CHILDREN'S PARTICIPATION IN PEACE BUILDING PROCESS IN GULU DISTRICT, NORTHERN UGANDA

By

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DECLARATION

I declare to the best of my knowledge that this piece of work is my own, original work and no part of it has been submitted in this university or any university elsewhere, apart from the works of others that I have appropriately acknowledged and referenced.

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Moses Oketch Aguto

DEDICATION

A Special Dedication To

My Loving Brother Dr. Olowo Onyango

I appreciate your encouragement and support throughout these years.

And To

My Dear Parents, Mr & Mrs. Olowo Gaster

Thank you for the wonderful love and guidance since my childhood. I love you all.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

offered to me through the quota scheme. Without you I wouldn't have been able to attend this course.

My greatest appreciation goes to the Almighty God for having enabled me to go through this study process in good health and sound mind.

LIST OF ACRONYMS

ARLPI-   Acholi Religious Leaders Peace Initiative

UPDF-   Uganda People's Defence Force

LRA-   Lord's Resistance Army

WNBF-   West Nile Bank Front

FRONASA-   Front for National Salvation

UNLF-   Uganda National Liberation Front

UPM-   Uganda Patriotic Movement

HSM-   Holy Spirit Movement

CHA-   Cessation of Hostilities Agreement

ICC-   International Criminal Court

GUSCO-   Gulu Support the Children Organization

SCiU-   Save the Children in Uganda

UBOS-   Uganda National Bureau of Statistics

HURFO-   Human Rights Focus

JT&RP-   Justice and Reconciliation Project

TRC-   Truth and Reconciliation Project.

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is concerned with the experiences of children who were formerly abducted and recruited into armed rebellion by the Lord's resistance Army (LRA) in Northern Uganda. It discusses their experience of participating in peace building process and the challenges they face in the community. The thesis further highlight the role of a local NGO – Gulu Support the Children Organization (GUSCO) in resettling and reintegrating ex-child soldiers into community life backed by the fact that recently both local and international NGOs have increased and invested a lot of effort and resources in conflict zones to promote peace.

The theories that guided this study were the social studies of childhood and related perspectives that explain children's experience in conflict. These are children's agency and victimcy, resilience, lost generation, traditional and transitional justice theories. These theories have been explained in detail regarding how they help to analyze the perspectives and experience of children in armed conflict and peace building.

The study is a qualitative one, and several methods were used in the process of data collection such as individual interviews, focus group discussion, and observation and field notes taking. The informants in this study were mainly ex-child soldiers who attended GUSCO and they were 15 in number with 6 girls and 9 boys.

The findings of the research revealed that initially children take part in war, and negotiate their ways out of it, while contributing immensely in peace-building process and the task of integration into society. Although children in the context of war are seen as mere victims, this research highlights the complex and dynamic ways in which they negotiate agency and actively contribute to the peace building process and reintegration activity underway in the region. In their involvement in the GUSCO, they get several support such as immediate psychosocial support, material basic needs and medical care, vocational training as well as family tracing. The children face challenges such as health problems, marginalization and stigma by community members, corruption where the services intended for them are diverted, inability to locate family members and poor counseling services at both school and local levels. The study goes further to show that the efforts to represent and assist children who come of age in war-torn communities like one I studied cannot or should not take place without understanding the wider economic, geo-political and cultural context that help to enhance or constrain the peace building process.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

This thesis is about the life experience of the ex-child soldiers of the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA); how their knowledge of and participation in building peace is promoted and\ or constrained in Gulu district of northern Uganda, children returning to the community were demonised by the community members as a group returning to contaminate the society with their anti-social behaviour. Ex-child soldiers are also considered as a group threatening the well-being of society; including non-child soldiers (e.g. war affected children, out of school children etc). As a result ex-child soldiers do not receive acceptance into the community they once belonged, a situation that affects their growth and identity in the society. Re-integration of ex- child soldiers and reconstruction of peace is also a key priority for the international aid community as well as local NGOs. The LRA have been in Northern Uganda for the past 20 years (1987-2006) abducting mainly children between 8 to 15 years of age and coercing the population into camps. Drawing on children's perspectives, this thesis examines the experiences of ex-child soldiers focusing in particular on their involvement in process of peace building, reintegration into "normal life" of communities and challenges they face as they go about achieving these ends.

Background to the study

In many post conflict societies such as, Sri Lanka, Columbia, Southern Sudan, and Northern Uganda, children have been recruited and forced to participate in combat activities. Children living in conflict zones live in a different world compared to other children who leave in safe zones under the comfort of their parents in other parts of the world. Despite all the challenges children under extreme circumstances face, they still try to use their agency to cope with adversity. Recently, in northern Uganda, various attempts have been taken to rebuild, reintegrate and demobilise the young child combatants back into the community. Rehabilitation and reintegration has been the focus of government and other various agencies with the view that children are easily corrupted by the insurgents. Armed groups such as, the Lord's Resistance Army(LRA) led by Joseph Kony have been recruiting and using children in combat activities such as children engaging in destructive anti-social behaviour like killing, maiming, and destruction of lives, property and environment. Participating in these activities is detrimental to the child's future development affecting their behavioural, cognitive and emotional behaviour.

Undoubtedly, war leaves a big burden on children that they have to carry throughout their adult life as we shall see in the analysis chapter.

Joseph Kony the leader of the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) wanted to over throw the government of Uganda and establish a government based on the biblical Ten Commandments of God. The LRA rebellion transpired for over 20 years in the northern districts of Gulu, Kitgum, Padar, Lira, Soroti, Nebbi, and Arua. The rebels terrorised the population mainly abducting and recruiting children in combat activities. Thousands of children and their families were displaced into Internally Displace peoples' Camps (IDPs).

According to the estimated figures; over 3000 children were abducted and recruited by the LRA. Many of the children were forced to kill their relatives and friends as a form of undergoing a process of initiation into rebel ranks. At the same time, most of the abducted girls were given to the rebel commanders as wives. Sadly still, other abducted girls combined both being wife and participating in combat duties; while majority carried heavy loads which threatened their physical strength especially food stuffs the rebels' loot from the villages.

Within this period, many children would escape, or rescued by the Uganda People's Defence Forces (UPDF) during battles with LRA rebels. Most of the children rescued were unaccompanied, sick, and malnourished and lacked nowhere to go since most of their families were confined into camps. As a result of this, many mothers got concerned about the well- being of children returning from captivity. The concerned mothers came up with an idea to start providing food to the displaced and helpless children. But the number of displaced children kept on growing, the concerned mothers applied to the municipal council and a plot of land was allocated to them where they started an organisation known as Gulu Support the Children Organisation (GUSCO).

GUSCO therefore, became a local organisation established by the concerned mothers in Gulu district who felt touched by the suffering children returning from LRA captivity were undergoing. It started operating in 2004 as an organisation working to promote the well-being of children affected by conflict in northern Uganda. They provide immediate centre based

rehabilitation support to formerly abducted children, and they also ensure that there was conducive environment for ex-child soldier's safe integration for the new life in the community. GUSCO worked hand in hand with the government, the community, and various aid and international child organizations such as, UNICEF and Save the Children in Uganda (SCiU), which also provides the organisation's funding.

GUSCO's core of operation is on article 12 (UNCRC, 1989) that concerns ideas about participation by children in matters that affect their lives. Through participation, children get the basic life skills that enable them survive and recover from adversity. Participation became the potential for empowering formerly abducted children and identifying their knowledge to secure their well-being in society as a happier generation with secure future after a long period of devastating war on their lives.

Therefore, my study explores the lives of 15 children who were abducted, returned upon escaping from the rebels or being rescued by the UPDF during combat, attended GUSCO rehabilitation centre where they participated in planning, delivering and shaping services about peace building to the community. Special emphasis is on the role GUSCO plays in the lives of children, their participation in the peace building process and how their opinions have contributed to the peace building process in northern Uganda. I also go further to look at the challenges ex- child soldiers still face despite reintegration and participation in peace building.

Peace attempts in northern Uganda

There were various peace attempts in northern Uganda notable among were the one in 1994 when Betty Bigombe who was working for the World Bank was asked to act as a peace envoy by the government of Uganda. She achieved ceasefire and extensive face to face talks with Kony himself. However, her mission failed as a result of communication difficulties, alleged vested interests of certain high ranking officers and politicians (Lomo and Hovil, 2004). In 1997, the catholic, the Anglican and the Muslim religious leaders of Acholi sub-region formalised their increasing co-operation on peace issues by setting up the Acholi Religious Leaders peace initiatives (ARLPI). The ARLPI was established at a time when the prospects for a negotiated settlement seemed very bleak clearly; the ARLPI threw itself into the task of seeking negotiated

peaceful end to the conflict. Religious leaders from the onset of the LRA rebellion up to date have worked closely with traditional leaders, government, rebels, and the members of international community and have enjoyed trust of the community. They became influential in providing communication between the government and the LRA despite the government and rebels accusing them of being agents of the other. On the other hand, they were remarkable especially in highlighting the suffering of the night commuters (young children who used to trek long distance to Gulu town street and bus park every evening escaping from LRA attacks and sleeping on bare grounds). Their effort saw them spend several nights in streets of Gulu town showing their concern and love for the children during the peak of the war in 2004. Hence, their effective mediation for peaceful end to conflict gave results in 2002 when the government granted amnesty to all the LRA fighters who returned from the bush.

The religious leaders have continued to advocate for amnesty for the rebels drawing their inspiration from post-apartheid South Africa were amnesty was pivotal in ensuring that the leaders of the apartheid regime negotiated and handed power to the African National Congress (ANC). Also, in West Nile region of Uganda amnesty had already been effective in determining the surrender of the West Nile Bank Front II (WNBF II) a rebel group that was operating in the West Nile region of Uganda. In northern Uganda itself, amnesty act had proved influential in securing the surrender of over 10,000 ex- LRA combatants who had already abandoned rebellion and granted amnesty. The religious leader's effort for peaceful end to LRA war has been backed by members of society who also argue in favour of amnesty law against military operation. Their principle belief remains critical given that the majority of LRA army is composed of children abducted and turned into rebels (Owor Ogora, 2012). They could not see the reason why northern Uganda could not use amnesty in conflict resolution. They argued that if government forces attack the LRA they would respond by terrorising the population even more.

However, despite the LRA fighters beginning to surrender under the amnesty act, in 2002, the government launched massive army operation dubbed operation iron fist to end the northern rebellion but despite the hype, the army operation failed and the LRA continued to massacre and abduct more children. Operating within this difficult environment, in 2004 president Museveni

brought back a suggestion made by UNICEF in 1998 in New York and referred the LRA case to the International Criminal Court (ICC) seeing it as something of breakthrough (Allen, 2006:83). Reacting to the ICC enactment Save the Children in Uganda (SCiU) issued this statement in February, 2004,

> We have to realise that this war primarily involves children, thus any action taken must seriously consider the impact on child protection… children are by far the main witnesses (and victims)…Save the Children is concerned that the LRA leadership might apply even more strict discipline to prevent witnesses from escaping. They could also easily convince the children that they will be subject to prosecution by the ICC if they do so. In other words, their hold and control over the child hostages can be increased, as well as the risks to children associated with escaping from the LRA. This is likely to prevent more children from escaping including newly abducted ones… It can be assumed that the lives of those children who have managed to return from abduction will be endangered, especially if they give evidence to the ICC. This may also have implications for the present practices of rehabilitation and reintegration, where organisations working in this field actively encourage children to return to their communities following assessment and assistance in the rehabilitation centres. Who will be held accountable for the safety and protection of these children? … In general we find that it is extremely challenging to impart clear information to war-torn communities in ways that will be properly understood by the majority and not converted into damaging rumours, leading to even more suspicion and distrust (SCiU, 2004 in Allen, 2006:83-84).

The following years was not any better, children were still being abducted and suffering while other members of the population remained confined in camps due to failed peace talks. In the face of these suffering, a new round of peace talks was organised in July 2006 in the capital of Southern Sudan, Juba, where the government of Uganda and the LRA signed a Cessation of Hostilities Agreement (CHA). Over the following two years, the government of Uganda and the rebels reached agreements on reconciliation, accountability, and disarmament (HURFO, 2010).

However, the president and the ICC chief prosecutor Luis Moreno Ocampo continued to support the military offensive to arrest Kony and his four commanders despite opposition from the community leaders and members of the civil society who were in support of the amnesty law. Meanwhile, other community leaders together with critics accused the ICC of practicing selective persecution and being one sided by only looking at the LRA while ignoring the government forces whom the community claim to have also participated in killing and torturing them.

The LRA rebels demanded removal of the ICC indictment before they could accept to surrender and sign the final 2006 Juba peace agreement, a situation that put the peace talks at standstill. But the government and ICC refused to accept their position giving a deaf ear. The ICC continued to support the government to use military offensive against the LRA, thus the peace talks broke down and the LRA relocated to the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and later to the Central African Republic (CAR) where currently they still continue to scatter, attack population, and abduct more children.

Responding to the LRA strategy, in December 2008, the government replied by putting in place another army operation dubbed operation lightening thunder where thousands of Uganda troops marched into Central African Republic in search and arrest of the indicted LRA commanders (Mamdani, 2012).

In November 2011, US president Barrack Obama dispatched 100 troops and advisers to the DRC to join the UPDF in the hunt and arrest of the four LRA commanders. Following in President Obama's footstep, in March 2012, an American NGO Invisible Children which have been operating in northern Uganda since 2003 joined the ranks by calling for US military resolution and campaign to make Kony famous in 2012 calling on the whole world to join the support. Currently, Kony continues to abduct children in the DRC and CAR and there is now counter accusations emerging from both DRC and CAR arguing that, Kony is a Ugandan and an Acholi problem and they are demonising the whole Acholi community (Kony's tribe) as the one committing atrocities against the local population in the neighbouring two countries. Thus, the LRA rebellion has now turned into a geo-political war affecting the neighbouring countries of

CAR, DRC and Southern Sudan. Thus, the end to LRA war in northern Uganda still hangs in balance with no clear indication when it will end and were Joseph Kony, his commanders and remaining abducted children really are.

Peace building and participation

Uganda being a signatory of the UN Security Council and a member of the UNCRC 1989 joined other development partners who were already players in the peace building process in northern parts of Uganda.

According to the UN, peace building encompasses a wide range of political, developmental, humanitarian and human rights programs and mechanisms designed to prevent the outbreak, reoccurrence or continuation of armed conflict (UN Security Council, 2001).

Participation being an important factor for reintegration is being implemented in relation to the UNCRC (1989) article 39 which mentions the care and treatment of children in difficult circumstances and the article states that,

> States parties shall take all appropriate measures to promote physical and psychological recovery and social reintegration of a child victim of any form of neglect, exploitation, or abuse; torture or any other form of cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment; or armed conflict. Such recovery and reintegration shall take place in an environment which fosters the health, self-respect and dignity of the child.

Following the United Nation's Security Council 2001, article 12 and article 39 of the UNCRC, different development initiatives were developed in Northern Uganda to include children's representation in determining decisions that affect their lives. For instance, there was formation of children clubs that provided support to the communities, helped raise awareness about reconciliation in the community. All these efforts were geared towards enabling children who were war victims to change in a non- violent way under the guidance of government as a member state of the UN security council and various Non-Governmental Organizations such as, Save the Children, UNICEF and World Vision International. The three organizations have been focusing on article 12 and 39 of the UNCRC as their guiding tool since 1990s.

Hence, the government embarked on a comprehensive plan in 2007 and designed a program called the Peace, Recovery and Development Program for Northern Uganda (PRDP, 2007) as a strategy to eradicate poverty and improve the welfare of populace in northern Uganda.

Strategic objectives of PRDP include,

1. Consolidation of state authority.

Whose ultimate outcome is to ensure cessation of armed hostilities, providing security, restabilising the rule of law, enabling the judicial and legal services to become functional, protection of human rights and strengthening local governance through rebuilding state institutions in the region.

2. Rebuilding and empowering communities.

The PRDP seeks to contribute to community recovery and promote an improvement in the conditions and quality of life of displaced persons in camps, completing the return and reintegration of displaced populations, initiating rehabilitation and development activities among other resident communities and ensuring that the vulnerable are protected and served.

3. Revitalization of the economy.

The PRDP seeks to re-activate the productive sectors within the region with particular focus on production and marketing, services and industry. This will require major rehabilitation of critical infrastructure. Revitalization of the economy has both negative and positive influences on the environment, therefore, mechanisms for sound management of environment and natural resources will have to be reinforced.

4. Peace building and Reconstruction.

A major outcome of the PRDP is to ensure the continuous prevalence of peace in the region.

The peace building and reconstruction process requires increased access to information by the population. Through use of the print and electronic media to popularise the PRDP with the beneficiaries and stakeholders, use of national and private FM radio stations and television

stations for talk shows, educative messages and other relevant programmes to reach the beneficiaries.

It encouraged enhancing counselling services such as profiling counselling providers and developing counselling tools and modules, establishing mechanisms for intra\inter communal conflict and national conflict resolution such as supporting traditional, local and cultural drama groups, cultural institutions to deliver messages through music, drama, and other local shows to deliver reconciliation messages.

Attempts were also made towards strengthening local governance and informal leadership structures and reinforcing the socio-economic reintegration of ex-combatants. This was to be achieved by supporting dialogue and reconciliation between the civilian population, the government and the military.

These peace building programs were to be implemented together with partner organisations working in peace building programs within the northern region of Uganda. One such organisation is a local NGO known as the Gulu Support the Children Organization (GUSCO). GUSCO have been working to promote the wellbeing of children affected by armed conflict in northern Uganda since 1994 by providing Centre-based rehabilitation work. Covering things like, provision of immediate psychosocial, material and medical care provided to the children upon their return from captivity (GUSCO, 2010).

From GUSCO, children started participating in peace building by giving information on who is still alive, the ways they managed to escape and documenting their experience of captivity through drawings. Additional effort by children is documented in my empirical data where child soldiers accepted their position as both victims and perpetrators of violence. They explained to the community what they did, how and the circumstances that made them do it.

Therefore, children in my thesis are seen as capable agents in the construction of their life experience of armed conflict. Getting their voice was the sole reason for selecting this topic and their views and opinion forms the lens that I use to guide my understanding of ex-child soldiers

with peace building process in northern Uganda. Further still, children's knowledge gave me better explanation of their lives that is important to policy makers, academicians and researchers regarding future programming for the children.

Research questions and objectives

This study captures children's participation in peace building in northern Uganda. It is based on the following research objectives.

- To explore children's and young people's experiences as participants in peace building process in Gulu, Northern Uganda.

- To get knowledge about children's perspectives of Gulu Support the Children Organization (GUSCO) work in peace building in Gulu.

- To explore the activities children are engaged in and the challenge they face in the process of reintegration into community life.

The research question explores children's experience as participants in various activities they did during the peace building process in Gulu. It also looks at the challenges ex-child soldiers face in the process of reintegration into community life. The research question specifically tends to address the following interrelated questions:

- What kind of support do children returning from LRA receive from GUSCO?

- How do children's participation enhance the peace building process and why?

- In what ways did different groups of war affected children (those from LRA, out- of-school and school going children) involved in the peace building process?

- What challenges do children face in the community and schools?

- Which methods are effective to engage children in peace building process and why?

Methods I used

In choosing my methods, I considered the fact that young people are knowledgeable agents as articulated in social studies of childhood (James et al.1998).

To capture this knowledge about children's lives as active participants in the peace process, I used qualitative methods so as to get children's experience, perception and understanding of what they know about the peace building process. I selected qualitative methods such as observation, interviews, field note taking and focus group discussion because they enabled me to dig deep into the lives of my respondents. I discuss each of these methods in detail in the methodology chapter.

Organisation of the thesis

This thesis is organized on chapter basis. In **chapter one** I give the introduction to my topic and why I found it necessary to select this topic. In **chapter two**, I give description of my study area, giving the background to the LRA war and the situation of children in Gulu district and Uganda as a whole. In **chapter three** I will be looking at the theoretical under takings that form part of my study topic, while in **chapter four**, I will be looking at methodology looking at the ethical issues I encountered during my study, how I used the methods and challenges of carrying out field work in post-conflict zone. In **chapter five** and **six** I will look at the empirical data I got from the field regarding children's experiences with peace building, while in **chapter seven** I will draw my conclusion and implications of study, and suggestions for further study to be carried out.

CHAPTER TWO: THE STUDY AREA

In this chapter, I locate my study area on the map as an area located within East Africa and my study area Gulu district northern Uganda. I elaborate on the background to the war in northern Uganda and the prevailing situation at the moment in the region, and also give a thick description of the rehabilitation centre where I spent most of my time during the study period. Further, I reflect on the situation of children in northern Uganda and show the sector responsible for the children in Uganda. Similarly, I outline the different protocols the government of Uganda signed in relation to protection of children and what the UNCRC (1989) recommends regarding protection of children in Uganda.

Map of Uganda showing districts that were affected by the LRA insurgency as well as the neighbouring countries of Central African Republic (CAR), Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and Southern Sudan where the LRA still abducts children to date.

Source: **http://www.enoughproject.org/files/142/lramap5.jpg**
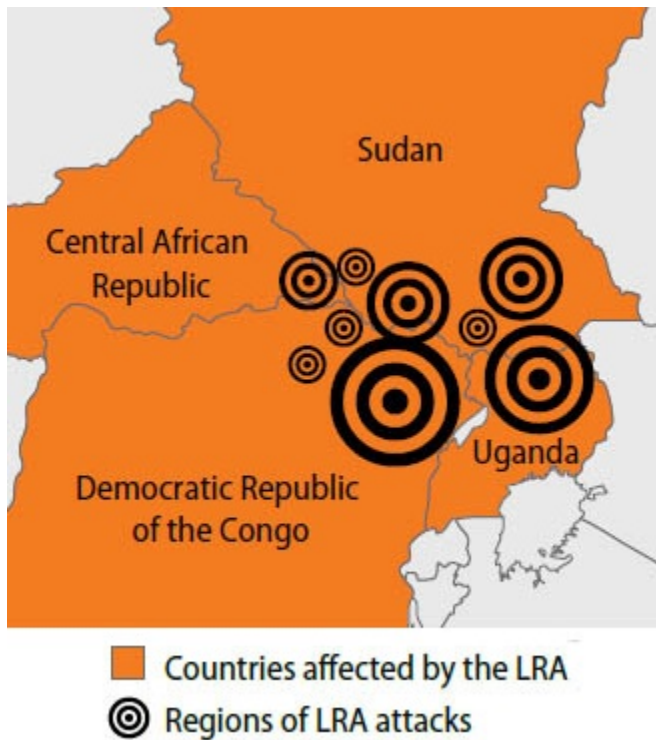
Gulu district is located in the northern central part of Uganda with the neighbouring districts of Kitgum, Pader, Lira, Apac, Amuru, Dokolo, Amolatar, and Oyam. Gulu together with the

neighbouring districts constitutes the largest region in the country representing 35% of the total land surface. Gulu district suffered from the onset of the LRA war and though the place is now peaceful, the area continues to suffer from post-war effect of the LRA rebellion. According to the government report Peace, Recovery, and Development Plan for Northern Uganda (PRDP, 2007), over 90% of the population in Gulu district were displaced and have not been able to engage in any meaningful economic activity. Agriculture which is the major source of livelihood in the district was mostly affected since most of the land surface was infested with land mines. The after effect have inflicted a lot of injury to the farmers and maimed many who tried to till the land. Hence, Gulu district continue to suffer wide spread poverty and hunger. The PRDP (2007) report also indicates that Gulu has the worst nutrition status compared to other districts 25% of children in Gulu area are underweight and the number of orphans also increased in Gulu district to 28% from 25% previously, a notable increase is also registered in the number of child headed households and widow hood with 12% registered increase.

