in advance for your participation in this study.

____________________________________   ____________ _______
Name         Date

Teacher Written Consent

I, ___________________________, as a member of the staff at __________________________ school, give my permission to allow __________________________ to participate in a research study. I understand that at any time before or during this study, he/she can withdraw his/her participation in any part of the study, and to completely terminate his/her participation in the study.

I understand that the purpose of the study is to uncover “Community-Led Approaches to Reintegration and Reconciliation in northern Uganda” and the information and data collected will be summarized in a final student report. I understand that no one will be paid for the student’s participation in this study. This focus group/survey does not involve any foreseeable risk to me or my child and there are no direct benefits. However, the benefits of participation is the possibility of providing insight on how individuals can come together to rebuild the community after years of violence and conflict.

____________________________________   ____________ _______
Your Name         Date
Child's Name
GLOSSARY OF ITEMS

AC - Amnesty Commission
CBOs - Community-based organizations
CHH - child-headed household
FAP(s) - Formerly abducted person(s)
HSM - Holy Spirit Movement
ICC - International Criminal Court
LRA - Lord’s Resistance Army
Mato oput - Symbolized by raw eggs, hyssop leaves, water and ‘oput’ herbs.
NGOS - Non-governmental organizations
NRA - National Resistance Army
BIBLIOGRAPHY

Primary Sources

Amous. Focus group interview with formerly abducted students. 15 Apr. 2009.


Charlotte. Focus group interview with formerly abducted female student and night commuters. 15 Apr. 2009.

Elder. Focus group with community members from Mucwini sub-county. 18 Apr. 2009.


Faith. Focus group interview with formerly abducted mother and night commuters. 15 Apr. 2009.


Finance Teacher. Focus group interview with secondary teachers at Town College. 15 Apr. 2009.


Janet. Focus group interview with formerly abducted mother and night commuters. 15 Apr. 2009.

Marie. Focus group interview with formerly abducted mother and night commuters. 15 Apr. 2009.

Mary. Individual interview. 22 Apr. 2009.


Tim. Focus group interview with formerly abducted male students. 18 Apr. 2009.

Secondary Sources

Dr. E. Wamala. “An Introduction to Human Rights.” History department, Makerere University. Lecture handout. 2 Mar 09. 7.