Back-ground to the war

According to different scholars, the LRA war has it is roots in connection with the culture of the Acholi and political history of Uganda. A statement which several Acholi elders agree with that the pre-Colonial history of Acholi people included a warrior tradition which involved combat with their eastern (Karamojong), southern (Langi) and western (Madi) neighbours, as well as frequent conflict among the Acholi clans themselves. During the Colonial period, the British Government recruited heavily among the Acholi for the uniformed services (army, police and prison guards). Acholi soldiers participated with the British in World War II in combat theaters throughout the world. Acholi people generally hold the view that the colonizers exploited them for the uniformed services and for unskilled labour, leaving them at the margins of Uganda's development, while central Ugandans, such as the Baganda, were the beneficiaries of more durable commercial and educational activities (Gersony, 1997:7, Allen, 2006, Finnstöm, 2008:61, Kasaija, 2005:392).

After the British rule, Uganda gained independence in 1962 but even then the country continued to experience a series of violent conflict. Notable among them was the over throw of the first

Uganda's president Edward Mutesa in 1966 by Milton Obote. In a similar way, Milton Obote was also overthrown by his army commander General Idi Amin Dada in a military coup in 1971.

After the 1971 coup, Obote and his allies took refuge in the neighbouring Tanzania where they reorganized their army to topple Amin. In Tanzania they were backed by the Tanzanian regime of President Julius Nyerere. They launched an attack on Uganda and in 1979 Amin was over thrown by the pro Obote group operating under Uganda National Liberation Front (UNLF) and Front for National Salvation (FRONASA) of Yoweri Museveni (Allen, 2006).

Following the overthrow of Idi Amin, elections were held in 1980 and Milton Obote won but other candidates contested the results that it was rigged by the electoral body in favour of Obote. The discontented parties accused the Obote's government of massive rigging and refused to recognise the newly elected government. Yoweri Museveni who participated and lost the elections under the Uganda Patriotic Movement (UPM) launched a guerrilla war against Obote's government immediately after the 1980 elections. The preceding period 1980-1986 was characterised by bloodshed, human rights violations and death, with many social services destroyed and notable economic breakdown with different presidents coming in and out. In 1985,

Obote's government was over thrown by military junta led by Tito Okello Lutwa who stayed in power for a short time before being deposed on 26th January 1986; by National Resistance Movement (NRA) of the current president Yoweri Museveni who is on record before Joseph Kony to have used child soldiers during his struggle to power in 1986.

After Obote's overthrow, in 1986 his allies and former soldiers regrouped to topple the Museveni's new government. As described by the IRIN (2004) the UNLF regrouped in 1986 under Alice Lakwena's Holy Spirit Movement (HSM). Lakwena was believed to have spirits which guided her for the good of the Acholi people whom she felt were being victimized. This belief won her support among the Acholi but her movement was defeated in 1987 by the Uganda army.

After her defeat, Joseph Kony a former school dropout and former gang member involved in petty thievery began terrorising the population claiming to be visited by the same spirits. He then gathered the remnants of the Holy Spirit Movement and formed the LRA in 1994. His major aim was to over throw the government of Uganda and establish a regime based on the ten commandments of the bible and overcome the marginalization of the Acholi community (Royo, 2008).

From then onwards the LRA raked havoc on the population of northern Uganda mainly using abduction and kidnapping as its form of recruitment majorly abducting children which composed most of his army. Nordstrom (2002) has observed that the LRA employed murder, torture, community destruction, sexual abuse and starvation as prime weapons in arsenal of warfare. The continued terror and displacement of the population created a situation among the local people who normally referred to their surrounding as '*piny marac'* a local name for bad surroundings in Acholi culture (Finnström, 2008:10).

Joseph Kony's operation is believed to have been helped by the fertile ground they found to operate in Southern Sudan because the area had been wracked by the war between the Sudanese Peoples' Liberation Army (SPLA) of the late John Garang and the Khartoum government which began in may 1983.The Sudanese government found an ally in Kony because the government of Uganda was supporting the SPLA (Kasaija, 2005). Kasaija (2005:392) also adds that the LRA war was due to the existence of a political divide between the south and the north resulting from the times of colonial administration when the north was majorly reserved for recruitment in the army while the southern part was for administration and cash crop growing. This divide resulted into uneven social and economic development, violent regional conflict and marginalization by governments and the elites in power (IRIN 2004, Kasaija 2005).

Others consider this war to have continued and delayed to end due to laxity in the army. It is believed that most army commanders did not want the war to end because they were reaping economic benefits out of it. Though more fingers have been pointed at the president and the ICC chief prosecutor who acted in contraction to the Juba peace agreement in 2006 where Joseph Kony had agreed to sign the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement (CHA) but the government went

ahead to indict him to the Hague court which dealt a huge blow to the peace agreement up todate.

Currently, northern Uganda have enjoyed relative peace for six years (2006-todate) but the area is still coping with challenges faced by post-war societies such as, large number of orphans and homeless children, land conflict, corruption, human rights violations, and compensation which leaves this region in the shadow of attaining sustainable peace.

However, most worrying is that the LRA is still at large in the neighbouring countries, the population is still scared that Kony and his remnants may return anytime to terrorise them. Kony is currently in the neighbouring countries of Central African Republic (CAR) and Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) where he continues to abduct and terrorise the population. The people in DRC and CAR continue to condemn and look at the Acholi population with bitterness that it is their son committing atrocities in the neighbourhood. They are demonising the whole tribe because Kony is an Acholi, and that it is an Acholi causing suffering in their areas, arguing that Kony and his remnants are a Ugandan and an Acholi problem. Hence the innocent people of Acholi land have been included in this war and the LRA war has now turned into geo-political war that in the long run may result into inter- tribal clash between the neighbouring tribes in CAR, DRC, Southern Sudan and the Acholi.

Finally, despite the gun going silent for six years now, the Acholi sub-region is battling yet another mysterious disease. The disease which mainly affect young children between 2- 15 years, and so far over 1,800 children are reported to have died as a result of this disease and 1,000 are still suffering from nodding syndrome with 88 cases reported in Pader district and Kitgum 45 (Ayebazibwe, 2012).

Photo showing children suffering from nodding disease in northern Uganda, the disease is currently threatening the lives of thousands of children despite the end of war.

The nodding syndrome derives it is name from the disease itself whereby often the victims nod to death and are malnourished because eating food seems to spark bouts of nodding seizures.

Other characteristics of associated with nodding disease include mental and physical retardation, head nodding and drooling, constant nasal flow and saliva. The disease was first reported in 2003 with some locals thinking the disease is witchcraft and most of them took the children to witchdoctors. Others thought it was a curse from God, so they chose prayers but still nothing changed. Others believed in scientific medicine but lost hope along the way, saying the white man's drug had failed them. No single child has been cured from this disease since 2003 to date and its cause and cure still remain a mystery to the population of Acholi sub-region.

The syndrome is common in areas around Pager River Belt in Kitgum, where the LRA and government soldiers rocked their guns and missiles, leaving some locals to say the disease could be yet another effect of the war. Other locals link it to relief food and post war effects,

contaminated water, and poisoned game meat. Because of large number of victims, there is now wide call from local leaders for the establishment of rehabilitation centres to provide psycho-social support and medical supplies to the victims, special needs school, and mobile units to offer easy accessibility. Special needs school relates to the report that more than 1,000 children in Acholi sub-region have dropped out of school as a result of the disease which affects their level of concentration and stigma. 300 pupils are reported to have dropped out of school from Okidi primary school since 2008 due to stigma from nodding disease; pupils do not want to associate with the sick at school (Ayebazibwe, 2012).

Children in northern Uganda and the war

Since 1986, children in northern Uganda lived in timid condition without any peace enjoyed by children in other regions of the country. Growing up within this period I still recall how children from northern Uganda were the headline of every media house in Uganda each day reporting either they have been killed or abducted by the rebels or how they are commuting every night and sleeping under appalling conditions in verandas and bus parks of Gulu town. I could not imagine myself being in what they were going through. I could watch news, read newspapers and wonder whether the world had forgotten about certain parts of the world, a similar situation to the current nodding disease syndrome I high light above where the government seem not to care about the children's situation in this region.

Worth noting is that throughout the 20 years of LRA insurgency, the lives of children in northern part of Uganda was characterised by gross violation of children's rights, with no love and no care availed to the children. The children used their capacity to fend for themselves in terms of getting food, and protection.

By being the principle victims of this war, children lost parental care, rights to family, education and health services due to this conflict. Hence I can say the state failed in providing and protecting children in northern Uganda from rebel abductions. According to estimates over 3,000 children were abducted during LRA conflict. Their abduction and indoctrination into rebel activities were characterised by engaging in some of the worst practices any human kind should

not be exposed especially when you are forced to do it against your will. Taking a quotation from a 16 year old formerly abducted child she states that one day,

> One boy tried to escape, but he was caught, they made him eat a mouthful of red pepper, and five people were beating him. His hands were tied, and then they made us, the other new captives, kill him with a stick. I felt sick. I knew this boy from before. We were from the same village. I refused to kill him, and they told me they would shoot me. They pointed a gun at me, so I had to do it. The boy was asking me, ''why are you doing this?'' I said I had no choice. After we killed him, they made us smear blood on our arms. I felt dizzy. They said we had to do this so we would not fear death, and so we would not try to escape (HRW, .1997).

This statement from the 16 year old girl demonstrates just one example of what many other children went through under the brutal work of the LRA in northern Uganda.

Many of the children were doing night commuting where by tens of thousands of children go to urban areas at night for protection. Night commuting saved the lives of many children even if they were doing it under extreme hardship. However, though some abducted children have returned, majority still remain unaccounted for and quite a few still continue to return and are being resettled into the community.

When children are rescued from abduction, they are returned to the barracks and later handed over to the organizations carrying out rehabilitation either at World Vision Rehabilitation Centre or Gulu Support the Child Organization (GUSCO). GUSCO is where my study was carried out and it's the children who were rehabilitated by GUSCO that I followed during the course of my two month field work. I now turn to talk more about GUSCO.

The Gulu Support the Children Organisation (GUSCO)

GUSCO was found in the beginning of 1994 by concerned mothers due to growing concern for the lives and well being of children who return from captivity. This is because some of the

children did not know the where about of their parents simply because either their parents have been killed or have been displaced (GUSCO, 2004).

Additionally, concern was raised by mothers regarding the way the government forces were treating children returning from captivity. Whereby, children upon being rescued by the UPDF are taken to barracks as rebels. Inside the barracks, children are tortured, made to go hungry as the army tries to gather intelligence information from them. Finnström (2008:9) has observed that, in January 2003, the magistrate's court in Gulu town reported that two boys aged fourteen and sixteen who returned home from rebel captivity were charged with treason, and that twenty-five more minors were being held in military custody without charges, under pressure to join the Uganda army or face treason charges.

During this time, many young people in Acholi land struggled to find balance in life due to disempowering circumstances, many young people lived in conditions they frequently described as ''bad surroundings'' (*piny marac*- local word for bad surrounding in Acholi (Finnström, 2008:10).

Therefore, due to mistreatment of ex-child soldiers by the army, mothers organized and put hands together with the local government and came up with the program to feed and keep the children. They mobilized their own resources, brought the children near them, made consultation with local leaders and children started staying with them. Some mothers volunteered to stay with children; they collected them and provided imminent care which children were badly in need at that moment.

From then onwards, due to the over whelming number of returnees, the mothers thought of getting a home where children can be settled and for that place to be a transitional path for their rehabilitation. They appealed to the Gulu district local government which allocated to them a plot of land near Gulu district administrative offices. At the beginning, the resources were scarce and not enough to build and at the same time provide the basic necessities to the ever increasing number of returnees, but the concerned mothers sat down and made a proposal to RED BARNET.

Their proposal was accepted and Red Barnet started funding GUSCO. From then on, when children are rescued by the army, they are first taken to Gulu army barracks and then to GUSCO for registration. After registration each child is allocated a social worker who has to counsel the child. The social worker is also availed with a health form called the health worker's assessment form where he fills all the health details he observes on the child. He fills the form indicating the level of injuries and trauma suffered by the child and if he found a child is badly injured and in need of immediate medical attention, the child is referred to a nurse immediately.

When children get to the centre, they are briefed about the place that GUSCO is a transitional centre and they will be there for a short time before reunion with their families. They are told that home is the best place for them to grow up. Therefore the centre traces the family of the child by inviting parents to the centre to identify their children. Some older ex- child soldiers too help in identifying the young children born in captivity. If a parent identifies a child, a social worker goes and maps where the child says comes from. It is from such mappings that social workers and visitors use for follow ups.

There were also different activities that children engaged in while in GUSCO such as taking country guided walks taken within the community so that they get equipped with the experience before their return. They also get immediate support about their lives such as teaching them about their rights, class orientation and assessing their ability whether they can go back to school or not. In case a child is unable to go to school, he\she is provided with skills training in brick lying, bakery, tailoring, carpentry, and mechanics, while the young ones are sent back to school.

Culturally, moral lessons are also taught to the children mainly focusing on daily life and what is expected out of them. This is done separately among boys and girls and also the children under go through family talk where parents are invited to tell children conditions at home and what is expected of them upon return.

Uganda and the welfare of children

Uganda ratified the UNCRC in November 1990 and the African Charter on the Rights of the Child (ACRC) in the same year. Similarly; these are the legal documents that are used in providing welfare for children in Uganda. A number of interventions have been developed and implemented in Uganda following the ratification of the convention (CRC/C/65/Add.33). Uganda reports to the UNCRC after every five years the progress of the rights of the child under different protocols signed. Such protocols include optional protocol to the convention on the rights of the child on the involvement in armed conflict, optional protocol to the convention on the rights of the child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography.

In Uganda, all issues concerning children are under the National Council for Children under the supervision of Ministry of Gender and Social Welfare Development. The National Council for children helps to produce and promote policies and programs on the survival, development and protection of children (CRC/C/SR.3). This is in line with the article 6 of the UNCRC which calls for

> (1) States parties recognize that every child has the right to life.
>
> (2) States parties shall ensure to the maximum extent possible the survival and development of the child.

Despite the Government of Uganda signing the above protocols, the state for the past 20 years betrayed the children of northern Uganda. The children in this region lost trust in the adult work for failure to provide protection and living them to be abused and abducted by the LRA rebels. Therefore, for the government and the whole adult world to rebuild trust with the children, there is need for the state of Uganda to put article 39 of the UNCRC into practice which states that,

> States parties shall take all appropriate measures to promote physical and psychological recovery and social reintegration of a child victim of: any form of neglect, exploitation, or abuse; torture or any other form of cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment; or armed conflicts. Such recovery and reintegration shall take place in an

environment which fosters the health, self-respect and dignity of the child (UNCRC, 1989).

It is through the call by article 39 that different policy makers such as, the government together with the international donors like UNICEF, Save the Children and World Vision have been operating in Gulu district trying to reintegrate the ex-child soldiers into "normal life". Therefore, article 39 of the UNCR 1989 is of paramount importance for this topic.

Demography, culture and the economy

Population of Uganda

Uganda is home to ethnically diverse population with politicized divide among different groups (Allen, 2006). This divide stems from the indirect system of administration used by the British Protectorate. There exists a big gap in development between the northern and eastern parts of the country compared to the central and some parts of western region. According to the State of Uganda Population Report released recently, Uganda's population currently stands at 34.5 million (UBOS, 2011), with the female and male population standing at 17.3 million each. The fertility rate for Ugandan woman stands at 5.9 per woman which puts Uganda above all the countries in the sub-Saharan Africa where on average; there are 4.8 children per woman.

The young population dominates Uganda's population structure with 0-14 years standing at 49.9%; 15-64 years at 48.1% and 61 years and above compose only 2.1%.

The average life expectancy at birth stands at 52.17 years for the males and 54.33 for the females. Furthermore, the maternal mortality rate stand at 430 deaths\100000 live births, with most of the children under the age of 5 years being under weight accounting for 16.4%. Uganda also records high number of infant mortality rate at 62.47 deaths\10000 live births (UBOS, 2011).

Ethnic groups in Uganda

Uganda is composed of many ethnic groups, the largest of all are the Baganda which account for 16.9%, Banyakole 9.5%, Basoga 8.4%, Bakiga 6.9%, Iteso 6.4%,Langi 6.1%, the Acholi 4.7%(my study ethnic group), the Bagisu 4.6%, Lugbara 4.2%, Bunyoro 2.7% and others 29.6%.

Language

Having a variety of tribes means Uganda is home to many languages. The country has about 53 different dialects but as a government policy, English is the official language and also language of instruction in schools, courts of law and by most news papers and some radio broadcasts. Currently, Swahili has been adopted as the second official language and also as the language being spoken by all the members of the entire East African community.

Religion

Uganda is home to different religions, majority being the Roman Catholic's who have got the largest number of followers accounting for 41.9%, and the Protestants are the second largest at 42% and the Muslim account for 12.1%. There also exists the Pentecostals who account for 4.6%.

Economic activity

Uganda's economy is heavily based on agriculture and most indigenous people are employed in this sector. The crops grown for domestic consumption and export include millet, banana, cassava, maize, ground nuts, maize, sweet potatoes, sim- sim, tobacco, coffee, cotton, sugar cane and cabbages. Among the people of Gulu, agriculture and livestock form their major source of livelihood. The northern districts of Uganda receive reasonable amount of rainfall throughout the year that make it possible for the community to engage in agriculture and livestock rearing. The Acholi tribe rears cattle, sheep and goats. Having large herd of cattle in an Acholi community shows a person's wealth and such a person is highly respected in the society. Owning these animals also represents their contingency reserve for sickness, drought, retirement and marriage dowry (Gersony, 1997).

However, as the war intensified, the Acholi lost their cattle to the rebels, government forces and the Karamojong who continue raiding Acholi cattles. The limit in the number of cattle available in families has affected the institution of marriage were cattle is highly valued in settling bride wealth. Currently, the population is demanding compensation from government for their cattle lost, with major blame being labelled against the government to have taken their cattle to support army operation.

The education system in Uganda

The education system in Uganda maintained its structure from the colonial independence power Britain. The structure is based on seven years of primary education, four years of lower secondary ,two years of upper secondary three and five years of university education. At each level, there are options of pursuing technical, academic and vocational careers. Many of the technical colleges are associated with government but some are owned by individuals. Most subjects were taught according to British syllabus until 1974, and British examinations measured students' progress through primary and secondary school.

In 1975, the government implemented a local curriculum and for a short time most school materials were published in Uganda, school enrolments continued to climb throughout most of the 1970s and 1980s, Pre primary education was introduced and children began school at age three, most of these schools are located in urban areas where there is fine facilities mostly run by the private sector and the fees structure is quite high. In the mid 1980s, education system suffered the effects of economic decline and political instability, the quality of education declined, school maintenance standards suffered, teachers fled the country and many facilities were damaged.

During 1990s, the government adopted a policy to rehabilitate buildings and establish minimal conditions for instructions, improve efficiency, quality of education through teacher training and curriculum upgrading.

In 1997 in an effort to increase enrolment in schools, the government introduced Universal Primary Education (UPE) as policy to make primary education free for all children to attend

school. In 2006, Universal Secondary Education (USE) was introduced and now there is high level of school enrolments especially the girls who were not given chance to attend school, education was valued for boys only in many societies in the country.

The literacy rate in the country currently stands at 70% of which those aged 15 years and above can read and write.

Having briefly explained the background of Uganda in this chapter, showing it history and the status of children, I will in the next chapter present the theoretical concepts that have informed my study. The concepts I used conform to children's experience of adversity.

CHAPTER THREE: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In this chapter, I present how I have approached my study theoretically. I explain three conceptual frameworks in childhood studies and also engage with additional theories that give more holistic explanation of children in adversity.

Before the 1960s, childhood studies were mainly dominated by adult-dominated perspectives which suggest the important role of adults who decided on children's behalf. Researchers focused on adult perspective with less attention accorded to the children. Children were studied in disciplines such as; psychology, sociology, and medicine were they were mainly portrayed as human becoming instead of as human beings in their own right (Qvortrup, 1994). However, during the 1980s different authors started writing to advocate for children's voice to be heard and taken seriously. The writings of (Jenks 1982, 1996), James and Prout (1997) as well as James, Jenks and Prout (1998) were both instrumental and inspirational in advocating for children to be studied as independent being with valid knowledge and competence to make their own views and opinions.

The new social studies of childhood

The new paradigm of social studies of childhood is linked to the works of James and prout (1997). They argue for making the invisible (children as becoming and in need of adult protection and socialization) to be visible by seeing them as human beings, active participants in social life. James and Prout (1998) call for reconstructing childhood in the society by taking the view points of children seriously. That there should be formation of new knowledge about children with children's voices at the forefront to understand them for what they really are is an important epistemological and methodological break. In other words, childhood is a social phenomenon, as social institution that is the result of historical, political and economic processes.

The new paradigm considers childhood to be composed of differing elements that needs to be recognized such as ethnicity, social class and gender.

The new paradigm also considers children as agents in their own right and calls for studying children's social relationships and cultures 'independent of the perspective and concerns of

adults' (James and Prout 1997). As active agents in the society, James and Prout (1997) are hopeful that the new paradigms will play a part in changing the pattern of relationships between adults and children on the one hand and, on the other, children and society at large. The new paradigm operates under the following tenets. These are, the socio- structural child approach, the social actor approach, and the socially constructed approach.

The social structural approach

In the socio-structural approach, childhood is a structural phenomenon- that is, both structured and structuring, comparable and analogous to the proto-sociological class and the notion of gender in the social sciences (Alanen, 2001:13). Childhood is presented as being in continuous interplay with class and gender (and other social structures), and as being constructed and reconstructed within their interplay.

According to Qvortrup (2002), childhood as a structural form is conceptually comparable to the concept of class in the sense that it gains its defining characteristics by what the members of childhood are doing, so to speak, and through the position to which childhood is assigned by and in relation to other and more dominants groups in society (Qvortrup,2002:47). That the macro structures in society such as, economic forces, environmental events, physical planning, and political decisions affect children as well as the adults. Such aspects often occur in the society indirectly without the either the knowledge on consultations of the children and yet it has got a big impact on the lives of the children. Therefore, childhood should be studied in relation to other groups, historical periods and between different nations.

This approach sees childhood as a universal category, a part of the social worlds where children are a group whose 'manifestations may vary from society to society but within each particular society they are uniform' (James et al., 1998:32).

I therefore use the structural perspective on childhood to argue that it is the structures that children occupy and which they have limited or no control which constrain their life in captivity and society.

The socially constructed childhood approach

According to this approach childhood is seen as both a social and a cultural construct that vary both historically and culturally: 'in many parts of the world a child's age impinges very differently on local conceptualizations of children's physical and social skills'(James et al., 1998: 175).

This approach argues that the way childhood is constructed in the minority world[1] is different from that of majority world and each should be studied and explained differently by focusing on context in which events unfold. It recognizes that childhood is socially constructed by focusing on the social context within which psychological processes take place (Prout and James, 1990).

Jenks writes that the idea of childhood is not a natural but a social construct; as such its status is constituted in particular socially located forms of discourse. Therefore, to understand childhood as a social construct, we need to look at particular cultural settings and forms of conduct within a social structure. He argues that within particular social theory, the child is assembled to serve the purposes of supporting and perpetuating the fundamental grounds of and versions of human kind, action, order, language, and rationality within particular theories (Jenks, 1982, 1996:29).

Honwana adds that, childhood as a social construct, societies understand childhood to be dissimilar from adulthood, and they devise processes to articulate this transition, which might take place in different ways and at different stages in diverse social and cultural settings. The transition is often seen as a process rather than a single event. It is often composed of gradual transformations, or initiations (Honwana, 2005:35). Childhoods vary cross-culturally and over time, social roles, age, social expectations and responsibilities are constructed differently among societies. For example, among the Acholi, cultural education such as marriage rites are passed on to young generation during night fire meetings known as *wang'oo*. Here, children sit together with elders on a round table and girls are taught how to behave, conduct themselves, dress and how to do house work. The boys are as well taught how to hunt and protect the community.

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[1] Minority world refers to the economically more privileged countries of the 'developed' world, for example, Europe, United States, Australia, and New Zealand.
Majority world refers to the population that live in economically poorer countries of developing world, for example, Africa, Asia, and Latin America.

In my study, I will particularly apply this theory by drawing from a study by Levy Vygotsy (1978 in Boyden & Mann, 2005:5), who observes that participation in cultural activities and the guidance children receive from more skilled peers, siblings, and adults, children can learn to think and develop new skills and more mature approaches to problem solving. It is generally assumed that, all communities establish ways of helping children to build connections between their current knowledge and those skills and understanding they are capable of acquiring (Rogoff , 1990 in Boyden & Mann, 2005:5). I will be drawing from this perspective to show that the current generation of children in northern Uganda never had the chance to participate in the cultural education due to the long period of war. But still, peace building mechanisms included previous cultural activities such as Acholi traditional dance *larakaraka* was combined with children's knowledge from captivity to document their experience in a bid to ensure their safe resettlement and re-integration back into the community.

The social actor approach
This approach focuses on childhood as a social reality by focusing on the social activities of everyday life of children at the micro level particularly, children's agency. The paradigm considers children's interaction with the cultural world as separate from that of adults, where children act autonomously with their own rituals and rules, there by being an appropriate approach to explore the nature of children's play (Punch, 2003:280).

Children are social actors; as well as active social beings, constructing and creating social relationships, rather than as the 'cultural dopes' of socialization theory (Prout and James, 1990: 24). In other words, children make meaning out of the world and the places they occupy. Such places may include school, homes, peer groups, neighbourhoods and it is through such arena where children interact and learn some of the crucial aspects of their lives (see Opie, 1982). Engaging themselves through interaction in their activities is an important source in which children can achieve social change.

Hence, due to diversity in childhood experiences, children in majority world use different identities to suit different situations in their lives by moving between the two worlds in which

they find themselves as argued by Punch (2003). Using her approach, I show the different contexts of child soldier's lives using different theories that give a more holistic explanation of children's lives in adversity. This is explained by agency, victimcy, resilience, lost generation and transitional justice which are more of a cultural way of settling conflicts. I discuss each of these theories below.

Children's agency and victimcy

Often, child soldiers in Africa and elsewhere have been depicted in both academic and popular writing as mere victims (Brett & McCallin1996; Cohen & Goodwin-Gill 1994; Dodge & Raundalen 1987; 1991; Eade 1995; Fleishman & Whitman 1994; Furley 1995; Sly 1995; Sutton & Leicht 1999; Whitman & Fleishman 1994 cited in Utas, 2003:27).

Contrary to their arguments, child soldiers in my study are both victims and perpetrators in war. Children in war situations are competent agents who are actively participating in the construction of their own childhood that's to say, children are actively constructing and determining their own social worlds, the lives of those around them and the societies in which they live James and Prout (1997).

Child soldiers are participating agents in their own experiences; they engage with the structures around them and always find a thin line to take part in the construction of knowledge about themselves. There is child to child interaction despite the thinning socio-cultural structures that constrain and weaken their agency, they still try to find space to thicken their agency and negotiate their survival. Engaging in activities such as, peer to peer participation of children in decision making that affect their lives enhances their agency as it provides space for negotiation and space for critical thinking (Robson, et al, 2007).

According to the global and humanitarian discourse, children in adversity are mere victims who are unprotected, do not give informed consent to participate in war, and their right to unhindered growth and identity is threatened by the confusion of war. This is the global image of child soldiers in Uganda, they are that of victims irreparably damaged, a "lost generation," rejected

from their families and communities for heinous acts they have committed (British Broadcasting Corporation [BBC], 2007 in Annan et al, 2009:640). Therefore, drawing from discourses such as these, I will argue that the humanitarian discourse moulds children into traumatized victims ignoring the fact that children despite being passive victims, they are competent and possess the ability to act, possess the skills and resources that they use to negotiate their survival in adversity. In other words, their agency is underlined in explaining war situations.

Further still, war affected children are both victims and perpetrators who use their agency to negotiate their survival in adversity by sometimes appearing as 'victims'. According to Mats Utas (2003), victimcy is the most limited form of agency, which depicts oneself as a victim, and thus reaping the benefits that other people's mercy might give. In the presence of foreign humanitarian aid victimcy can at times be a very useful mode. They always operate with the notion that children recruited in armed rebellions are unaccompanied and suffer from unfavourable conditions of conflict zones; they stand defenceless in the face of aggressive recruitment campaigns, without the protective influence of the family (Brett and Mc Callin, 1996: 113; Ameratunga, 1998: 3; UNHCR, 2000, n.d.b:5, in Beirens, 2008:155).

According to Robson et al. (2007: 135), agency is understood to mean an individual's own capacities, competencies, and activities through which they navigate the contexts and positions of their life worlds, fulfilling many economic, social, and cultural expectations, while simultaneously charting individual\collective choices and possibilities for their daily and future lives. Agency can be of two types for example, strategic agency and tactical agency. Strategic agency as having possible long term consequences or benefits, and tactic agency are means devised to cope with concrete circumstances, even though those means are likely to have deleterious long-term consequences are key forms of agency I elaborate on in my research Honwana (1999b; 2000 in Utas, 2003:174).

Honwana (2005:46) adds that children in conflict are victims but they also become more than just victims. The process in which they become involved, transformed them into something else- an oxymoron-that brings together this ambiguous association of innocence and guilt. While they

cannot, on the one hand, considered fully responsible for their actions, they cannot, on the other hand, be completely deprived of agency.

What clearly emerges is that war affected children employ variety of strategies similar to that advanced by child beggars in Ethiopia, to attract pity, including appearing helpless, victimized, sick, hungry, and not having anyone to turn to (Abebe, 2008). In addition, their shifting strategy is captured in the way different respondents kept on bringing flash backs about their war experiences despite me trying to avoid asking direct questions relating to war experience. An indication of a tactical agency child soldiers used to arouse sympathy from me as the researcher and to the humanitarian agencies to capture their attention in order to get assistance. Evidence suggests that children's experience of agency change depending on who they are with, what they are doing and where they are (Robson et al. 2007 cited in Abebe, 2008: 98).

Honwana (2005) has also noted that young combatants exercise tactical agency, a specific type of agency that is devised to cope with concrete, immediate conditions of their lives in order to maximise the circumstances created by their military and violent environment. Their actions, however, come from a position of weakness. Showing that their agency is not nonexistent but thin, they are able to negotiate their difficult circumstances and their efforts to survive and build better lives (Robson et al, 2007).

Thus, I will argue in relation to Honwana (2005:49) who observes that somehow war affected children manage to create a world of their own within the confines of the environment of political violence and terror in which they had to operate. They created spaces for their conversations about home and their loved ones, even if in secret. They managed to create space for play, laughter, escape plans, false identity, avoid observing certain rules by their tormentors. While interviewing, one of my respondent told me of how he was slapped and he still feels pain on his ear drum because the LRA commanders sent them to collect firewood but they refused and continued playing football.

As I conclude my discussion on victimcy and agency, children are not merely empty vessels into which the capacity for violence has been poured but they are active agents who are fully culpable

and accountable for their actions. It is therefore essential to consider studies of the 1999 Kosovo crisis by Swaine & Fenny (2004) where they confirm that after this war, children proved to be not merely victims of war, but rather competent individuals capable of developing their own analysis of the situation and their own responses and survival strategies. To analyse further children's survival strategies I use the concept of 'resilience' which forms my next discussion.

Resilience

Resilience refers to the ability of materials to 'bounce back' from stress and resume their original shape or condition (Boyden & Mann, 2005:6). According to Beirens (2008:241) resilience is the ability to resist the destructive effects of difficult circumstances and maintain physical, biological and psychological integrity. In other words, it relates to the ability to construct a new positive life and self-identity, to create a meaningful tale out of distressing events.

 It is a concept that was first used in medicine to characterize the recovery of patients from physical trauma such as surgery or accidents. This theory was later allowed in psychology to study children of mentally ill mothers (Boyden & Mann, 2005:6).

 The theories of resilience in this study will help me explain and understand the way child soldiers recover, remain strong, and cope with extreme adversity in spaces which they occupy. In other words I will use it to portray how children in war show their resistance and at the same time use war situation to construct their lives. I will be drawing from scholars like Bernard (1995) and Garbarino (1999) who argue that resilience relates to individual attributes such as children's age, temperament, sense of humour, memory, reasoning, perceptual competencies, sense of purpose, belief in a bright future, and spirituality that have all been found to have a significant impact on resilience (Bernard, 1995; Garbarino, 1999 in Boyden & Mann, 2005:6). They argue that these protective factors shape to a large extent the strategies that children use to manage stressful situations and to defend themselves against painful experiences or low self-esteem.

My empirical data reveals that children in armed conflict in northern Uganda have been resilient in that many believe in a bright future, they believe after acquiring education they will become

somebody important and help their society. Spirituality is also one way in the data analysis that children mentioned to have helped them cope with adversity. According to Punamaki (1999 in Boyden & Mann, 2005:7), children who are able to remain hopeful about their future are flexible, adaptable, possess problem-solving skills, and actively try to assume control over their lives are likely to be less vulnerable than those who passively accept adversity they face. Most ex-combatants in Gulu especially child mothers have used their skills by engaging in small income generating activities such as baking and tailoring. Their future looks brighter than other non-abducted children living with in Gulu district. The child mothers have used their knowledge of common suffering as a source of their resilience and strength by taking up positions of comparative social and economic advantage. Getting involved in small scale income generating activity like baking and selling bread, have earned them a better standard of living compared to non-combatants. Therefore, giving them a safety net of achieving some degree of financial self-resilience within the household, where it is often extremely difficult for them to get access to their husband's cash (Edaku 1995: 45; Nyanger 1995: 112; Pottier and Orone 1994:17 in de Berry, 2004:59).

Swine and Feeny (2004) while commenting on adolescent girls affected by the LRA in Eastern Uganda appears to be saying that the structures that contributed to the girls' vulnerability provided the basis of their strength in the post-war period. The adolescent girls used their marginalized position to enrich themselves through involvement in social dubious lucrative beer industry.

Boyden & Mann (2005) observe further that, socially competent children capable of literal thinking and problem solving can enhance their coping by identifying alternatives to their current circumstances and devising creative solutions. Children in conflict develop positive peer relations that provide them with an arena of support outside the family in which they can experiment, develop attitudes, skills and values, and learn to share, help and nurture one another.

The social support children receive from their peers can greatly enhance their resilience and contributes to children's sense of self-esteem (Boyden & Mann, 2005:8). Therefore, in war

situations, children develop their own means of socialization that challenge the belief that without the family children cannot learn the required skills in life.

In my study also, I particularly draw from studies by Beirens (2008); she argues that children in adversity cope with their pain through utilizing and facilitating conversations within alternative community spaces such as, rap groups, sports clubs, and youth clubs. Through these groups, more egalitarian relationships are constructed and the peer group is privileged. Within such spaces, adolescents are more likely to seek support in directly addressing pain and suffering (Beirens, 2008: 247). As adolescents interact with society, they make sense of their lives and experiences and draw upon previously untapped resources in order to find new path ways for their lives. I use these theoretical perspectives in my study because my empirical data confirms that sports and youth clubs in northern Uganda were one of the ways children managed to recover from the effects of LRA rebellion.

Lost generation?

The theory of generation spell out the social change or the intellectual evolution in which particular culturally formed groups act as collective agents and (cultural) bearers of social transformation, based on socialization of cohort member during their formative years of youth (Becker 1997: 9-10; cf. Mannheim 1952 [1928]:292-308 in Alanen 2001: 15-16).

I approach this study from generational point of view using Acholi cultural belief where by becoming an adult is linked with the roles and responsibilities one learns as they grow up in a particular stage. As children grow they are expected to learn what is wrong and right from the adults, the appropriate conduct, responsibilities and duties which they have to be aware of before becoming full members of Acholi culture. Thus, to belong to a particular generation and to be a full member of a culture one needs to have gone through the socialization process.

Therefore using generation analysis as point of departure, I will argue in the context of northern Uganda , that many of the children who participated in the LRA rebellion were abducted many at very tender age, before they had attained adulthood, meaning they did not have the time to be socially prepared to assume the Acholi cultural roles. Thus, children missed the cultural and

social context that provide the frame work for how children learn to think, speak and behave. The presence of decades of war has disrupted the intergenerational bargain over socialization and the 'normal' adult-child relationships by involving both in abnormal activities and practices. Using the theory of generation analysis in my study, will help me dwell much on the inter-relationships, identity, group solidarity that war affected children develops due to the social structure they occupied that in turn constrained their childhood. In sociological terms the child soldiers underwent through acculturation in the hands of the LRA, implying that children acquired the culture of the human groupings in which they found themselves during the years they spent in abduction (see Jenks, 1996).

To put it into context, northern Uganda is composed of a generation of children who have been targeted, insulted, tormented and stigmatized by the society in which they live; they have only known war for the good part of their childhood lives (Cheney, 2005). Using war affected children's vast knowledge of experience in a wider perspective of analysis places their childhood experiences at the heart of political violence and instability. This means the perspective of childhood as a social\generational structure is very helpful analytical concept.

Qvortrup (1994) argues about childhood as a structural category that needs to be studied and analysed, if we want to make sense of and establish children as a generation in the child-adult intergenerational order.

Heirut Tefferi (2008) has pointed out that, the change in structure among displaced communities, in ideal circumstances, such as attachment to community is developed through processes of socialization and initiation that involve the inculcation of established values, adolescents miss out on this process where a sense of belonging is developed (Tefferi,2008:30). Among the Acholi, cultural education used to be passed on to the young generation by sitting around the fire place, and attachment to community was developed through processes of socialization and initiation that involve the inculcation of established values. In many conflict situations, however, the destruction of families, communities and traditional rituals often means that adolescents miss out on engagement with the established processes through which a sense of belonging is developed (Tefferi,2007:302).

The long period of war devastated the system of socialization leaving the community with children without proper guidance and moral discipline. The return of LRA abductees into the community have been met with stiff resistance from the community due to previous actions of extreme brutality. Their re-integration into the community also became difficult due to the social status they had acquired that could not fit well with community life (Tefferi, 2007). Socialization has been considered an important factor for decreasing the level of unawareness and ignorance in the society. Unless children are adequately socialized, the culture of the society in question will be unable to reproduce itself as a structure of mutual comprehension and agreed convention and it will fall into disorder (Lee, 2001:39).

Under the current circumstances, Acholi children fall under the category of 'lost generation' as argued by Kirsten Cheney (2005). Cheney observes that the war situations have created these circumstances that now characterize Acholi children's lives, and completely overturn the intergenerational social structure of the Acholi. "As one parent told me, our children have only known war" (Cheney, 2005:32), implying that, in the context of war children lost their culture and identity (Tefferi, 2007). These are the arguments that I will be drawing from for my analysis considering the fact that among the Acholi children are considered human becoming whom without adult guidance they are not fully human.

Hence, the inter-generational super structure points at the weakened social fabric in the Acholi community where by, the LRA assumed a central role in socializing adolescents in northern Uganda into raising their cause (Tefferi, 2007). As a result, war affected children have created a social hierarchy built upon age and generation, that has reduced the position to which respect for elders was strongly upheld, was replaced by a common belief that the elders as well as the values and powers associated with them were backward. The increase in power by the younger generation usurped the power of the elders, thus this loss in status of elders has in turn, had a significant impact on the adolescents development and disrupted the conventional framework for their transition to adulthood (Tefferi, 2008:26).

Cheney (2005) further points out that, the intergenerational relationships today among the Acholi, is reflected in the way children are having less respect for their elders, they are thus considered a generation both threatened and threatening to the Acholi community and the nation. In my analysis I will look at war affected in two aspects of being a child and a soldier. On the first level of analysis, they are still children, but they are no longer innocent; they perform adult tasks, but they are not yet adults. The possession of the gun and license to kill places them outside of childhood. But at the same time, such attributes do not constitute full-scale incorporation into adulthood, given, among other things, their age and physical immaturity as argued by Honwana (2005:32).

But in Acholi culture, boys are often raised to perceive the passage to manhood as involving the achievement of independence, on one hand and the fulfilment of a duty to defend their kin and community on the other hand (Tefferi,2007:306). And the moment a child starts to perform adult duties such as these and also adolescent girls giving birth at a tender age successfully, she will be regarded as an adult because they consider her body to be physically capable to perform adult work.

In other words, child soldiers find themselves in a liminal position which breaks down established dichotomies between civilian and soldier, victim and perpetrator, initiate and initiated, protected and protector, maker and breaker. They occupy multi-faceted identities, in this way; they occupy a world of their own. Their lives are situated somewhere between a world of 'make-believe' – a child's world of play and games of pretence (of children playing with guns) – and reality (Bakhtin, 1984 in Hart, 2008:32).

Transitional Justice

The theory of transitional justice adopted in post –conflict societies incorporates the political, economic and psychological as well as legal dimensions. It is based on recognition of the particular cultural and conflict context and the effective participation of civil society.

The theory is formed by the need to recognize and build on the capacities for peace already present in a society and to avoid cultural dissonance by imposing inappropriate mechanisms and processes disconnected from the fundamental world view of people involved (Recycler, 2006 in

Lambourne, 2009: 35). Recycler, (2006) further recommends that, for transitional justice and peace building to be transformative, there is need to emphasize the principles of local participation and empowerment.

He also added that, developing sustainable peace requires looking at myopic perspective created by disciplinary boundaries, by developing a trans-disciplinary mind-set that incorporates insights and lessons from many disciplinary perspectives and experiences in order to create new ways of thinking about peace building and transitional justice theory.

Transitional justice is implemented in the context of a process of transition from violence or mass violations of human rights. Transitional justice operates under the aim of offering redress for the crimes committed. It is an approach that has been used for understanding peace building in the communities emerging out of conflict. As an analytical process, transitional justice takes into account the expectations of conflict participants, as well as the links between dealing with the past and building peace for the future. It includes putting into consideration the needs, expectations and experience of conflict participants. As well as the perpetrators, victims, survivors and other members of society directly affected by violence, who are intimately involved in peace building process (Lambourne, 2009).

Transitional justice in societies emerging out of conflict operates under two justice systems namely, restorative justice and retributive justice.
Retributive justice involves punishment of the wrong doer and subjecting them to legal trials in the western legal justice systems such as the International Criminal Court (ICC) in The Hague. But it is sometimes understood to mean justice that restores communities or relationships. For instance some justice systems combine both retributive and restoration justice in an attempt to solve conflict such as the *gacaca* in Rwanda and *nahe biti* in East Timor (Lambourne, 2009:30).

Restorative justice means using peaceful means to solve conflict and get justice. The idea being that the person who committed the crime, the victim, and the community can find a way of resolving the conflict which helps everyone form good relationship again by putting the past behind. Restorative justice works at local level with the aim of rebuilding the social fabric, for

instance, the *gacaca* in Rwanda, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) in South Africa, Justice and Reconciliation Project (J&RP) in northern Uganda are all examples of justice mechanisms established at local level to bring about peace building.

 For instance, in South Africa during post-apartheid period truth and reconciliation commission had a great influence on the democratization process through it is contribution towards creating a more reconciled society (Tutu, 1999).

Lambourne (2009) argues that truth commission was crucial feature in moving South Africa towards a democratic process. He asserts that, South Africa was marred by bloodshed, retribution, and vengeance but truth commission contributed to democratic reform. He attributes the success to the fact that the commission apportioned blame to all sides in the struggle over apartheid. The blame was put on all who violated the law of human rights including the liberation forces on the premise that all sides committed atrocities and gross human rights violations.

Desmond Tutu, a former archbishop of Cape Town and head of Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) writes that, truth and reconciliation in South Africa was the only way they managed to prevent evil from happening again. Despite critics, he contends that it was the only way to a peaceful transition from apartheid to democracy. He further notes that by renouncing vengeance and unburdening an already strained judicial justice in favour of restorative justice, the spiral of violence was broken and the country saved from civil war (Tutu, 1999). Restorative justice provides a podium where we listen to both, the stories of atrocities suffered by the victims and the scenes of repentance and revelation of truth from the mouth of perpetrators (ibid, 310).

Tutu too links theological and religious insights to be part of restorative justice. He writes that theology reminded him that, 'however diabolical the act, it did not turn the perpetrator into a demon'. This concurs with a Christian tradition, similar to Paul's or Bonheoffer's theology, that put its faith in the compassion of a God who does not seek to destroy but works unceasingly for the restoration of creation- a theology in which reconciliation, at high cost and not cheaply takes

Centre stage. To be unforgiving is blasphemous as it contradicts the moral universe and spits in the face of God (Tutu, 1999:310)

Like in South Africa, truth commission in Uganda was speared headed by the religious groups under the Acholi Religious Leaders Peace Initiative (ARLPI) which brought together different religions denominations to advocate for dialogue as a way of bringing about peace in Acholi sub-region. The ARLPI opposed the retributive justice system advocated by the international Criminal Court (ICC) they saw it as crushing any hope for real and lasting peace (Quinn, 2009), that it is one sided because the ICC focused on prosecuting only the LRA commanders leaving out the Ugandan army, yet according to the ARLPI both parties should be liable if peace is to prevail.

Tim Allen (2006:86) has observed that the ARLPI called for forgiveness and asserted that the ICC reflected flaws and compromised the systems of justice known to the Acholi, grounded in what are asserted to be traditional or Christian values. The religious leaders gave support to the Amnesty Act that the government of Uganda passed in November 1999 and was conceived as a tool for ending conflict in northern Uganda and a significant step towards a process of national reconciliation (Hovil & Lomo, 2005).

Since 2005, Justice and Reconciliation Project (J&RP) was established in northern Uganda in partnership between the Gulu NGO forum and the Liu Institute for Global issues at the University of British Columbia in Vancouver, Canada. It became an independent Non – Governmental Organization (NGO) in January 2010 with the support from the Royal Norwegian Embassy, Kampala, Uganda. It was established after they noticed the gap in information on traditional justice in Acholi land. The commission was established with the aim of using local approaches to transitional justice with the aim of bringing justice, healing, and reconciliation (J&RP, 2009).
Traditional justice working hand in hand with the Amnesty Commission adopted an attempt to understand and explain the interests, needs, concerns and views of communities of northern Uganda affected by conflict. It operated with the aim of ensuring accountability and reconciliation aimed at empowering the victims and survivors of conflict in northern Uganda. It

gained popularity because it gives communities space to tell their stories, I will document this later in my empirical data how children told the community the truth as way of achieving reconciliation (J&RP, 2009).

Studies carried out in East Timor and Rwanda reveal that survivors wanted to know what happened to their loved ones and to receive some acknowledgement from perpetrators. Engaging in community reconciliation processes brought perpetrators and victims together. The resultant sharing of knowledge and expressions of acknowledgement were a critical step in the reconciliation and peace building process in the community (Lambourne, 2009: 40). Local justice systems such as the *gacaca* trials in Rwanda provided an opportunity for the accused to acknowledge their crimes and for the survivors to tell their stories (personal\narrative truth).

Furthermore, in re-building societies after war, another form of justice which is socio-economic needs to be put into consideration by societies emerging out conflict. The socio-economic justice system relates to compensation, restitution or reparation for past violations or crimes (historical justice) and distributive socio-economic justice in the future (prospective justice). This justice is important for enabling victims to meet their basic needs and eliminate poverty among victims. According to Lambourne (2009) in his interview with victims in Rwanda, Cambodia and East Timor, all his interviewees described their inability to meet basic needs as a significant impediment to peace and reconciliation. Providing basic needs is one way in which poverty among victims can be eliminated and helps them forget about their past compared to when they are left to leave in poverty.

Among ex-child combatants in Gulu northern Uganda, most of the victims are living in abject poverty and they put their demands forwards regarding compensation. Most of them said they were never compensated, that only the old commanders received economic compensation. Therefore, when such gaps are not addressed among returnees achieving total reconciliation in society such as the one I studied becomes more difficult.

Traditional justice system

This is a Justice mechanism that reflects local belief systems and is culturally appropriate like the *gacaca* courts in Rwanda. This local justice system is vital for community reconciliation and could facilitate rebuilding social fabric particularly in Acholi land, the region most grossly affected by the LRA conflict.

The traditional justice system addresses cultural differences and it is thus the best way of realizing sustainable peace and reconciliation in the region. The Acholi justice is executed according to spiritual and cultural laws that correspond to the level and intensity of a crime committed. It includes voluntary participation in the process, mediation of truth, acknowledgement of wrong doing and reconciliation through symbolic acts and spiritual appeasement which is historical done by different council of elders. The local name for traditional justice which I use in my study is *mato oput (*drinking the bitter herb).

Mato oput has been used in cases of accidental or purposeful killing. It involves truth, accountability, compensation and restoration of relationships as a justice process. It is an independent and transparent process where elders act as neutral arbitrators of disputes (J&RP, 2006).

According to Joanna Quinn, the Acholi in northern Uganda use a complex system of ceremonies in adjudicating everything from petty theft to murder, in the current context, a number of ceremonies have been adopted to welcome ex-combatant child soldiers home, including *mato oput* (drinking the bitter herb) and *nyono tong gweno* a welcome ceremony in which an egg is stepped on over an *opobo* twig (Finnström, 2003 in Quinn, 2010:2).

The aim of *mato oput* is to promote reconciliation between clans of victims and perpetrators so that they can resume past relationship and put the past behind them and forgive one another. *Nyono tong gweno (*stepping on the egg) is designed to welcome home family members who have been away for an extended period of time; in this case, it is performed for those who have

returned from the bush (J&RP, 2006). The aim of participating in this ceremony is to restore relationships within communities.

The Acholi perform another ceremony for persons returning from captivity known as *moyo kum (*cleansing the body), this ceremony differs from clan to clan but in general calls for gathering of elders to bless the returned person, wash away their ill-deeds, chase away evil spirits and appeal to the ancestors for their blessing. In some cases, it involves simple spearing of a goat and dragging it across the compound to rid the clan of *cen (*evil spirits). *Moyo kum* is an Acholi ritual that has some precedent in other post war conflict reconciliation practices, such as in Mozambique, Angola and Sierra Leone (Honwana, 2001in Honwana, 2005). Gibbs (1994) adds that, in Mozambique, following devastation by war, reconciliation and forgiveness was achieved by acknowledging and celebrating the return of former combatants, who put the war behind them by partaking in ceremonies and confessions (Gibbs, 1994 in Boyden and Mann, 2005:8-9).

Therefore, traditional theory guided me to explain how local initiatives aimed at bringing social cohesion in the community were used in northern Uganda and also helped me to show how forgiveness, social trust, reconciliation and democracy are important mechanisms' of restoring broken relationships in post conflict societies (Quinn, 2009). Reconciliation refers to the process of bringing something into agreement, by mutual respect and understanding. It also means that the groups involved recognize and accept the situation or things that have happened (O'Kane, 2008). It normally involves justice and forgiveness and therefore contributing towards peace building, diminishing potential for the present and future conflict.

As I conclude this chapter, I will argue that reconciliation can be achieved by considering the system of justice that operates within particular cultures. For instance; during the 1994 Rwanda genocide *gacaca* was formed to use local courts to reconcile victims and perpetrators of genocide. In northern Uganda, *mato oput* (drinking bitter root) in a ceremony of clan and family members is still being used to reconcile the LRA returnees back into the community. I use this theoretical perspectives described in this chapter to help me understand peace building process and how reconciliation processes and forgiveness was achieved in northern Uganda.

CHAPTER FOUR: METHODOLOGY

In this chapter, I discuss the methodology I used during the process of carrying out this study, where I discuss the process of choosing the research site; discuss the various methods I used in exploring children's participation in peace building. I will go further and shade more light on how I interpreted the data as well as the position I held in the field during the research process. Furthermore, I will also look at my experience of carrying out research in a post-conflict area, and further give critical look at reflections on ethical problems I encountered during my research process in Northern Uganda.

Methodology shows procedures taken in accomplishing a study; it concerns issues such as methods, tasks, techniques and tools.

It can be defined as techniques for gathering evidence or a theory and analysis of how research should precede analysis of the assumptions, principles and procedures in a particular approach to inquiry (Harding, 1987: 2, Schwandt, 2001:161). Methodology involves the researcher describing, explaining and justifying his choice of methods to help the reader understand them.

Methods can be looked at as techniques for gathering evidence or procedures, tools and techniques of research (ibid). Methods involve practical activities in research such as sampling, data collection, data management, data analysis and reporting research findings (Kaplan, 1964).

Research design

Research design can be defined as the plan for collecting and utilizing data so that desired information can be obtained. This study aims at collecting information that is descriptive and explorative about real life experience of children's participation in peace building. Therefore to generate more knowledge about this topic, I adopted a qualitative study design. Qualitative study concerns carrying out interviews not to discover how many, but what kinds of people share a certain characteristic. It is to gain access to the cultural categories and assumptions according to which one culture construes the world (Mc Cracken, 1988:17). My fieldwork in Gulu explored children's participation in peace building. Qualitative study provided the best option to understand and generate more knowledge about the real life experience of children. Normally, in

qualitative research, the samples are selected purposively to serve an investigative purpose rather than to be statistically representative of the population. In this study, my respondents were purposively selected to explore, discover and interpret the lived life experience of a particular category of participants. A total of 15 children who passed through GUSCO participated in this study. Particular focus was put in this group to capture their opinions and ideas after their long experience with conflict and peace building. Therefore, through qualitative study I managed to explore their lives within the local setting.

Mc Cracken (1988) observes that the first principle in selecting respondents in a qualitative study should be to know that "less is more", he recommends that 8 respondents are sufficient and that it is important to work longer and with great care, with few people than more superficially with many of them.

The strength of qualitative research relies on the ability to engage with the people's subjectivity and the researcher needs to be transparent on the subjectivity so that other readers can make judgments about it. Relatedly, in qualitative study the researcher should avoid and minimize bias and inaccuracy in reporting findings. While writing Reports, researchers should report accurately about participants' beliefs, attitudes and values by seeing the world through their eyes.

The emphasis of qualitative research is to record interactions as they occur in their natural setting. The researcher has to be invisible; he needs not to attract attention from the participants and should always be alert on the inconsistency or errors on the participants. A qualitative researcher focuses on the dynamic ways in which people bring issues and problems to life by talking about them or acting around them.

The researchers' work here is to engage with the participants to jointly create an understanding of the subject under discussion, he should interact freely with them, form and carry relationship with them so as to allow the unexpected to happen and to be alert to multiple ways of seeing (Stacy & Miles, 2007).

While asking questions during qualitative study, the conversations with participants should be interactive, the researcher should not ask leading questions. Qualitative study design emphasizes questions to be asked in a non leading, depersonalized manner. The researcher should make sure

that he captures and observes the real attitudes, motivations and beliefs of participants and try to set aside what he already know about the subject under study. The researcher can also generalize the answers during analysis to understand a particular society. The researcher gives a thick description of the participants' real beliefs, attitudes, behaviours and knowledge.

Therefore, all the above arguments were put into consideration to get accurate information about children's participation in peace building. For instance, while designing my interview guide I made sure there were no leading questions to minimize inaccuracy in reporting about children's lives.

Selecting the field site

According to Jenna Burrell (2009), the term field site refers to the spatial characteristics of a field based research project, the stage on which the social process under study take place. Selecting my research site was shaped by accessibility. I could easily access children at the Gulu Support the Children's Organization (GUSCO); this centre provided shared access for the Formerly Abducted Children and Ex-combatants a situation which led me to select it as my research site. Also GUSCO provided me the quick entry point to the children and easy identification. This is because the centre took care of the children and knew where the children were hence locating the children through them provided the best option to take into consideration. Furthermore, GUSCO was a convenient place for me to talk to the children; it was too private with fewer interruptions and it was also cheaper though I moved to schools, I managed to access most children from GUSCO premises.

Access to the field

As part of any research study it is important to start by getting cleared by the relevant authorities. I submitted my proposal to the Norwegian Centre for Child Research (NOSEB) and I was given clearance to continue with the study. In Uganda, research is controlled by the Uganda National Council of Science and Technology (UNS&T) which gives research permission on behalf of government. When I arrived in Uganda from Norway I submitted my proposal to the council and I was given a go ahead with my research as I had met all the requirements needed to carry out

research in Uganda. I contacted the area local council in Gulu Municipal council to get access to this area. I entered GUSCO through Save the Children Uganda (SCiOU) just as Mats Utas (2003:54) recommends that accessing the field in conflict zones normally involve going through humanitarian agencies both local and international. Indeed, in relation to the way he entered to do his research during the Liberian civil war, I borrowed his idea and I entered GUSCO through Save the Children Uganda. I got clearance to stay in GUSCO centre for two months during the course of my study and to carryout interviews from there. For the school head teachers I explained to them the purpose of my study mainly focusing on my research objectives. I also asked for the headmasters' permission before I did the actual fieldwork with the children. I gave them the consent forms which I designed before I went to the field to sign.

Informed consent

For my participants, each of them signed consent form after I explained to them the purpose, and objectives of the study before I commenced with the interviews. My research participants were falling in the age grade were they can decide whether to participate in research themselves or not. Masson (2004) argues that a child aged 16 years and above can enter into research transaction with a researcher without the consent of his or her parents. Thus it became obvious that since my participants were within this age group, they provided the consent to participate in this study themselves.

Sample selection

The children who took part in this study all passed through Gulu Support the Children Organization (GUSCO). They fall under two categories of ex-child soldiers, the first category are the children who are school going and are currently attending secondary education upon their return from captivity. In this category, I carried out individual interviews with six of them all boys. I attribute my reason for this because of accessibility. The boys' schools were easily accessible to me to carry out the study. My failure to involve school going girls was due to the fact that accessing them was difficult since their schools are located in distant areas.

The second group of my participants were children who dropped out of school and are currently living within the community upon their reunification. I carried out individual interviews with three of them and was also included in the focus group discussion. In the category of out of school children I had four six child mothers and three boys. The question guide for both groups were similar although for the school going there were particular questions which came up during interviews especially concerning school environment.

The criteria I used for selection was based on one's experience of war. I selected them using snowball sampling basing on the fact that most of them were not living in the reception centre any more. Therefore, during fieldwork for each one child I talk to, he or she helps me identify the other friends he\she knows. I used a total of 15 respondents; in which I looked at those who were at school and out of school to get both their experiences with the peace process. I tried so much to give equal representation to both genders but I had more boys than the girls because accessing the girls were a little bit challenging. While in the field it became easier for me to have access to the boys than the girls, this because most girls were living in the villages and some got married in other districts which made it hard for me to get access to them. The boys were a little bit easier to get since most of them where living within Gulu district engaging in small employment and while some were attending schools within the same district.

Therefore, I sampled a total of 6 girls and 9 boys. All my respondents were abducted before they attained age 18 which means they were all children according to the United Nations convention on the right of the child (UNCRC, 1989) which Uganda is signatory. But under these circumstances, I found out that some of my respondents had passed this age by the time of this interview; and when I got into the field I was first shocked to find this. I was torn between rejecting them as my respondents because of the age factor but at the same time I needed to get their rich experience from this rebellion since their knowledge was good for my thesis. Thus I decided to consult my supervisor for guidance and indeed she told me the emphasis is on the experiences of these children when they were in captivity therefore their age falls within what my research questions were designed to find out she gave me a go ahead to continue with my study.

In addition to this, I decided to consult the books where international agencies such as the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR, 2000, UNICEF, 2007 in Annan, Brier and Aryemo 2009:645, Utas, 2004) recommend that any child who is abducted before he or she attains age 18 is considered a child soldier. This consultation motivated me and boosted my confidence to carry out my study since it became clear to me that I was indeed on the right track of what I was doing.

Establishing rapport

I managed to achieve this by spending more time interacting with the children for sometime before the actual study began .I sometimes moved with the social worker whenever he goes for his routine visit (outreach program) to see the children, which made me familiar with them in that when I went back for the interviews, I was already not a new person to them. Infact most of the children thought I was a new social worker at the centre because they could always find me there but I told them I was a student. One of the girls who was a child mother of two children bakes cakes and bread from the centre to raise some income, I always talked to her about her business, sometimes I helped her with baking ,this contact made her feel free with me during the interview. It is therefore from such acquaintance with the children that turned out to be my great asset in that they felt safe with me and they opened up easily when I started carrying out my study. I further gained their trust by asking familiar questions at the beginning of the study such as their feelings in the society, and what they do. I did this in relation to Cameron, (2005) who stated that to get children to open up it is normally good to start by asking a child what he\she considers to be less threatening like specific daily events or routines. I always began by talking to the children about their feelings, what they do to capture their attention.

Being in the field

I went to the field already armed with variety of methods to use in collecting data having learnt them; but when I got to the field, I realized that some of the methods I had prepared could not work out. I had to adjust and make some changes to adapt to the prevailing situation by borrowing from Kvale (2009:88) who observes that procedures in the research inquiry calls for the know- how of the researcher, marginalize personal intuition, flexibility, and creativity in

interview research. Here, I had to run back and take a look at what I did while designing my proposal. I had thought I would use drawing, essay writing and photography. I even tried to use essay writing in one of the high schools in Gulu but the children seemed not to be comfortable with and I had to be flexible in that I decided to use interviews which was the favourite method to most of my participants.

Methods used during field work

In choosing my methods, I considered the fact that young people are knowledgeable agents as recommended in social studies of childhood (James et al.1998). Therefore, to capture this knowledge about children's lives as active participants in the peace process, I employed the use of qualitative methods so as to get children's experience, perception and understanding of what they know about the peace building process. Qualitative methods such as observation, interviews, field note taking and focus group discussion enabled me to dig deep into the lives of my respondents. Furthermore, I selected these methods basing on the nature of my research subjects and the setting of the place which I was going to study. As a result of this, I found that these methods offered me the most appropriate solution to collect concrete data from this age group. Basing on their competency, these methods worked better for me with this age group compared to the one I would have used with much younger age group. I discuss each of these methods below.

Field notes

During the course of my study, I took field notes basing on my experiences in the field. Field notes according to Hamersley Martin and Atkinson Paul (2002) can be defined as written records of observation data produced by field work. While, Jackson (1990:6-7) observes that field notes represent the process of ''transformation of observed interaction to written public communication''. I did this normally when carrying out observation and after carrying out the interviews and focus group discussion I sit and write up the interaction I encountered during my engagement with the respondents. Montgomery and Bailey (2007) observes that field notes requires observational sensitivity, putting in place specific contexts in which it occurs like describing and interpreting data based on observational experience, with observation being the source of data that are not sorted or written. The data collected must represent facts of

observational experience such as descriptions of social interactions and the context in which they occurred, furthermore, field notes captures the attachment, the identification, the uncertainty ,the mystique, and perhaps above all, the ambivalence of being in the field (Roper & Shapira, 2000, Jackson, 1990). I followed this during my fieldwork process by collecting facts in the field and describing the settings of the place, also through noting down direct quotations from my respondents. This I did in relation to what Patton (1990) suggest that when writing field notes it should include data about variables such as settings, the direct quotations, the researchers reactions and unfolding of these complex encounters. Also, throughout my study period I made sure I write down where, when and what I did during interviews.

Field notes helped me during my analysis in giving a thick description of what happened in the field, especially providing the facts on the ground such as the behaviours' of my participants during the interviews, their use of words. It is also in the field notes that I always noted down what worked well during the field process, how I did it or what needs to be changed all these helped me in elaborating more on the recorded data during analysis.
 I also noted down the problems and success of my study throughout the study period.

Observation

This is a method of data collection where data is gathered by watching people, places or processes (Ennew et al., 2009). Observation can be structured or unstructured depending on the context of the data. For this study, I focused on unstructured observation where I carried out observation of children in the reception centre, schools and around the community. The length of observation normally took the whole day. The focus of my observation was on observing the surroundings, the body language of children while at the centre, the services available for children in the community about children and also the different activities children were engaged in. Added to that too, was the overheard comments, dress code, houses they lived in and the written words on the walls. These aspects gave me some of the ideas which I later explored further in focus group discussions and interviews for further elaboration. Observation continued during interviewing and focus group discussions where I noted down children's use of language, the tone they use while speaking and the interactions among themselves.

Observation period was also vital for building relationship and trust with my respondents. Most of the children were always available at the centre and this gave me opportunity of interacting with them before I could apply other methods.

Interviews

This is a research method where data is collected by interaction between two people. I carried out individual interview with 10 of my respondents and interviews provided me with valuable information about children's background and experience. In conducting interviews, I employed my personal skills and personal judgments regarding the ways of posing and asking questions to the respondents. For instance, I allowed the questions to be open- ended to give room for diversity of responses. Some of the topics we discussed during interviews covered issues such as, activities done during peace building, children's rights, problems still faced in society, coping strategy and effects of their participation. I made sure I had grasped all aspects about the knowledge of my topic which was under discussion; while doing this, I was fully aware of the quality of knowledge I would produce since it would depend on my interviewing skills and my knowledge of the subject matter. As Kvale puts it that for one to become a successful interviewer one needs to undergo through extensive training to acquire the skills of interviewing (Kvale, 2009:17). I made sure that I used all the skills I had learnt to conduct interviews since I was the main instrument in this study, implying that my personal knowledge, judgment, sensitivity and competence would determine the final outcome of the knowledge that I was going to produce.

I used unstructured interview whereby I had a list of questions that guided me during the interview process and this gave me the freedom to phrase the questions in the ways my respondents tell their stories.

I did this by introducing the topic to my participants and they talked about their experience with participating in peace building. I asked question by borrowing a word of caution from Holstein (1997) who notes that questions should be asked in a proper way to avoid bias in the quality of data. Therefore, I guided the discussion in a constructive manner by avoiding distortions by asking questions in proper manner. To achieve the desired outcome, I had to take caution of what

the respondents said and probe further using the arguments they bring forward to make them elaborate more on the subject of study.

Focus- group discussion

I carried out one focus group discussion with 9 children of both sex. I had five males and four females with their age ranging from 16-19 years with children who were out of school. I decided to use focus group discussion with this group specifically because of the status my participants occupied. They were an illiterate group and as recommended by Robert Chambers in Jo Boyden (2004) where he observes that group discussion helps in capturing information built on collective knowledge and experience. My participants had collective experience of participating in peace building and war background therefore focus group discussions provided the best way to capture more of their experiences. The area of focus during focus group discussion was on activities done during peace building, children's right, their interaction in the community focusing on the challenges they face, the strength of their knowledge use regarding different programs in the society, their solutions to the problems they face today.

According to Frey and Fontana, (1991 cited in peek, 2009: 37), focus group size ''is a total to its success'' and they recommend that, ''the actual size should be between 8-10 participants'. On this note, I wanted to include equal number of both boys and girls but I was limited due to accessing female respondents, most of them settled far away from my study area.

The recruitment of my participants during focus group discussion depended on the nature of my research. My research required a particular category of respondents therefore I used a key informant who had connections with the children since he had known them and taken care of them in GUSCO rehabilitation centre. Using the key informant became vital for my study, because most of my research participants were hidden and his presence made getting them easier for me as argued by Peek (2009). This was more difficult with the returnees who are out of school. But he managed to gather them for me together in community centre. Morgan, (1997 cited in peek, 2009) observes that focus group discussions are typically held conference in rooms or in public facilities such as community centres, libraries or schools. During this study, with the help of the key informant we all sat in a circle in one of the rooms in the community centre, the

place was quite and comfortable for the study because I registered no interruption during the discussions. I began the discussion by welcoming the participants and thanking them for their time, I introduced myself, briefly described the purpose of my study. I briefly explained to them that the interview will last for 1 hour and 30 minutes and that their voice will be recorded for transcription and all their names will be kept confidential.

During this study, I kept eye contact with my respondents and enabled good communication and interaction which made the discussion to run smoothly. I collected a wide range of information from my respondents as we discussed different issues relating to peace building and participation. Studying together in a group gave me the opportunity to speak to several participants at once. I got the opportunity in this study group to also observe group dynamics and interactional processes that otherwise would have been invisible as stated in (Bloor e tal., 2001). I observed that most of my participants were tolerant of each other with each elaborating on events as they occur.

However, some of my respondents were quite during the discussion saying very little despite my effort in trying to involve them. I tried using both verbal and non-verbal signals such as glances and bodily postures like nodding my head but still could not yield much. But it has been argued that silence in a focus group is not a problem, since it's a feature of human interaction (Smithson, 2000).

Human beings react differently on particular situations, at the end of my study; I asked my participants if there is anything they would like to add. Many indeed added by emphasing a particular issue they had already raised before. I ended the discussion by thanking my participants for their time.

Data transcription and analysis

Data in this study was transcribed from tape recorder into words, then I picked out the themes which emerged and analysed them basing on concrete meaning the participants put on their point. I described the thoughts of my participants while highlighting their inner experience by going through question by question. The analysis was done by taking what the respondents said

mainly the section which are important and answered my question according to research. The parts which do not answer I treated it as not important. I looked at historical construct, the cultural understandings and the large structural undertakings at macro level that under pin the Acholi culture in relation to what the children said.

Secondary sources

I obtained secondary data from GUSCO with major interest in how the care system was upon receiving children from captivity. I also looked at sources from the government and donor run projects such as Peace, Recovery and Development Plan for Northern Uganda (PRDP). The PRDP provides information on how development processes are being implemented in northern Uganda, the monitoring and evaluation system and the players spear heading reconstruction programs. Addition information was also got from Uganda National Bureau of Statistics (UBOS, 2002). UBOS was equally important in giving rich data on gender, literacy, and ethnicity and population composition. This information helped in giving concrete description of the local context in the introduction chapter.

Ethical and methodological challenges

Confidentiality

Each respondent was assured of confidentiality of the information given; starting with their names. I constantly reminded them that their correct names will not be used in the report, and all the information they were giving to me will remain with me and no one else would have access to. In this situation, each time a respondent tell me his or her names, I replaced them with pseudonyms to protect their identity. I combined using a tape recorder together with note taking after interviews and I ensured that all the information I collected was well kept with no one having access to. As a final assurance, I told them that after transcription, I would delete the recordings to avoid any other temptation or accident from occurring.

Power relations

This concerns the power difference between adult researcher and the children. In this study, I tried so much to lower my adult status as much as possible to ensure equality with my respondents. In this case, I selected child centred methods and I used simple words which were easier for children to understand. I too spent some time in the community before starting the study to create rapport with the children and trust within the community so that I could interact with them easily.

Problems encountered during field work

During the period of my study I encountered some problems. Firstly, the recruitment of children to participate in this study proved challenging. This problem resulted from the fact that most of them were living far away in the next districts with the parents. Some of the schools going children were also enrolled in distant schools that involved travelling long distances. This became too costly for me and some days I had to grace the hot sunshine and rains. But this did not stop me from collecting the data, I contacted the nearby schools where I could easily access some of them and it paid.

In relation to the above, locating female respondents was a challenge. Most of my target group were living in rural households in other neighbouring districts, accounting for the reason why I had gender imbalance in my study though this did not have a great impact being qualitative study. Furthermore, the child mothers I interviewed returned with younger children from captivity and they could sometimes interrupt our interviews though this occurred in few cases, but I always tell the mother to attend to the child first. But I managed to get access to few children using their personal network especially those who are always coming to the centre helped me identify the other friends and that's how I managed to come up with the sample size.

In addition, the age factor was a major issue I encountered. Some of my respondents had crossed the 18th age mark, but still their knowledge was needed for the nature of my research questions. For this I contacted my supervisor and she gave me a go ahead that it is ok to include them that they fall under the category of children since they were abducted before they attained age 18.

Also the government of Uganda and UNICEF define all children abducted before their 18th birth day as children despite attaining age 18. They argue that child soldiers lost their childhood all they grew up knowing was war. Hence they need rehabilitation to regain the lost childhood. Therefore, including their knowledge as children is relevant for any research aimed at improving their lives.

Accessing the field also caused some delays to start up my research. I had to wait for a week for my study to be cleared by the Uganda National Council of Science and Technology (UNCST). According to them the group of children I was going to study was sensitive to the security of the country thus my research questions had to be scrutinized first. But I wrote a letter to the director of the UNCST and attached my introductory letter from NOSEB indicating that I was a master student and I had followed all the necessary ethical guidelines to protect the children.

Furthermore, during the time of my studies, I tried using essay writing with school going children during one of the sessions but they were not comfortable with it. To solve this, I had to adjust and interview them instead which worked very well with them.

Added to the above, the guide allocated to me at GUSCO rehabilitation centre had other assignments to do. Therefore he had to balance his time and mine; but his assignments worked in my favour instead. This is because his work involved doing a follow up on the children and I would move together with him for these visits. Therefore these visits provided me with the easiest way for the children to be comfortable with me as they kept on seeing me. In their face, I was not a foreigner to them when it came to the days of interviews.

Another ethical issue I faced was that of raising unrealistic expectations. While carrying out focus group discussion this issue came up when one of the participants asked me whether I could set for them something in the community. Prior to my research, one Swedish student went to carryout field study and in the process she established a poultry farm to help child mothers. Therefore, this was an ethical problem I had to address but I told my participants that I cannot promise them but I will address their call with other students like me may be something will come up but I cannot promise you much. Jo Boyden (2004) observes that this is a common problem for researchers in war affected populations; he says that sometimes researchers raise

expectations that cannot be fulfilled. As stated, in conflict zones respondents may use the research process for their own ends, their stakes are high and respondents hope that research will lead to some form of practical assistance. During one of the individual interviews, a child mother asked me that if I was not a student she would have asked me to help her get land so that she can build her own house to expand her tailoring business. This is something I had to contend with throughout my research process because most of the issues children kept raising concerned assistance and raising complaint either from empty promises by government or aid agencies in short, their responses were geared towards needs and assistance. I tackle these problems in the analysis chapter.

Field work experience in a post- conflict area

One thing I noted about researching children in a post-conflict area was during interviews and focus group discussions. Most of the children sometimes move away from answering the questions addressed to them and start narrating their experience from the time they are captured up to when they either escaped or rescued by the army. This pushed interviews for longer hours than planned. I noticed that most children were eager to speak to me about their experiences in captivity than to talk about peace building. I personally attribute this to the open and levelled platform provided by the choice of my methods to listen to them something the government and other adult researchers normally ignore. With regard to war situation, children's stories were so touching at one moment I became emotional. But bearing in mind what Ennew e tal,(2009) recommend that during research it is better to let children say out their painful experience during research as by saying it out it helps them get rid of their emotion. Indeed I allowed ample time for children to tell their experience as I gave a listening ear, I kept nodding my head as I listened to them. This I think comes from the fact that most literature from northern Uganda focuses on children's experience of war. Almost at the beginning of each interview they try as much to bring in their experience for instance my first question according to my guide was for them to tell me what they understand by peace building. They respond accordingly but always they negotiate away to bring in their experience into the discussion.

In addition, researching post-conflict zone also left me with a feeling that the participants look at researchers as people bringing development and help to them. I got constant demands from my

participants. A case in point was a 16 year old senior two boy who asked me to buy for him a cell phone after one of the interviews at his school. I told him that his Idea was not bad but he should first concentrate and complete his education. I told him about my own experience to guide him that I got my first cell phone when I was at the university because I had to concentrate and work hard on my studies. I also asked him what the school rules says regarding owning cell phones. I asked this bearing in mind that Uganda education system and school rules (apart from university and other tertiary institutions) does not allow students to own cell phones in school premises and very few children of his age carry cell phones save for the few from wealthy class in urban areas. At the end he seemed convinced on my explanation. Also a good number of respondents used the opportunity to show their dissatisfaction with the services being offered to them.

Finally, at the beginning of my study, I was a little bit nervous not probing more because I was concentrating on the guiding questions which did not allow comfortable probing. But with time I shifted to conversational interviewing where I was using my participants' language, pausing and seeking clarifications. I noticed that I was gaining a thicker explanation and more data on issues under discussion without using question guide.

CHAPTER FIVE: THE ROLE OF GUSCO AND CHILDREN'S PARTICIPATION

My discussion in this chapter will give the reader the debate on the role Gulu Support the Children's Organisation(GUSCO) play in the life of LRA returnees, here too we see that children value GUSCO so much being the place that transformed their lives. Also, it is in this chapter where there are quite distinct features of the role children played in peace building. Not forgetting children as agents and participants in peace process, they were instrumental in most of the activities that took place.

The analysis of the type of support children received from GUSCO suggests the first critical moments in the life course of child soldiers. As identified below, their narratives arose from critical moments that formed their life experience. Children's contextual explanation and love for GUSCO suggests the disadvantage and misfortune that surrounds their lives.

GUSCO's support to ex-child soldiers

Registration

One of the functions Gulu Support the Children Organisation (GUSCO) carries out is to register children returning from captivity at the rehabilitation centre. They do this in order to ensure that there is proper identification of children, their security, and preventing possible revenge attack from members of community and security forces. The best interest of the child was given due attention as well as child survival, protection and development. The community members of northern Uganda believed that children were responsible for the various atrocities committed during the 20 years of LRA rebellion. When children return, they are seen as tormentors of the community linking them with committing atrocities such as, killing neighbours, family members or participating in looting their properties such as, cattle, goats, and food stuffs. Participating in those activities placed them outside the local cultural meaning of what a child is supposed to do. In Acholi society, early childhood is linked with innocence and protection from adult activities, while adolescents especially the male child is supposed to provide protection to his parents and community not threatening their existence.

This is an important sign of social maturity in Acholi culture where by the males acquire the status of adulthood.

Studies indicate that, the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) often abducted children and ordered them to ambush their own communities to loot food, abduct more children, and terrorise people. If they refuse, they die, if they submit, they kill (Cheney, 2005:24). My empirical material reveals that most children are still being tormented by their relatives and society despite reconciliation. They are not recognised as full members of the society indicating that total healing have not yet been achieved.

The main reasons for registrations of children is for easy identification so as to prevent possible re- arrest by the Uganda People's Defence Forces (UPDF) on any form of suspicions, issuance of certificates of pardon to the children who had been in captivity with the LRA in accordance with the amnesty act. The Amnesty act was passed into Ugandan law in November 1999 and was enacted in January 2000, with the aim of representing the aspirations of the people of northern Uganda to reconcile with those who have been involved in acts of war (Allen, 2006).

Registration of children went through different phases which includes, briefing the children after they are received from the Uganda People's Defence Forces (UPDF). The army received the children after escaping, surrendering, or after being rescued from the LRA in battle fields. The army first interrogates the children and then hands them over to GUSCO where they are first registered, and briefed about what takes place at the Centre. The children are then told of what is expected of them such as respecting the rules at the Centre, that's GUSCO is just a transitional Centre which will only help them move from the current state but afterwards when they regain normalcy; for instance when children no longer show any signs of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), they are supposed to return to their parents because the Centre believes that home is the best place for every child's development and welfare (the Child Trumpet, 2004).

Psycho social support

In order to help children cope with grief, GUSCO provided immediate psycho social support to returning children upon arrival in the centre. This is to help shield them away from talking about and thinking about the difficult times while in custody of the LRA. Many children have

traumatic experiences while being in captivity and working with militias. Most of these experiences are associated with psychological distress such as, flash backs, night mares, inability to concentrate and constant withdrawal. Most children return when they are withdrawn, very aggressive and have overwhelming need for revenge either against their own people or the rebels (the child Trumpet, 2003).

Immediate Psycho social support also had an impact on rescuing children returning from captivity against all forms of trauma they got from either witnessing or participating in killing while in captivity. Many children return from captivity suffering from severe trauma because of the terrible things they have been forced to do. Such experiences call for children arriving at the centre to be given immediate psycho -social support such as counselling.

Upon arrival at the centre, each child is allocated a counsellor who assess whether he or her requires immediate psycho-social assistance. The counsellor fills out Post Traumatic Disorder Form where he notes down different signs he sees on the child. If the child shows signs of serious ill health, that child is recommended to Lacor hospital which is the biggest government run hospital in Gulu. Others are referred further to Mulago national referral hospital in Kampala. A male respondent who spent four years in captivity had this to say about the help the Centre rendered to him.

> Bush changes your life, your brain and everything, when I came here even when someone shouts at you, you get scared, but they talked to me slowly and they gave me life. Tony aged 16 years and currently a student.

Tony's story above indicates critical moments that arose from him and other children's involved in war. He looks at the care and love he received to have transformed his life.

Many children experience difficult conditions while working with militia groups a situation which leaves a lot of traumatic experience on their minds. While in captivity, children are socialized into stealing and killing which forms part of their everyday life. The LRA used the children they abduct to kill their own relatives and loot the food before escaping with them into captivity. Tim Allen writes that, the LRA used abduction as a deliberate strategy like rape to

systematically and selectively terrorize the population. Indoctrinating impressionable young people and making them do terrible things, such as kill their own parents, inverts the moral order and shows the power of the LRA (Allen, 2006:64).

The support Centre provides counselling services and activities to the children such as; sports, dance, and drama which keep the children busy so that their time gets occupied doing something with friends. Engaging in sporting activities helps children cope with traumatic past experience such as experiencing flashbacks. 15 year old Collins commented on counselling and playing football below,

> When I joined GUSCO I was only thinking of guns but when I stayed there my mind changed from thinking of stealing and the guns. We also used to play football with other children of the community to bring us together. We interacted with these children and we made friends with them.

Through the process of reflecting on his life, Collins shows the difficulty children in similar circumstances under go, high lighting the importance of play in fostering childhood unity and friendship. For him, playing football together was one way in which children interacted and created peace in the community.

Medical attention

Also, notable factors include provision of medical attention to the returning Formerly Abducted Children (FAC). Most returnees arrive at the Centre in a weak physical state exhausted with sore and swollen legs after walking long distances. Female captives return with unwanted pregnancies, sexually Transmitted Disease (STDs), while others returned malnourished due to eating raw wild food while still in captivity. On arrival, the centre assesses the health of the received child by filling out Social Worker Assessment Form (SWAF). In this form, the health worker fills out all the symptoms visible on the child. After completing depending on the level or seriousness of the illness, a child is recommended immediately to the reception Centre clinic for immediate medical attention. For children with serious injuries are referred to Lacor hospital for special treatment. Others who are malnourished are put on immediate special diet for quick

recovery. Indicating that, conditions created by displacement makes it hard for adolescents to obtain certain basic needs. Therefore, satisfaction of nutritional needs during adolescence is very important, and the consumption or lack of certain food items is believed to seriously impact both the physical and the psychosocial development of adolescents (Tefferi, 2008:31).

While interviewing, one female respondent who lived in this Centre for three months had this to say.

> GUSCO gave me life, even if I come here they still help me, they changed my life in all ways, they cared for me and still do it even today, they give me advice. Ajok 17

Ajok was abducted at 8 years and spent 4 years in captivity and now a mother of one child she got in captivity**.** The type of experience children undergo while in captivity shaped the way they valued GUSCO being the first place that gave them a different life where they were welcomed and shown love and assured of surviving the next day gave them a sense of belonging after a long time of living in wilderness.

Basic needs

GUSCO provided returning children with basic needs such as physical needs like food, clothing, and shelter. They also provided educational needs (basic and vocational), economic and emotional needs such as acceptance, love and instilling self confidence in children. Many of the returning children arrived at the Centre in tatters with no cloth to wear and no body to provide for them. By providing these needs, the returning children regain normal functioning; they get relieved of difficulties they have undergone for a long time under captivity.

One male respondent who spent 8 years in captivity had this to say.

> I love GUSCO, i was very young and did not know anything, they provided everything I did not want to leave, I wanted to continue staying there but others continued coming, but I still continue visiting them and they give me scholastic materials, basic needs and we enjoyed life as we come. Peter 18 year old ex- child combatant.

Peter was a respondent with a different experience, though he is currently attending technical education studying mechanical engineering. He lost all his relatives and cannot trace any. He still

depends on the Centre for assistance and gets additional support from his sponsor who is a 'Muzungu' (local name for white man\woman) but the sponsor is pulling out after he completes his education this year.

His account gives a clear understanding that most children valued the reception centre highly in changing their lives, and at the same time it shows that children lived a better life at the reception centre than their homes, thus they would prefer to stay in the reception. Like many others, child care at the reception centre was different from the one they received at home. The argument links to the economic aspect of childhood care whereby at the reception centre with the backing and funding from UNICEF, and Save the Children, the best interest of the child is a priority hence they are able to meet the needs of the children. On the extreme side, children's families are still impoverished and recovering from war effects, hence the needs of children are not a first priority since they had little if not no income at all. This illustrates why children continue to look at the reception centre as their safe haven to get assistance. Further indicates the global way of childhood care cannot be applicable to societies recovering from war. We need to go further and deconstruct the economic status of the society which children find themselves before implementing the best interest principle as advanced by both the UNCRC (1989) and the African Charter (1990) on the rights of the child.

Vocational training

Like the case of Peter and his other colleagues, the centre provides vocational training to old returning children normally those above 18 years at the time of return and are not able to continue with their formal education. They are enrolled in vocational training in fields such as, bakery, carpentry, and tailoring which is available within the reception centre. For other courses like engineering children who have got sponsors like Peter can join since it is provided by a private institution and is costly which leaves only a few who can afford to pay for it.

Vocational training was especially encouraged for child mothers who returned with two to three children, and heading for life into the community where there is high level of poverty. Worse of all, some of the child mothers were going to head their families because they came and found their parents dead. To begin to shoulder such a responsibility is no means an easy task to

undertake (the child trumpet, 2004). Hence they required immediate source of livelihood to care for their family. The Centre carried out such training to enable them gets a source of earning a living.

Formal education is provided to the young returnees who show interest to continue after undergoing successful rehabilitations. Meaning, the child no longer shows any sign of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder(PTSD) such as, flash backs, nightmares, and withdrawal. Then, the Centre carries out class orientation where they try to find out the level of the child's coping ability in school. Also, the centre recommends that a particular child is in the right state to join other children in school. The ones who still show signs of PTSD continue to undergo more rehabilitation.

Jackie a female respondent who spent 8 years in captivity and a mother of two children currently runs a tailoring business in Gulu town thanks to the training she got from the centre. She had this to say.

> I got training; skills training in tailoring which has enabled me earn some money and employ some of my friends. At least I can buy for my children clothes; I got skills which means I got something from peace building said Jackie a child mother.

From Jackie's narrative above, tailoring is a resource by which she manages the financial difficulties of catering for her children. Further indicating that, girls are able to cope with consequences of their events in ways that are constructive and which have even brought social and economic advantage. Child mothers taking responsibility of their lives helped remove the prejudice the community had against them. Instead, they helped remove the belief that war affected children are vulnerable and in need of help.

 She also constructs her identity as a resilient child mother recovering from nobody to somebody in the community. The vocational training she got from GUSCO empowered her economically further indicating her ability and skills in small business management. Thus removing the misconception that war affected children are a "lost generation" or "victims" who have nothing

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remaining to offer to the society. Whatever happened she decided to put it in the past and achieved her desired goal against all odds.

Beirens (2008) has observed that education and vocational training in post-conflict societies is pivotal in providing under-eighteens with structured activities that create a sense of stability and routine schedules that help fight boredom and promote personal development. In many of these instances, at adolescence, young people are always active looking for things to do, and being an experimental stage were children try out all events in life, education helps keep young people busy occupying most of their time thus reducing redundancy and idleness.

Family tracing

GUSCO carries out family tracing and reunion of FAC with their families. This is done after children undergoing successful rehabilitation where by children no longer show any signs of traumatic experience such as night mares. The Centre Resettlement Form is filled detailing the basic bio data of the child, details of the family the child is getting settled into and also assessment of the child's readiness to go home and the family's ability to receive him. Children who do not have any surviving relatives are taken to SOS children's village and Watoto church. These two centres provide assistance to children who completely have got no trace of their family members.

The centre also carries out dialogue with families and communities of children upon reintegration. They do this by carrying out community meetings in order to raise awareness on how returning children should be handled at home. The Centre does this through carrying out training of local community members in order to equip them with knowledge about caring for the children.

Dialogue is considered necessary because children who have experienced war and violence may react by becoming very aggressive, or they may withdraw into themselves, it is a normal way to react to extraordinary experiences, but it can be difficult to understand for others, that's why GUSCO engage with the parents. When a returned does manage to find its family, the family and

the local community often lack knowledge about and understanding of what the war has done to the child (the Child Trumpet, 2004).

How children participated in peace building in Northern Uganda

In this section, I discuss the different activities and roles children played during the peace process. I combine the discussion with related literature from other conflict zones.

Community work

The findings indicate that children participated in community work and truth telling. Community work involved returning children participating in various activities such as, cleaning market areas, helping the sick, the disabled (mostly from land mines, maiming by LRA forces) with household activities such as, cooking, collecting firewood and clearing the bushes around the compound. This is a kind of social support that young people are supposed to render to the elderly as part of growing up in Acholi society. Also, as children engage with the elderly, they learn and receive guidance from the elders concerning morals, norms, behaviour they are supposed to show as they settle back into the community. Thus their participation fits well with the social cultural construction of childhood where Rogoff (1990) cited in Boyden & Mann, 2005) argues that all communities establish ways of helping children to build connections between their current knowledge and those skills they are capable of acquiring. But De Vries, 1996, cited in Boyden & Mann argues that conflict threatens family and community coping, destroy social and cultural institutions and distort social norms and values, but due to the long conflict, this social norm was destroyed living the elderly with no support.

For Sam who spent 6 years in captivity and was among the participants helping the elderly said.

> We cleaned the market places to show that peace is there, we also cleaned sub-county health Centre and talked to people about peace, that peace is good and to accept everyone.

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Sam's statement indicate that he was an active agent in his own environment, he participated in activities that empowered the community proving that war affected children have the skills towards developing new ideas of problem solving the community.

Truth telling

A consistent finding across all the respondents was that, children participated in truth telling and community sensitization in northern Uganda. Most community members wanted to know what transpired during conflict and why. Indicating that, only after learning the truths about the war and its effects would they forgive and reconcile with the children. Children told the community truth about what happened while they were in captivity. They explained to the community how they killed, looted, maimed and intimidated the local population by burning their houses. They gave the community information on who is alive and who is killed, an information which most relatives of abducted children did not know. They asked the community not to judge them harshly; they told them that they committed most of the crimes not because they wanted, but because they were forced to do it. For John who returned from being a rebel to become religious person said

> I gave advice to the people in the community, I told them I'm a Christian, I should share with the people the little I have, I told people not to do wrong things to others. John 17 year old spent 4 years in captivity.

For Akello a child mother who was abducted at 11 years and given to one of the rebel commanders as wife had this to say about truth telling.

> We told the community the truth, we told them the truth so that they did not victimize us, instead of quarrelling with them, we told people this is what we did and it was against our will, we accepted that we had wronged them but we were forced to do so.

The narratives provided by Akello and others, suggests that truth telling is at the core of fostering peace and reconciliation. Further showing that, children in war are victims as well as social actors who use their knowledge and experience of war to foster change in the society. Truth telling is seen to be a fundamental and central component of reconciliation in divided societies

(Rama, 2005). It is therefore essential to speak about the truth, to lessen animosity, and foster friendship.

It must be noted that many children who returned into the community upon rehabilitation where victimized by community members calling them names. Crucially, many children returned with body injuries such as, scars on their bodies due to bullet wounds, corporal punishment and disabilities due to land mine. Some of the child mothers who returned with their children in to the communities, were given names such as children of killers, murderers. Indicating that, the life that existed in the community before the war where by people used to sit together especially around fire place to discuss issues related to bringing out moral education was already broken.

The community believed most of the returning children have "cen" or "jwogi" (evil spirits) and therefore cannot do anything productive in the community. They also believed that once someone is possessed by the spirit of the dead he\she can pass it on to the next person, a situation which led returning children to be rejected and discriminated against in the community. They could not play or associate with their other peers in the community since they were denied access by the adults. While in captivity they either killed or were made to kill someone or pass over dead body.

Therefore, this study reveals that the community played a leading role in labelling and traumatizing ex-child soldiers with their past mistakes. Children against all odds brought out memories of the past in their quest to right the wrongs of the past. Indicating that, children in armed conflict often rely on their individual capacities to cope (Boyden &Mann, 2005).

According to reports by Justice and Reconciliation Project (JRC, 2010), truth telling has been widely considered to be crucial component of transitional justice process. According to them, in northern Uganda, victims wanted to understand what exactly took place during the conflict and why. The community insists that only after learning the truth will they be able to forgive and reconcile with the perpetrators.

Therefore, children explained to the community what structured their lives while under rebel custody to help community understand their position. Truth telling about the atrocities alleged

that they committed in the community is therefore one way in which societies emerging out of conflict promote reconciliation and accountability to create harmony in the society. I noticed one informant telling me with happiness written all over his face when community members recognized them when they were helping out. A community member said that,

> These children are good, they are hardworking, said Collins 15 year old male student, and he continued,
> I heard one community member saying we are good, when we went to clean the Centre people in the community where saying we are hardworking people, people liked us, peace came in, we were recognized I felt so happy.

Collins' words sheds light on the recognition of children's effort as actors in peace building motivated and help children gain a sense of belonging in the community they live and the society more broadly. They reconfirm community acceptance and forgiveness for the wrongs committed.

The perception about children also changes as community now look at them as less aggressive or hostile to the community, children are looked at here as people who are eager to be socially integrated. They are not lost generation or victims of war but change agents who use their agency to fight for a better future in a society where they had been castigated.

Collin's insight also indicates that reconciliation and post conflict recovery is possible through discussion in the community about what happened, how children have managed to reconcile the differing parties by acknowledging the Past mistakes of victims and perpetrators. The children spoke to the community about their past traumatic experience in order to create a space whereby they feel free in the society where they previously belonged. Therefore, by encouraging returning children to participate in the community work and tell the truth to local people, a bond and trust that was previously destroyed by war was re-created as part and parcel of Acholi culture. Engaging with the community meant that children gained acceptance in the society, it removed the perception that returned children are abnormal.

Theatre as a tool for peace

As stated in the UNCRC 1989, article 31(2) which states that,

> *States parties shall respect and promote the right of the child to participate fully in cultural and artistic life and shall encourage the provision of appropriate and equal opportunities for cultural, artistic, recreational and leisure activity.*

The data from this study indicate that children in northern Uganda used art and theatre as a vehicle for spreading information about peace as well as entertainment. Notable was that through art, different statements such as political, reconciliation, customs, morals, suffering, security, human rights, and domestic violence were relied to the audience that included government, community and international development partners who were both players in peace building project in the region. According to Honwana & De Boeck (2005), Young people often shape and express political aspirations in surprising ways such as creative and innovative forms of popular culture like theatre, arts, music and dance. As a result, their participation shows their inner strengths as active producers of their own experience through planning and producing plays with messages that shaped not only their lives, but also for the community as a whole. Researchers have observed that increasingly, credit is given to people's creativity and resilient ability to rebuild their lives, even after the cruellest of circumstances (Gibbs 1994, Honwana, 1999 and Malkki, 1995 in de Berry, 2004:48)

As noted above, children's creativity within culture of war portrayed them as actors in creating stories that confirmed to the world their suffering and at the same time, fostered peace in the community. Further indicating that, dance and drama brought out children's identity through performance based on their past experience of war.

In addition to these developments, while children were still under the LRA, some of them were holding ranks and used to execute punishment on other children, others killed brothers or relatives of the surviving children and they had different hatred for one another. Thus, participating together created unity and mutual co-existence among first the children themselves who had divisions and grudge against each other from captivity. While

Secondly, the community victimized and blamed children for most of the atrocities the LRA rebels committed in the society. To which children do agree that they were part of it but was against their will, they were forced into committing the atrocities by the LRA. When children perform to the audience, they help raise public awareness about their problems and show to the audience through art the circumstances under which they committed a particular act. Putting such a performance helps bring out clarity on what actually took place, how it was done, who did it and what circumstance led the person to commit such an act. The community members identified with them.

It is therefore clear that inter-communal co-existence and cultural sharing that takes place through plays and dramas succeed in winning the claim while making their voices to be heard. In doing so, it has helped in creating a large cycle towards a shared Ugandan culture. For Collins who spent 4 years under captivity had this to say about singing,

> We sometimes sing and cry out loud to the rebels and government to end the rebellion so that children can leave happily like other children in other parts of the world.

The above informant portrays how Songs are ways of bringing out creative commentary on war and marketing suffering to the world. Such commentary may include issues such as painful experiences which children sometimes fear to tell through direct talk. Jackie who spent 8 years in captivity had this to say about songs,

> We performed drama, singing about peace, togetherness, sometimes when we are performing drama and singing we cry because of the pain we have had during captivity. We performed cultural dance like Larakaraka dance, Bwola dance.

When children sing and cry they get rid of the devastating painful experience they once went through indicating their resilience in relation to the difficult times they have had to endure. They created sympathy among the audience, who in turn, identified with them and accepted them as they were.

The data from this study also indicate that singing about war has been one way in which children brought out the message about their experience to establish peace. Children composed songs concerning various abuses they suffered while in captivity. It was also a form of entertainment that occupied their time at GUSCO rehabilitation. Centre their existed a time table for practice and performance on daily basis and was away in which children learn the past local custom which children have to learn as they graduate into adulthood.

For instance, Larakaraka and bwola cultural dance was widely mentioned by most of the informants as some of the dances they engaged in. The two songs were previously performed for courtship in the Acholi culture where the males flirt with there would be female partners in ceremonies always organized for the peers. This meant that the returnees were meant to perform these dance so as to fulfil what they had lost while living in captivity. Therefore participating in theses dances meant that children were fulfilling socially acceptable norms of Acholi culture that is in conjunctions of constructing childhood culturally from societal level. Further, contextualizing the importance attached to cultural transition into adulthood.

Songs and drama meant that children showed their resilience and performed their culture which signifies children using their agency to rebuild their world. The image children portrayed to the viewer called for humanitarian assistance that would ensure social order and solve their suffering. Consequently, through drama, children highlighted the harsh conditions that they endure while in captivity which in turn arouse sympathy from their audience and depict them both as victims and active human survivors of war.

Radio talk shows

Furthermore, my study indicates that children remained competent in the face of adversity indicating their intellectual mastery in creating ideas such as using radio talk shows to spread the message across to establish peace. Children used radio talk shows to relay the information to other children who were still under detention by the rebels in the jungles of Garamba forest near the border between Uganda and southern Sudan. Moreover, Garamba is a hard to reach area with no road network; it's covered with bush savannas and long grasslands along river banks. This forest occupies slopes of river Nile and Congo Rivers with a wide range of wild animals and

insecurity. During the peace process, children through a radio program every Thursday called Dwong Paco (come back home) used to communicate with their friend whom are still under detention detailing for them the escape routes available and the general picture of life in the society. As it can be seen from this excerpt by a 17 year old John who spent 5 years in captivity,

> We called on our friends who were in the bush to come out, we told them that peace is there in the community they should come, we are safe here in the community no one is killing us, as opposed to what the rebels used to tell us in captivity that if we escape they will kill us in the community since we killed and looted property said John. He continued that,

> Through radio we also talked to our friends remaining behind on how we managed to escape, also we talked about human rights issues of the children emerging out of captivity. We talked to our parents and guardians to accept us back home because it was against our will that we were abducted. We also called on the rebels to lay down their weapons and return home, we told them that there exists amnesty for them and they will be welcomed the way we have been welcomed back safely without any problem. The amnesty was a means of persuading the rebels that if they surrender or return they will not be punished.

Another respondent continued to comment on the same issue,

> we were going out trying to call voice of those who were out to come home, we go to radio stations and tell them am the real person do come home we are safe. We collect children take them to radio stations and call those children who are still in captivity to come home Said Collins who used to lead his friends to the radio station.

The statement above reflects how Collins and others express and provide answers to the existing problem showing children as self-empowered initiators of knowledge in the peace process. Honwana (2005) writes that normally in context of war, adolescents always seek meanings for their lives despite the fact that they have been through painful experience of violence. The study reveals that children identified radios as an effective means of reaching out to their friends still

under captivity. The information they brought helped the stakeholders reach out to other child combatants who were still under rebel captivity. Therefore, children's information was vital in achieving disarmament in northern Uganda war.

Secondly, the children increased information flow through disseminating information on reconciliation programs that reached the intended beneficiaries who were still held up in Garamba by the LRA. Indicating that, children in conflict develops survival strategies and better understanding of their tormentors than us who observe from outside. Radio educative programs equipped various child combatants with in captivity with enough information on how to escape, the escape routes and the existence of the Amnesty for those who lay down their arms and surrender peacefully. Various child combatants got disarmed through the messages they received, they got the courage having heard the voices from fellow ex-combatants to escape and come back to settle for peace in their community. They created harmony with each other.

Lobbying and campaigns

One of the ways societies emerging out of conflict create peace is by carrying out mass campaigns and lobbying international community for help. My findings indicate that war affected children in northern carried out campaigns dubbed Gulu walk with similar matches organised in different big cities around the world to show the plight of children in northern Uganda. Children together with various NGOs operating in northern Uganda such as, International Refugee Trust (IRT), UNICEF, Save the Children, together with members of the community joined together with the children in the walk. The participants remove shoes to identify with the children who used to trek long distance on barefoot while still under rebel detention. Moving barefoot is symbolic in that it shows identity and solidarity with the children and creates awareness among the population and across the world. A similar campaign was recently carried out in March 2012 across the world by invincible children an American NGO working in Gulu district calling for assistance to help capture Joseph Kony LRA leader who is still a threat to the peace currently existing.

One child, Tony, who participated in community walk, recounts his experience below:

We participated in peace movements such as in Gulu walk where we walked around the district wearing T- shirts and villages carrying placards with different words such as forgive one another, peace is good for the community, stop abducting children they are innocent.

Peter continued on the same subject,

We wrote letters about peace to the government, the rebels and international community calling on them to end the war and stop children's suffering, we asked for other countries to help us, we wrote letters to our sponsors who pay for us fees and up today we still write to them and they still help us with money which we use to buy our needs and pay school fees.

The narrative demonstrates children as competent actors in matters that affect them and active producers of their own experience, their ideas called to attention different actors to act in order to make a difference in their lives. Remarkably, children's reaction also showed their desire to belong rather than to disconnect from the community, indicating that they are competent adolescents who are able to draw on their pasts and focussed more on their future development and social inclusion (Beirens, 2007).

Creating awareness on the value of education

As respondents noted, they increased awareness in the community on the value of education in the community. Previously before the war, many children were not attending school especially the girls due to cultural attachment. Most girls were married off early to get bride wealth for the family with first priority for education given to the boys. But with the onset of peace and governments' implementation of Universal Primary Education (UPE), there is increased enrolment in schools though the quality of UPE graduates is questionable.

Children can now see more and more of their friends attending school especially the girls as opposed to before the war. Most girls used to be denied the right to study. As the excerpt below,

We can see more and more children are now going to school. The girls are also going to school more than before the peace process, like we went to a certain family where girls

were not allowed to go school, we went there and talked to them the parents and they allowed them to start going to school, now I see many girls going to school and the ones we helped are now sitting PLE. (Primary Leaving Examination (PLE) a national examination one sits before joining high school) said Paul 17 year old current in senior four.

There are no more children at home digging as it used to be before we were captured. We used not to go to school; we used to dig at home. All of us now have got a right to study.

I love it now that I have a right to go to school and respecting others, even if I am denied food as long as I go to school continued Collins a senior two student.

Paul's narratives above describe the gendered structure that the girl child occupied before the war whereby; girls' education was not given priority. But due to the gradual transformation that came with the reconstruction programs meant that society has undergone a transition away from the previous held cultural practice that never allowed girls to continue with their education to now liberalised society where girl's education is a right and priority. They highlight the attributes that came with the United Nations Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) under goal number two that calls for the achievement of universal primary education and the UNCRC (1989) advocating for the right of every child to attend school and making education compulsory and free for all under article 28. In contradiction with my respondents, statistics from Gulu district indicate that, the education attendance among war affected children is still low.

The low standard of education in Gulu and the wider northern region is attributed to teacher pupil ratio, pupil class room ratio. Normally one teacher attends to over one hundred pupils in a crowded classroom. There is also lack of qualified teachers and basic scholastic materials, most households cannot meet the extra costs not covered by UPE due to poverty in the region.

According to report published by Uganda Demographic and Health Survey (UDHS, 2006 in GUSCO, 2010), many children in war affected northern Uganda do not attend school despite the government implementing the UPE system in 1996. The national completion rate of primary school stands at 48 percent but only 20% complete primary school in northern Uganda. Also noted is that only 5% of children in northern Uganda who attend primary education are able to enter secondary education.

In another survey carried out by GUSCO (2008) among war affected children in northern Uganda, states that over 60% of youths stopped in primary level and majority were girls. The reasons for this gap is that there is an overwhelming school age—gap scenario where children above the normal age for their class levels find it difficult to resume school after a lapse of time by many years due to war. It even becomes more harder for the girl to continue than the boy in the same age bracket due to social pressures emanating from cultures and social stereotypes at both family and community level.

Children's rights

According to UNHCR programmes of peace education, child rights campaigns are important to raise awareness about child rights among the refugee and wider population. The assumption is that if displaced communities, families and children are aware of children's rights, children will refrain from participating voluntarily in armed combat and communities will explore methods to prevent or obstruct forced or coercive recruitment of underage children (Brett, 2001: 19; Verhey, 2002: 2 in Beirens, 2008:155).

As noted by many of my respondents participation in peace building involved talking and learning about their rights. As one respondent told me below,

> I had never learnt about my rights before the peace process, I never knew children have rights I was deep in the village and my parents were rude, they could never allow me say anything, like I never saw my report from school because my parents never had money, they could tell me do we have forest were we pluck money from? Adyeri 20 years old (child mother) she continued that,

> I have the freedom to say what I want, but my children should not dictate on the rights they are supposed to have; it's upon the parents to decide if they can give them, because some parents may not have the money to provide the child with what he or she wants.

The child mother above is talking about accepting the benefits of learning her rights but she is also concerned with her level of income showing that children's rights agenda should be socially and culturally applied for it to achieve the desired aim. She argues that her child should not demand all the rights the convention demands since her income status may not match those demands.

Despite the growing recognition of important role learning children's rights play in the context of peace building and post war reconstruction, it is still not widely practiced or applied as it should compared to global north. According to Kristen Cheney , the universal notions of childhood proliferated in Uganda by international organizations such as UNICEF do not fit neatly into the local context, she argues that understandings of childhood must therefore be historically, culturally and geographically situated (Cheney, 2005:24). Linking her argument with what the respondent above says has a connection in explaining the applicability of UNCRC in the global south.

Therefore, policy makers should understand children's vulnerability basing on the income level of a person in order for some foreign ways of child care to be applicable. Educating children on their rights is important for them for the case of nation building. The future of northern Uganda depends on the children who need to learn about their rights in preparation for different roles that waits them ahead. Teaching them about their rights also puts in line with international standard of childhood which is spelt out in the UNCRC 1989. Thus, despite the struggle more questions still remain on the applicability of these rights in the wider northern Uganda. In addition to that, more respondents told me of the rights they have now learnt with in the period of peace building as outlined by Collins below.

> We now have a right to be with a voice, because from there (in captivity) you have no voice, there is now right to love my parents love me plus the relatives, we have right to go to school, I love this right so much because I think education will make me someone important in the community and I can help my community he continued,

We also respect others, we have now right to health, good health helps me stay in school in captivity they used to give us some medical assistance but it was not good enough as the one we are getting now stated Collins.

Collins' narrative shows a resilient child, who has actively assumed control over his life; he has remained hopeful of a better future with acquiring education and being an important person in the community.

Counselling

The research findings indicate that some respondents participated in counselling their former colleagues from captivity. Ex-child soldiers underwent peer training in counselling to equip them with skills in dealing with traumatic events in their lives. They reported to have helped their friends who returned and found it difficult to listen to adult counsellors. They were not willing to corporate with other people they were not used to regarding giving out their information. They understand each other because of having the same experience from captivity. Paul below recounts different things he did during the counselling sessions.

We counselled our friends who come back from captivity after us; we talked to them about what they should do in case they get problems, told them about their rights. We had peer training in counselling but the training was not enough and I would prefer to continue learning about counselling, at school …we do not have even counselling lessons…. … and I would prefer to have it in school so that I can continue learning and help counsel my friends. When I talk to people it helps me forget about the past and I can also help my friends whom I came with from captivity….when we counselled the people, I saw their mind relieving of the past, others do not want counselling, I start by telling stories and then I come to the real issue.

Paul's account depicts him as a socially competent child, who uses his creativity and experience of conflict to devise means of counselling his friends through identifying appropriate alternatives of portraying his message to help them understand. According to Boyden and Mann (2005), the

social support children receive from their peers can greatly enhance their resilience. They learn to nurture one another and thus contribute to the child's sense of self esteem.

During fieldwork in July 2011, I observed on the walls where the writings and drawings by children depict what they have been through. The drawing of helicopter gunship firing bullets, people running away, children holding guns and sticks, others show children tired on rope following a long chain moving in the bush. Therefore, training their fellow combatants whom they feel free with giving information played a key role in confidence building of new returnees; telling their own stories helped instil confidence in them and gave information that was good for the disarmament of others who were still at large.

Children's rights club

Consistently, participants expressed happiness with the harmonious relationship they created among themselves. They expressed how they met regularly to discuss issues related to the different problems they face in the community such as, stigma, reproductive health, their roles in the family and society. According to Liesbeth de Block (2008:294), children's work in clubs gives them the opportunity to represent different aspects of their lives in a way that they had not had the opportunity to do before. For some of the ex-combatants the structures they occupied while under captivity never allowed them to have such a voice. Often, on different occasions, are divided according to different genders so that boys are told of what society expects of them and the same to girls. Indicating that, childhood is a cultural and social category unique in every culture.

The separation between boys and girls means there are particular cultural beliefs about childhood and child development that needed to be constructed differently. For instance, among the Acholi culturally early childhood care is majorly a woman's responsibility.

Many girls returned with children whom they were not ready for and some community members did not accept their children, therefore child mother found they helpless and in isolation of society. The discussion in children's rights groups gives them space in which they develop alternative solutions and coping strategies for their problems. According to Boyden & Mann

(2005:8), when children interact, they develop positive peer relations that provide them with an arena of support outside the family in which they can experiment, develop attitudes, skills and values and learn to share, help, and nurture one another.

To support this view, Sam and Odong narrate their experience below.

> We belonged to children's club where we talked about things that affect us, we used to talk about bad dreams we have at night and our friends tell us on what to do, we talked about children's rights, we talked about our problems we face and present them to the GUSCO members.

In one of the individual interview at school, Odong told me how belonging to children's rights club helped him play and make friends, and how it helps friendship based on mutual past experience!

> We played together with other children, cooperating with other children from the society helped us make ourselves together, we became friends. He continued that,
> We also visited other child rights clubs like Unnyama children's club, Soroti children's club and Lakwama children's club where we helped one another, talked about the problems children face in the community and how they solve them.

Their narrative indicates that children got a sense of belonging by meeting other friends with similar problems like them, they felt good about who they were, developed creative solutions to their problems together. Beirens (2008) writes that adolescents find alternative spaces through sports clubs or youth clubs where more egalitarian relationships are constructed and the peer group is privileged. Within such spaces, adolescents are more likely to seek support in directly addressing pain and suffering. Therefore, Involvement in clubs allowed children to relate to and network with other children in similar circumstances. Visiting other children's club outside Gulu provide children opportunity to spread peace building message to other parts of the country and to make friends among other child rights clubs.

Prayers or churches

The data reported that increased participation in church activities made it possible for peace to prevail in society. Church leaders repeatedly reminded the congregation that even Jesus asked God to forgive his killers; therefore the population should also do the same. The children asked for forgiveness and acceptance of God in the local community. They always resorted to prayer as a way of seeking peace and harmony with their past wrong deeds especially when attacked by '*cen*' and also, to restore gradual trust and friendship within community. Below is an account of how prayer was used to foster forgiveness among Christians in society.

> We prayed with the people and told them that forgiveness is good however much someone wrongs you, do not quarrel but forgive that person. We told our stories in church by giving testimonies of what we did, told them stories about our experience during captivity, we explained to the congregation to know what we did in front of the priest and we asked for forgiveness. The priest prayed for us and we stopped getting those bad dreams said Peter.

Peter's statement indicates that religion is important in creating a bond in people who were previously divided. According to Utas (2003) while commenting on the post-war experience in Liberian civil war, many ex- combatants joined local churches in an attempt to ask for forgiveness and re-acceptance from God. During my fieldwork in Gulu, I happened to go for a church service one Sunday morning and what Peter says above was purely relied in church service that day. The arrangement in church is that there were sessions reserved for people to give testimony about problems they have or face and in a turn a reverend prays for them. That morning one young man got up and said he was abducted when he was ten years and returned when he was 20 years, but "cen" (evil spirits) used to disturb him. But when he went to church they prayed to him and he gave his life to Christ and from then "cen" disappeared. According to Tim Allen (2006), some people find Christian rites to be more helpful. For Catholics, he says individual confession and collective celebration of the mass are claimed to have therapeutic effects on those who are disturbed or traumatized (Allen, 2006:164).

In Uganda there is a strong belief in the power of religion to heal people from different problems. People have always run to the church to seek God's intervention when they are faced with difficult circumstances like experiencing nightmares, economic difficulties, divorce, coping with bereavement especially when one lose a loved one.

Religion forms part and parcel of Ugandan communities associated with having strong supernatural powers from a spiritual being that can heal or rescue a person from a particular problem. Prayer day is always on Sundays but there are different activities the church organizes throughout the week. Such activities include putting young people in groups which normally meet in the evening to discuss various topics such as, the challenges they face in society, the success through giving testimony to the group members. After which group members pray for the victim to help soften his heart. Religion was first introduced in Uganda by the white missionaries in 1877.

Before the missionaries came in the only religion of the land was traditional religion where by the community used to believe in sacrifice to the spirits or ancestors in case of a problem or harm. But with the coming in of the white missionaries, traditional religion was condemned as barbaric and full of evil deeds by the white missionaries forcing the community to abandon it and convert to Christianity. Currently, the major form of religion in Gulu district is catholic religion spread in the area by the Verona fathers. Other forms of religion include, protestants, Pentecostals, Muslims and traditional religion which is still practiced but at a minimal rate. The religious leaders command a lot of respect in society in that when they say something members always adhere to. This has similarity with reports from other post conflict societies such as Mozambique where the church and local healers played a major part in the reconstruction, focusing and reaffirming the process of reconciliation (Boyden & Mann, 2005).

Hence, in northern Uganda religion was one of the ways in which children coped with adversity. Tefferi (2008) has observed that in Kenya, young Sudanese refugees converted to Christianity so that they could benefit from gaining an avenue to community belonging through the church groups. Children participating in church took the message of reconciliation to the community through delivering peace building message in church.

Tree planting campaigns

According to Boyden & Mann, (2005), reconstruction in post-conflict societies can be achieved through the management of everyday activities such as building houses and planting fields in which children including former combatants play an integral role. The findings from my study point out that, child soldiers participated in planting trees around the community. Each participant took the responsibility to care for the tree he or she planted. This suggests that, the tress children planted were symbolic in cementing peace in the society as the tree grows peace among the returned children and the community at large kept growing too. It further symbolise the commitment among ex-child soldiers for taking care of one another, and nurturance.

Simon below narrates his experience,

> We participated in tree planting with other peers in the community, we interacted with one another, played together and we felt very happy, he continued further to say that,
> I created friends with people; people kept saying this boy is so good some of them can help us in the community. Said Simon

Simon narrates the resourcefulness of children as actors in conserving the environment in which they live. Taking part in tree planting activities indicates ex-child soldier's resilience as people who acknowledged their past and are ready to move on with life.

Making drawings

A few of my respondents reported that they participated in drawing their real life experiences and explained their stories to show how they understand their life. Most organizations such as GUSCO, world vision who are involved in rehabilitation of children returning from captivity encouraged children to draw their experience as they understand so that appropriate action could be taken according to the way a child understand his or her own problem. According to Beirens (2008) children in war can make sense of their lives and experiences when they draw and document their lives. Below, is Paul's statement on this subject,

We made drawings of our experience while in captivity and told stories about them to the community members and wrote about peace to portray the message in the community. Said Paul 16 year old student

Children did different things about peace which they still go and find in the community. Their effort still reminds the community of the importance of forgiveness and reconciliation. For Simon's case, he still sees his drawings standing in the community today. He had this to say,

There is a photo I drew when I was here and it's still there with words like keeping peace among us is better than fighting, come home and we be together, do things which cannot hurt your friends, forgive one another said Simon

The above statement portrays the resourcefulness children brought to the community, Simon's skills in drawing and writing puts him as a socially competent child using creative ideas from his life experience to tell the story to more generations to come and it shows him as a child who has overcome adversity. Also, his writing raises awareness on reconciliation in a society, highlights messages about forgiveness and togetherness in the community.

Mato oput

Empirical evidence shows that children participated in traditional ceremony of reconciliation and reparations. The cultural *mato oput* ceremony calls for reparation for those who have been offended and also receive back those who wronged the community. According to Allen (2006:166), *mato oput* is one of the Acholi customs especially *nyono tong gweno* (stepping on eggs) it's a ritual that signifies acceptance back into the community after a period of absence, particularly when the person has done something moral or immoral, such as having a child while living away from ancestral home. It has been adapted in this new context as a ceremony to forgive many ex-child soldiers who were victims of the LRA abduction. The Acholi also perform another ceremony for persons returning from captivity known as *moyo kum (*cleansing the body), this ceremony differs from clan to clan but in general calls for gathering of elders to bless the returned person, wash away their ill-deeds, chase away evil spirits and appeal to the ancestors for their blessing. In some cases, it involves simple spearing of a goat and dragging it a

cross compound to rid the clan of *cen (*evil spirits). *Moyo kum* is an Acholi ritual that has some precedent in other post- war conflict reconciliation practices, such as in Mozambique, Angola and Sierra Leone (Honwana, 2001 in Honwana, 2005). These cultural ceremonies were adapted in Mozambique, following devastation by war. The community achieved reconciliation and forgiveness through acknowledging and celebrating the return of former combatants, who put the war behind them by partaking in ceremonies and confessions (Gibbs, 1994 in Boyden and Mann, 2005:13).

Ex -child soldiers participated in this ritual before entering their ancestral homes by drinking the bitter concoction of the bitter oput leaf which symbolise the bitter truth that underlies the atrocities committed in the community by the LRA perpetrators as well as victims.

In the next chapter, I present the findings on the challenges ex-child soldiers face despite being participants in peace building.

CHAPTER SIX: CHALLENGES OF PEACE BUILDING PARTICIPATION

In this chapter I discuss the various challenges still facing my informants despite participating in the peace building process era. I highlight how children used their agency in coping with the challenges in the post-war. I therefore reveal the challenges facing children in the re-integration process such as many children are still scorned by the population for the atrocities committed resulting to their isolation in the community. Corruption in the resettlement programs and turning children into research objects.

Inadequate training

The findings indicate that the type of training offered to child mothers in terms of baking, tailoring is inadequate and they call for support to enable them go for further training. While at GUSCO, they only got basic training in bakery, tailoring, and carpentry. For Jane, who bakes bread and sells her products in Gulu town had this to say,

> I am facing challenges in my business, I did not get enough training therefore I would like to further my education to improve my business, I also need further guidance and financing so that I can be able to serve large market, and currently I have very few customers who take my bread.

Jane (not real names) one of child mothers I interviewed mixing wheat floor in preparation to bake bread for the evening market at GUSCO rehabilitation centre in Gulu district. She needs more training and financial support to expand her business (Photo taken during fieldwork by Moses Oketch Aguto)

In ability to locate family members

Sadly, the data indicates that, many ex- child soldiers cannot locate their family members the reason being that to some all their family members were either killed or were born in captivity. Hence it becomes difficult for the child born and raised in captivity to trace his father or mother's lineage when they return to the community. One of my respondents though not born in captivity falls under this category of children. Peter relies on the support and help from good Samaritans' from western countries that are providing assistance to him in terms of awarding scholarships. He told me that he was abducted at 7 years and when he returned, he could not locate any member of his lineage as he recounts below.

The problem I face is at home, I lost all my parents and I cannot find any of my relatives I have no permanent place to settle. I am currently renting a house which I pay using the money I got from my sponsor who is a muzungu, I met him while I was still in GUSCO. He helps me a lot; he comes and visits me, pays fees, buys requirements at school. The problem I have is only the settlement; if someone could buy for me at least a plot of land where I can build my house it would help me instead of paying monthly rent. Sometimes, I have to do side work to buy food and pay rent for myself.

For Peter, parental loss decreases his chance of recovering from war experience and resettlement into the community. Similarly, drawing from this finding and Reports from other conflict zones such as Mozambique and Angola, family members and significant others play a major role in helping children interpret processes and adjust to, or overcome difficult life experiences (Dawes, 1992 in Boyden & Mann, 2005:7). For children like Peter, attaining successful rehabilitation will be difficult since the emotional wound caused by loss of parents will gradually affect him and his inability to own land will be a difficult venture that's bound to haunt him throughout his adult life. His situation is weakened further by the fact that in Acholi culture an adult male child acquires land through inheritance from his parents. For him and others, having a lost lineage means they are will have to work hard to acquire their own land for settlement.

Revenge attacks

A further analytical point is that most formerly abducted children are still subjected to revenge attacks by the community and are socially excluded from interacting with other community members. Even among school going children they face stigma from their friends in class or during time of play. They either mock them because of their disability or because they are being sponsored by an NGO which pays fees for them. Paul who have suffered stigma among his friends at school had this to say,

Some students tell me I am from captivity, but I tell them it is God's work, if it was my decision I would not prefer to be there, I forgive them because I was taught by GUSCO about forgiveness that we should forgive one another no matter the difference.

The statement shows Paul's sense of self esteem; he accepts his position as victim but uses the same space to share with fellow students a message about forgiveness. A further analytical point shows that there is still absence and breakdown in the moral path in the community, there is discrimination, lack of tolerance among community members and failure to accept one another despite the differences. For Rose a child mother of two narrates her experience with the society below,

Things are not good for me at the moment, I feel the need for education to my child, and I need compensation and accommodation. I need a community where people love each other; I currently live in a place where people do not welcome me with my children that we are from the bush. People do not welcome me, the women do not want to associate with me that we are possessed by the spirits of the people we killed, and their husbands do not want to see them near us where we are renting. She continued to tell me how she feels about such sentiments,

I feel out of place and I sometime think it is better off remaining in the bush other than come out in the community where people keep on reminding you of bad experience you had which you never choose yourself. I think it is God who determine people's future and since this was ours may be theirs will also come some day. Sometimes I sit alone and cry when I see these things but I talked it over with my friends here (points at her friends in the focus group discussion) and we tend to do our things together......

Rose's statements end by indicating that children nurture and help each other to cope with adversity. Rose and her colleagues used their skills to nurture each other outside the family support network. The social support they receive from each other shows their skill and resilience towards developing a mechanism for problem solving in a community where they are labelled names and rejected. Similar findings from northern Uganda indicate that some young soldiers who returned from captivity were rejected by their families or co-villagers due to their previous actions. The community accuse them of committing extreme brutality- that puts them far outside the bounds of acceptability-integration back into the community (Tefferi, 2005:35, Allen, 2006).

Therefore, as a strategy, ex- child combatants migrate to towns where they run away from community stigma. Most of the out of school respondents lived together around Gulu Town suburbs where they are closed to one another as opposed to village where there is scattered settlement and it is easier for the community to stigmatize one person than a group. Being in a group creates a shield around them that their tormentors may fear to utter any negative sentiments that might call for revenge attacks. Similarly, during the Liberian civil war of (1990-1997), many of the ex- combatants had a war- friend network that dominated their social ties and many of them lived together with friend they fight with especially in semi-urban setting (Utas, 2003).

Non participation

Interestingly, the data further indicates that some children feel they did not participate in peace building. This is because according to them, to participate would mean involving them to go to the peace talks with the adults to meet the rebels in a round table talk. During the peak of the war in 2004, different peace talks where organized in northern Uganda between the government and the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA). The delegation to the peace talks normally included among others, traditional leaders, politicians, NGO representatives, religious leaders but children were never represented at top level peace talks.

Children told me that they fancied taking part at the top level peace talks as it would have provided them with the opportunity to meet their offenders directly. The children believed that including them at the top level peace talks, would have helped them air out their message directly to the rebels and government. The children having been participants in LRA war had valid knowledge and knew their problems better than the adults hence; including them in peace talk's negotiation team would have provided a better solution to settle their mind.

Here are selections of extracts from interviews with Opio who feels he never participated in peace building. He also re-counts his experience about school, community, and friends.

Rr. Did you participate in peace building?

Opio. No, I only heard people talk about it, that they organized drama and some cultural dance.

Rr. Do you think it could have helped you if you had participated?

Opio. Yes. It could help me talk about what I experienced in the bush and community.

Rr. What would you tell them?

Opio. I would advise my fellow community members to take people from the bush as normal, not to tell them that you have come from the bush.

Rr. Do you face such problems?

Opio. Yes. At home I face it; they say such and they are jealous, that he is there because he is back from the bush. At school they also tell me that because am sponsored by NGOs, they are always jealous about that.

Rr. How do you feel about that?

Opio. I feel very painful; they make me recall what I suffered sometimes back.

Rr. What do you normally do in case they tell you such things?

Opio. I talk to my friends the ones I came with from captivity and the teacher.

Rr, why do you prefer to talk to your friends from captivity than those who are not?

Opio. I prefer the ones I came with because they also experienced that situation and since both of us have been advised from the same GUSCO Centre….

Drawing from Opio's statement above, there are different issues he raised. Firstly, his statement indicates that children develop mutual trust among each other that they use to comfort one another in case they are stigmatized. From having the same experience and having lived together for a long time, they become resilient against community stigma. There common understanding of each other has created a strong bond among them and each one feels free with the other.

Another strategy that can be linked to child network is that most ex- child combatants live near each other in Gulu town suburbs. Staying together reflects the role positive peer relations plays in aiding children's mutual understanding and trust among each. It further highlights children's skills and attitudes in seeking alternative solution to their own problems by settling within a particular location. Notable also, is that most ex- child combatants work where the other works indicating that when one gets a job he\she trusts to call the friend whom they were within abduction.

Secondly, the NGOs increase children's stigma in society and also at school. Donating books, clothes, shoes to ex- child combatants creates conflict whereby other people see them as having a better life than none abducted children in the community yet the war affects everyone. Hence, offering assistance to only ex-child combatants is not realistic, it increases their stigma in society, and any assistance rendered should therefore be inclusive whether a participant or non-participant war affects everyone in a war zone in a certain way.

Network of friends

Thirdly, Opio's narrative also suggests existence of a network of close friendship they have developed among each other demonstrated by way they comfort one another, others find it easy to fellow combatant, working near each other, and living together, however, I consider their network to be good but at the same time bad to the peace process as I argue below.

Firstly, it can be dangerous to the future peace in this region going by what transpired during the focus group discussion with out of school children. Their tone and facial expression gives an impression that they are getting frustrated especially regarding empty promise by the government on resettlement package. The government needs to honour the pledge and economic programs they outlined in the PRDP and in the Northern Uganda Reconstruction Program (NURP). They cite an example of government's promise to improve agriculture through provision of ox-plough and oxen to support food production and revival of education being at the centre stage of their unhappiness. Government and development partner's needs to implement those programmes to curb out vulnerability of ex-combatants, or else their continued marginality may drive them into violence that may jeopardize the peace process. Ex- child soldiers can use their network and position as marginalised social group to cause discontinuity and instability to the peace process if the stakeholders do not properly address their vulnerability. Scholars such Mats Utas (in Boyden and De Berry, 2004:214) has argued that marginalising the youth can make them see combat as the only opportunity to move from the margin into the centre of politics and economy.

Therefore, continued economic marginalization not reintegration and poor service delivery that characterised northern Uganda before the war continue to exist and continues to worsen than even before the war. Thus, such situations create a fertile ground that may inspire this

disadvantaged social group to re-enter combat activities coupled with the fact that they are already trained in combat activities.

School network

The problem of friendship does not only end with out of school children in the community, but moves further to the schools where ex-combatants attend. Children at school too brought out this subject. They said that, they always find comfort from their fellow ex-combatants at school especially when their friends torment them with words linking them to the rebellion. Their fellow ex-combatants accept and provide comfort to them as pointed in the above extract.

Secondly, what I consider the good side of this network would be for the government and other development partners such as the NGOs, to engage with this network of friends or social category especially in assisting the child mothers and boys, who have dropped out of school. Using this group to empower ex-combatants would offer a long term prevention of them engaging in conflict in future. Their social category already has a common understanding and trust among each other. They can collectively identify a particular project they want to engage in, and additional support to this project could be channelled to them instead of relying on the long bureaucracy of government which is corrupt and riddled with mismanagement of resources.

For instance, since July 2008, the government of Uganda implemented the PRDP with estimated cost to be near 540 million United states dollars and with broad agenda of providing safe water, revival of education, improving agriculture with oxen and plough to support food production and income, fight HIV\ Aids, provide emergency relief and improve roads (PRDP, 2007), such a government initiative would help this network improve their economic position. But the government technocrats together with the district leaders and local authorities have failed to properly implementation the reconstruction drive to the intended beneficiaries. There have been accusation of massive corruption and mismanagement of PRDP funds reported involving top politicians from Gulu who are supposed to oversee and monitor these development programmes.

Research objects

The findings further indicate that respondents who are mainly out of school children expressed serious concerns about the researchers coming into the community as one way in which the community continue to stigmatize against them. Different researchers from government, NGOs, academicians normally come into the communities identifying children for interviews. This identification complicates children's position in the society as a social category with something "special" that always attracts attention. The community looks at ex-combatants as people with problems since every time people do come looking for them. And they said that what complicates their position more is the fact that despite all these visitors coming to talk to them nothing seems to be changing. Maureen 17 abducted at 8 years expressed her dissatisfaction with the researchers and government below.

> We are still the same way as we came, the government researchers always come here asking us questions that they are going to improve our lives but we have not seen anything…

As discussed above, it is a proof that turning ex-child combatants into research objects is what researchers going to northern Uganda do to the children. The community continues to view and portray formerly abducted children as people with a problem which needs to be addressed. When children are portrayed in such a manner, their rehabilitation and resettlement into community life is made more difficult.

Marginalization

Additional number of my respondents reported their unhappiness with the way the government have handled rehabilitation and compensation programs. They said that despite the government consulting them, they do not see where their views are being implemented in the society. Instead they continue to ask them same questions by different government researchers.

Here a child mother recounts her unhappiness and continued marginalization by the government during focus group discussion,

We are only happy that we have gone back to our homes, there is nothing else done especially by the government. We do not see anything being applied or implemented despite us giving them our information. We used to give our views to district leaders, the NGOs but we cannot see anything in this area depicting what we suggested, most of us want our children to go to school, we desire to see our children in school, they even identified our children for help but somebody else snatches the opportunity. This brings sadness to us instead of people bringing solace to us, someone else takes their opportunity and it brings us sadness continued Maureen.

Since the commencement of the rehabilitation programs in northern Uganda, there have been wide spread complaint of corruption and mismanagement of the Peace and Recovery and Development Program (PRDP). There has been accusation of supplying sub-standard farm equipment by the ministry of disaster preparedness, and embezzlement of millions of Uganda shillings. The situation is only getting worse with the government doing nothing notable to change the situation. The implicated corrupt officials are left to go free without any form of prosecution to recover the stolen funds.

No School counsellors

The data indicate that apart from inadequate counselling provided by the responsible authorities such as governments, NGOs and local leaders, most students reported lack of trained counsellors in their schools. They say that when they get problems some schools even lack counsellors who can help with the immediate problems they face at that moment. Most teachers lack the skills and do not know the behaviours, or attitudes of ex- child combatants in class rooms a situation which leads them to resort to their friends for counselling in case they are traumatized. Such a situation leads to high dropout rate of child soldiers and victimization making coping difficult to achieve. Paul who attends a school where there is no single school counsellor had this to say,

This school does not have any counsellors and I would love to have them here, since I joined this school only one teacher counselled us may be they think we are mature, they do not want to help us.

Girls and boys in situations of armed conflict undergo through different experiences that needs separate counselling sessions, but in Gulu schools this factor is not put into consideration, both

boys and girls received the same counselling from the same teacher yet they have differences on their level of experiences. Girls suffer double trauma while in captivity both as child mothers and at the same time as combatants engaging in combat duties. According to a report by IRIN (2004), girls who are involved in armed conflict face the additional burden of unwanted pregnancies and sexually transmitted infections including HIV\AIDS. The girl child soldier combine combat duties such as carrying out patrols while at the same time search for food to feed their husband and children. Thus, their health needs to be assessed separately from the boys by putting emphasis on the health complications associated with it. Their health assessment needs to take into consideration issues such as, baring children at a tender age, STDs; face a lot of social stigma from the community that condemn girls who have kids outside traditional marriage.

The effect of these problems haunts the child mothers too much making total healing difficult to achieve and threatens their rehabilitation. Such experiences puts child mothers in a paradox were they have to make a decision of whether to remain in the community or think of reuniting with their ''husbands'' in the bush. Returning to the bush may provide the easiest solution against social stigma one is most likely to suffer in the community. Therefore it is essential for the government and other development partners to always direct their focus towards diversity of experience among child soldiers. Assessing the difference would help make meaning that can be helpful before administering counselling as a collective entity. It would as a result, help the child mothers who remain invisible in armed conflict when actually they are participants and hence re-integration process treats them differently.

Health problems

Many of my respondents also reported a number of problems associated with their health. Their health problems come from different social and economic problems children suffered while in captivity. These problems vary from chest pain which still hurts as raised by most child mothers, need for stomach operation, hearing problem. For Collins told me how he was slapped because he continued playing instead of collecting firewood. He said,

I do have hearing problem, I cannot hear very well, when I was there they slapped me serious slap and I collapsed because I refused to collect firewood so I do not hear well.

For Collins statement above shows how social order is maintained even in captivity and further shows his agency that even in captivity children still try to negotiate their ways to find time to play. Yet as discussed above, in Acholi culture if Collins mother had sent him for firewood and fails to go he would have been punished all the same. Therefore, physical punishment is a way of maintaining moral order and disciplines both by the rebels and in an African family setting though for Collins it has gone further to affect his health. Many health problems reported by ex-combatants relate to different forms of physical violence they underwent. Many are still suffering from chest pains due to heavy loads of looted foodstuffs they used to carry in captivity.

Envy of friends

The data indicates that, out of school children are not happy in the community because they feel envious and admire their colleagues who were never abducted and continued with their education. They feel uncomfortable in the community seeing their friends living a better life compared to theirs; they would all be at the same level if they had not lost a lot of time in captivity a situation which left their friends to move further with their education. They said that if it was not for their fate that they were abducted, they would be like their friends studying and working, and would be able to afford better living standards just like any other member of their generation. As I observed the community where some ex-combatants live is not up to the standard, some live in the overcrowded slums of Gulu town where there is poor hygiene as compared to their colleagues. Margret who was abducted at 7 had this to say,

The time I was taken by the LRA , I was studying but when I came back, I found my friends educated and living a better life . It pains me to see them like this yet I would also be like them, we envy them and this makes us unhappy.

For Collins who is school going and is 16 years told me that he instead envies his fellow ex-combatants. The adult combatants received resettlement package inform of iron sheets to construct houses, some domestic animals such as, cattle, goats and some money. Collins feels the government should do the same to them. He had this to say,

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The government should build for us too! They should also give us goat and cattle just as they gave to our old friends.

For Collins' argument above, presents policy makers with difficulty in determining how resettlement and compensation can do equitably so that no party feels envious of the other. Both children who were below 18 years participated in combat activities just as those were above.

Income and jobs

In war situations, most adolescents who return are expected to take up house hold duties upon return into the community. Taking this responsibility requires someone to have a stable income to make ends meet if she is to manage to meet the basic needs. During my fieldwork, inadequate income is one area where all my respondents mentioned as a major challenge they are facing in the community at the moment. Throughout the interviews this aspect was mentioned despite getting training from GUSCO they cannot find any meaningful employment. Their situation is worsened further that some of the ex-child soldiers became heads of families and had to take on responsibility and care for other younger siblings. The vocational training provided by GUSCO plus start up capital of 300,000 Uganda shillings which is an equivalent of 120$ or 600 NOK provided to ex-child soldiers is too little to start up any meaningful income generating activity that can sustain them.

Therefore, there is need to increase the amount of start up capital provided to the children plus more training in small business skills to equip ex-child soldiers with more knowledge. Training the ex-combatants in agricultural production would provide food for them and ready market since the northern part of the country is still in need of food. The development partners would help them better by putting them in groups and providing assistance to help in farming. Engaging in farming would provide quick income generating activity that would help easy re-integration. There is need for food by the World Food Program (WFP) selling their produce to them would better their living standards. As for Suzan, she does not have any form of earning a living; she had this to say,

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I came back home I am an orphan, I am a parent myself, I have no income, I feel sad. We cannot take our children to school; we would want to see our children in school since we missed this opportunity ourselves. Really life in the community is well but this challenge of not making ends meet like taking our children to school, lacking activity like job to do make life hard, and these challenges make us unhappy. Suzan 17 year' old child mother of two children

The photo shows a child mother attending to their poultry farm established by a Swedish student in paicho village Gulu district northern Uganda. Investing in such projects would have a great impact on the lives of ex-child soldiers especially child mothers. (Photo taken during field work by Moses Oketch Aguto)

For starters, putting up income generating activity directly at the local level for child mothers would have a big impact in their lives. Provision of young people and their families with start-up capital will not only empower them but also enable them to become self-reliant in due course. A case in point is demonstrated by the photo above, showing a poultry house established by a

Swedish master student to help a few child mothers generate small income. The poultry farm has had a great impact especially in enabling child mothers to meet their daily basic needs together with their children. She funded the project at local level directly with the affected child mothers, her funds never passed through the hands of corrupt government officials who with hold funds for their own benefit. Thus investing in small income generating activity such as the one above would help other war affected children like Suzan above who is not a beneficiary of this poultry project.

Land issue

The informants noted with great concern the social exclusion from land by community, clan and family members. They state that, they find it difficult to trace their identity in the community because majority of their children were born in captivity and their mothers are not sure of their father's family, others both father and mother died while in captivity hence they belong to the category of double orphans who cannot trace any relative. Allen (2006:170) supports this finding; he observed that many people were reluctant to accept such children born in the bush into their lineages, arguing that accepting them back would grant those claims over clan lands. Previously before the war, the children were rightly entitled to inherit land left by their parents but due to the break down in the clan power, many local people ironically including government officials who are supposed to offer protection resorted to land grabbing from already helpless victims of war. The situation is further worsened with the fact that the clan no longer offer any assistance as they used to do before the war where clan members used to settle land conflicts. Currently, there are no clear demarcations, boundaries and hence people are just taking others land, it is difficult to determine the previous right boundary. Hence, people are fighting over land instead of reconciling. Displacement of families is a structural problem that indirectly affects children and their future development as argued by Qvortrup (2002).

Philanthropists pulling out

Children are also deeply saddened and concerned about the fact that different development partners and donors who had been offering sponsorship to them are pulling out. They gave examples of world vision which have been paying tuition of children in school since their return

but now they are pulling out. Others cited individuals and good Samaritans especially from global north who have been offering support but are now pulling out. A reason for different sponsors pulling out is not clearly given but children say they think they have pushed them enough to continue further by themselves.

Peter whom his sponsor is soon pulling out had this to say,

> By the time I was taken, I left my parents I came back they were not there, no one can support me totally. I try to go to my relatives but they do not give me any support. I have been depending on world vision but they are stopping and I have to look for other ways to continue with my education. This makes my mind not to settle because I am always thinking of what, and where I will get money, and this makes me think that may be if my parents were alive I would not be going through this. I love studying and I would want to go up to university but I may stop on the way because of fees.

Lack of financial support leaves many of the ex-combatants out of school, many drop out because they can no longer support the high cost of education at higher level. Peter is sitting for his ordinary level certificate after which he wants to join Advanced level which takes two years according to Uganda's education system. But due to financial difficulty he cannot join this level, meaning his chances for joining university is limited. In Uganda, having university education improves one's chances of having better employment opportunity in future. Hence, Peter and others like him missing out on higher education leaves them with one option of joining vocational education which is a bit cheaper for those who are able to earn some minimal income.

They called for any assistance through sponsoring their study at any level either A- level or vocational education as far as it would help them become better citizens in future. The surprising thing is that there is Universal education even at a higher level now in Uganda but the children consider it inadequate because it provides less leaving majority of expenses to be met by the parents and children something which most of them cannot manage. Paul 17 years old commented on this issue,

Government introduced universal education which is not free as they say, they give very little and you have to contribute more, but financial problem may make me not go to A-level, since I do not have my parents, I ac t as father, I have brothers and sisters I have to support them. I am always faced with problems to raise money to pay their fees, food and raising scholastic materials, WORLD Vision gives me fees only; I have to get other things like books, soap for myself. I just want to continue studying so that I can be someone important in the community and help them.

Paul above is one exceptional example of a child heading a family, and the challenges that comes with managing a home at his age. He combines studying while at the same time taking care of his siblings back home. Giving any assistance to a family like that of Paul would help promote their education and open up a better future for them.

CHAPTER SEVEN: CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

This thesis contributes knowledge to a growing body of scholarships on children's lives in armed conflict. It has highlighted that children's perspectives are so diverse in that they use dynamic agency in such a way that sometimes they appear as victims in order to negotiate their survival.

The empirical material presented in this study indicates that war affected children present themselves using different strategies when narrating their suffering in captivity. Their experience in war is rather ambiguous and we cannot say they are innocent, at the same time we cannot deny that they are guilty. What is clear is that those ex-child soldiers employ variety of shifting strategies as they negotiate their survival in adversity. They create spaces for their conversations about home and their loved ones even if in secret, they managed to create space for play, laughter, escape plans, false identity and they avoid observing certain rules by their tormentors.

The analysis in this study of children as agents in their own lives is based on their experience as a generational structure especially the inter-generational super structure that changed the social order in Acholi culture. Analyzing their experience as a generation helps in explaining variations in childhood cross- culturally especially the effects of war on the social roles, social expectations and responsibilities that have gradually affected the Acholi cultural setting.

Social cultural approach in this study was vital in giving explanation on the way children's knowledge of captivity helped in connecting society together. Alongside traditional justice mechanism that provided important explanation on cultural differences and the way reconciliation played a key role towards realizing sustainable peace.

Empirically, children have widely used their agency throughout the conflict and entire peace building process. According to my findings, children used their agency in fostering unity, social cohesion, and understanding among populations in northern Uganda. This is depicted in their creative ability to prepare songs, dance, and drama, drawings that they used to sensitize and preach peace in the wider society. Laura Edmondson (2005:466) has observed that children's theatre group in Gulu that included several former captives, helped create awareness in the IDP camps about the harsh conditions that child combatants endured. This demonstrates children's resilience and creativity to produce realistic drama that provoked sympathy and identification

among fellow Acholi. Also, children initiated and participated in self empowered projects such as radio talk shows, children's clubs where they were able to establish inter-group solidarity with other children in the community.

In addition, children were notable in ensuring conflict transformation in the wider northern region, through participating in peace dialogues such as peer to peer education received in clubs and the peer counselling from friends when faced with difficulty especially as demonstrated by school going participants. Through these groups children brought out different issues that still affect their life. They were instrumental in transforming the education system especially educating the population on the issues concerning girl child education and remaining optimistic about their future something that has played a significant impact in their reintegration.

Children's narratives in most cases demonstrate that as participants in war, they are both victims and perpetrators in conflict zones. They have shown that instead of feeling powerless, though in certain circumstances they did, they showed that they had a voice and space to talk about issues that concern their lives. They showed their ability in uniting the communities which were once divided, the community accepted forgiveness and tolerance of each other. They engaged in discussion and activities aimed at promoting peace using precise message from their war experience. Their understanding needs to be based and understood within the context of war situations. Their participation in war is exploitative and affects their future growth and development but they still find alternative ways to survive. However, children always need the guidance from their parents but growing up in conflict means they miss out on the desirous familial love and guidance but they challenge this view by adopting alternative means of socializing themselves outside the guidance of adult parents through peer to peer relations were they nurture each other.

However, peace building project is still challenged by various factors such as massive corruption in northern Uganda whereby officials continue to divert funding meant for rehabilitation program. The threat paused by corruption is threatening the peaceful resettlement of ex-child soldiers, their already disadvantaged position continues to be destroyed further by

depriving them of the assistance aimed at uplifting them from the disadvantaged position they occupy.

A crucial factor that needs further consideration is that ex- child soldiers are still subjected to stigma and outburst from the community and at school. The continuous accusations and judgement of ex-child soldiers shows that total rehabilitation of children have not yet been achieved and more still needs to be done to improve the situation. In addition, the society and the children still suffer from trauma that is made worse by inadequate counselling in the country. The lack of trained councillors to handle cases associated with Post- Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) makes it hard for children to settle among the population.

The impact of rampant land grabbing by both the government and local people threatens reconciliation and rehabilitation. According to reports from northern Uganda in 2010, the police land protection units in northern Uganda recorded over 150.000 cases of land disputes. Over 71,000 had resulted into violent confrontation, 700 people died between 2006 and 2010 while fighting over land[2]. Land is important to the people of northern Uganda since they derive their livelihood from agriculture thus depriving them of the only means of survival adds more traumas to the society which is already deprived. Thus with land conflict still displacing thousands of already displaced Acholi society reconciliation remains a dream come true in this region.

In conclusion, the arguments presented in this thesis and the perspectives of children analysed this far have two key implications for conclusion. The first implication is that children in situations of armed conflict are not to be approached solely as mere victims of war and recipients of support under the banner of what Hart (2006) call the "project of saving the children". Children also take part in war, and negotiate their ways out of it, while contributing immensely in peace-building process and the task of integration into society. The second conclusion is that the efforts to represent and assist children who come of age in war-torn communities like one I studied cannot or should not take place without understanding the wider economic, geo-politics and cultural context that help to enhance or constrain the peace building process.

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[2] The Sunday vision online http://www.sundayvision.co.ug

Area for further research

As I observed the social network of ex-child combatants needs further research, I did not go into detail to find out more how strong and effective this network is in either promoting peace or threatening peace.

Another area that needs further research is the nodding disease which still has no clear explanation. There is need for childhood theories to explain the socially constructed knowledge surrounding the spread of the nodding disease in northern Uganda. The nodding disease affects children from five years to fifteen years and the community has no clear explanation on what causes it. Though there is speculation that it could be caused by the effects of biological war fare, the expired relief food from World Food program, curse from God or a black fly.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1

INFORMATION SHEET AND CONSENT FORM FOR THE CHILDREN

I am called Oketch Moses Aguto a student of Mphil childhood studies in Norway. I am writing a report for my university studies in Mphil childhood studies. This report is going to be about how you young people think about the ongoing peace building process, your participation and what you think needs to be changed to make this place better for you to live in. It is your views that I want not your teachers or parents' views. This report will help adults know what young people feel, want and expect from the peace process. Feel free to ask me if you do not understand any of the questions I will pose.

Your participation is voluntary. You must not be forced by anyone to participate, if you feel you don't want to answer anything it is fine. Nothing will happen to you if you decide that you do not want to participate. I may interview you individually or in a group so that it can be easier for some children to talk. Feel free to also let me know if you are not comfortable with any of the methods. You also need to know that there is no right or wrong answers to the questions I will ask you, I only need to know your views.

I will be using a tape recorder to help me remember what you said. If you feel that you are not comfortable with anything that is being done please let me know. The words on the tape will be typed out by and will only be seen by me and my supervisor. After I have finished with the transcript the tape will be destroyed.

When I am writing my report I may write about some of the things that you have talked about but I will not use your name. That means what you tell me cannot be traced back to you.

If you have any concerns after our group discussions or one to one interviews you can come and talk to me. I will keep everything private but if I think that you might not be safe I might have to tell some other adults who can help me make you safe.

Your parents\guardians have said its okay for me to talk with you today but if you don't want to talk with me then that's fine. You can ask me any questions you like before you take part in the group discussions.

So before we begin our discussion is there anyone among you who does not want to participate? If yes then it is very okay he or she can leave and I remain with only the ones who are willing. Thank you.

QUESTION GUIDE FOR DISCUSSION AND INTERVIEWS

I always begin by finding out biographical information of my respondents such as, name, age, sex, school, parents and village.

Exploring ex-child soldiers experience as participants in peace building

- Tell me something about peace building?
- Can you mention for me some of the things involved in peace building?
- Did you participate in it?
- How did you participate?
- Do you think your opinion/views were put into consideration?
- Give me examples in the community on what and where you think your views were used?
- Are you happy living here now? If so why? if not why? And what do you think should be done to make you happy?

Community knowledge

- Can you tell me what motivated you to come back?
- How did you feel coming back to the community?
- How do you see it from today and before you left? Is there any difference?

Testing knowledge on children's rights

- What do you understand by children's rights?
- Can you mention for me some of the rights you have?
- Do you practice those rights?

Coping questions and challenges

- Where do you always go when you have problems? Or whom do you talk to?

- What do you think is your most important contribution in peace building where you think you knowledge was used?
- Why do you like them?
- Outline for me the things you like most about your community regarding peace building?
- Outline the ones you feel your missing or not good for you
- What do you think should be done to improve them?

Questions about GUSCO

- Tell me something about GUSCO?
- What did they do for children?
- Are you happy with what they are doing for you? How about when you returned to the family?
- What do you think was their most important contribution to you?

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www.gusco.org, E-mail: advocacy@gusco.org

LETTER OF UNDERSTANDING

The following agreement has been made between the organization and the parent/guardian of

---who was abducted on--

from--------------------------------village-----------------------------parish----------------------------sub

county----------------------county------------------------------District till----------------------when he/she

was rescued by UPDF/escaped and reported to UPDF/local leaders at--------------------------sub-county

in------------------District and cleared.

He/she was given immediate support and basic counseling at GUSCO reception centre, from-------------

-------------to----------------------and is being resettled in his/her family community. Aware that the

distressing experience and experiences he/she has undergone can only be effectively overcome through

active forgetting in a normal family life, the shared responsibility between GUSCO and the

parents/guardian shall be:

ROLES OF GUSCO

-Ensure that the child abductees resume school/vocational training through apprenticeship.
-Provide basic counseling support to the families of the war affected children.
-Encourage parent/guardians to form selected interest groups to advocate for the plight of these child abductees.
-Monitor the resettlement process of the child for at least 12 months.

ROLES OF PARENTS/GUARDIANS

-Provide family care to the child.
-Initiate income-generating activities to improve their household income to support their child at school.
-Regularly inform the local council of their locality on how the child is resettling.

The above-shared responsibilities are fully agreed upon by:

GUSCO management: Parent/Guardian:

Name: --   Name: --

Title: --   Occupation: ---------------------------------

Sign: ---   Sign: --

Thumb print:

Date.......................   Signature.....................

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FAMILY TRACING/ASSESSMENT FORM

A. PARTICULARS OF THE CHILD:

Names of child ……………………………………………………………………………..

Age …………………………………………… Sex …………………………….

A. HOME ADDRESS:

District ……………………………………………………………………………………..

County ……………………………………………………………………………………...

Sub-county …………………………………………………………………………………

Parish ………………………………………………………………………………………

A. FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS:

1. Names of the head of the family
…………………………………………………………...
2. names of other adults in the family and relation to child

Names:	Age:	R/ship:	Occupation:
……………	………	………………………	………………
……………	………	……………………….	………………
……………	……….	………………………	………………

3. Are there any other children in the home? Yes/No. If yes, how many?

………………………………………………………………………………………

4. Other children's names and relation to the child and age.

Names:	Age:	R/ship:
…………………………………	………………..	………………………
…………………………………	………………..	………………………
…………………………………	………………..	………………………

5. Do these children go to school? Yes/No.

6. Give a brief health description and other conditions of these children and other members of the family.

....
....
....

B. FAMILY LOCATION:

1. Distance of home from the main road, e.g. passable road, distinct landmarks and other identifiable permanent features.

....
....
....

2. If passable give a sketch map

3. Distance of home from the nearest school the resettled child can go to……………………………….Km

4. Distance from home to the nearest health centre …………………Km

C. FAMILY CIRCUMSTANCES:

1. Description of the home conditions of the child. Good/Fair/Poor
   a. Shelter
      ....
      ....
   b. Hygienic condition
      ....
   c. Accessibility to clean water
      ....
   d. Health of members of the family
      ....
   e. Food security
      ....
   f. Any income generating activity

....
....

2. Do the adults have some paying employment or other incomes?

....

....

3. General conditions/environment e.g. security of the area etc.

....

....

4. The family neighbors, friends and relatives attitudes towards the child resettlement ....

....

5. When was the last contact between the family and the child? Who came to visit the child last? ....

6. What is the child's view pending resettlement?
....
....
....
....

Signed: ....

Name of officer: ....

Date: ....

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SOCIAL WORKER ASSESSMENT FORM

A. Bio-Data

Name of child: ....Ass. Period: .... (Week 1, 2, 3)

Sex of child: ....Assessment Date: ....

Age of child: ....Date of admission to Gusco: ....

B. Abduction, captivity and return details

Date of abduction: ....Date of first contact with UPDF: ....

Place of abduction: ....Date of admission to CPU: ....

Nature of return: ....Child experience of staying at CPU: ....

If released, under what condition ....Reasons for CPU experience: ....

If referred, by who: ....

C. CHILD'S INTERACTION WITH OTHERS AT CENTRE

Child's interaction with other children at Gusco reception centre: YES/NO

Playing/communicating naturally ....

Withdrawn/isolates himself/herself ....

Aggressive due to previous experience/role in captivity ....

Observed trends in child's behavior and PSS state of child

Staff observation

Behaves normally, looks happy/is helpful......Militarized aggressive behavior.........

Mood swings during day...................Mocks others ....

Behaves as though anxious ....Violent towards others ....

Looks depressed, cries frequently.............Steals from others ....

Shows deviant behavior ....

Child emotional state, thoughts and feelings connected to past life in captivity

Difficult to talk about past............ Prefers to express self in drawings ....

Child troubled by nightmare.......... Can openly talk about experience ....

Thinks he/she has evil spirit.......... Able to tell openly what happened ....

Have thoughts of suicide .... Troubled by guilt about his/her actions ....

Other observations ....

Child's interaction with members of staff at reception centre

Free, natural, respectful and friendly................... Aggressive, rude ....

Reserved, but may relate to some staff .... Seeks contacts for advice ....

Suspicious and withdrawn .... Unwilling to tell the truth/tell lies ......

Other observations ....

Child's interaction with visiting family members

Shows joy and affection .... Expresses disappointment ....

Reserved, not sure of welcome .... Appears indifferent whether visited or not...

Avoids meeting family .... Openly rejects family ....

Other observations ....

Child's interaction with other community members around or visiting GUSCO

Interacts normally .... Avoids contact ....

Shy but interacts with encouragement........ Has not had contact ....

Other observations ....

Child's interaction with her baby born in captivity YES/NO

Warm, cares well for the child, plays with the child ....

Feeds, bathes the child but not interested in him/her.....................................

Mother aggressive towards child and neglects it ....

Mother seems not to now how to care for child ....

Other observation ....

D. CHILD'S SELF-ASSESSMENT

Child understands and accepts why and for how long he/she will be at center YES/NO

Child understands and accepts why and for how long he/she will be at centre ………..

Child expresses relief and happiness in being at the centre ………………………..

Child does not fully understand what is going to happen ……………………………

Child is suspicious of the centre and wants to leave …………………………………

Child assessment of what has been important to him/her at the centre

………………………………………………………………………………………

Child assessment of the main changes in him/her self during stay at centre

………………………………………………………………………………………

Other observations ……………………………………………………………………

Child's perception of future life with family and community YES/NO

Child has realistic ideas about what it will be lie to go home ………………………..

Child has unrealistic expectations about his/her future ……………………………….

Child wants to avoid talking/thinking about his/her future …………………………...

Child is openly pessimistic about his/her future ……………………………………..

Child expresses spontaneous fear of re-abduction …………………………………...

Child feels ready and motivated to go home …………………………………………

Other comments ……………………………………………………………………...

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SOCIAL WORKER'S IMPRESSION OF THE CHILD AT REUNION (CONCLUSION)

Name of child ....

Age of child ....

Sex ....

Age group (Tick one)
- 0-15
- 6-10
- 11-18
- 19+

Date of reception ....

Date of reunion ....

District of reunion ....

County of reunion ....

Sub-county of reunion ....

Parish/Location of reunion ....

Psychological state at reunion (Tick one)
- Stable
- Unstable

Why stable psychologically at reunion (Tick one or two)
- Open to staff, fellow children and community
- Expressed willingness to go home
- Interacts freely
- Healthy
- Actively participates in activities

Why unstable at reunion (Tick one or two)
- Close to him/herself
- Uncertain about going home
- Avoids contact with community
- Health
- Does not participate in activities
- Aggressive

Health Status of the child (Tick one or two)
- Pregnancy
- Disabled

- Bullet wound
- Chronic illness
- Other sickness

Category of child (Tick one)
- Formerly abducted boy
- Formerly abducted girl
- Born I captivity
- Unaccompanied child
- Child mother

Family attitude toward receiving the child (Tick one)
- Positive
- Negative

Family capacity to provide basic needs to the child at reunion (Tick)
- Able
- Unable
- Fairly able

Future plan of the child (Tick one)
- Formal education
- Vocational education
- Income generating activity

For formal education – Profession (Tick one)
- Doctor
- Teacher
- Nurse
- Pilot
- Army
- Priest
- Athlete
- Lawyer
- Social worker
- Police
- Engineer
- Agriculturalist
- Others – specify

Status of parents
- One parent dead
- Both parents dead
- Both parents alive

CENTRE RESETTLEMENT FORM

A] Basic Bio data of the child:

1. Name of child: ……………………………………………………………………....

2. Sex of child: …………………………3. Date of assessment: …………………………

4. Age of child: …………………………………………………………………………

5. Place of abduction: …………………………………………………………………

6. Date of abduction: ……………………………………………………………..........

B] Details of Family the child is getting resettled into:

7. Date of resettlement from Gusco: ……………………………………………...........

8. Relationship of person child is being resettled with: ………………………………

9. Name of person resettled with: …………………………………………………..........

10. Was child resettled with original family: …………………………………….........

       If No, why? …………………………………………………………………....

11. No. of other children in the family of resettlement: …………………………..........

12. No. of siblings of original family still in captivity: …………………………..........

13. No. of siblings of resettlement family still in captivity: …………………………

14. No. of siblings of original family who have returned from captivity: ……………

15. No. of siblings of resettlement family who have returned from captivity: ….........

16. Location of resettlement family: District: ……………………….

County: ………………….......

Sub-county: ………………….…………Parish: …………….…………………..

Village: …………………………….........

C] Assessment of child readiness to go home and Family ability to receive child

17. Family's perception of change in their child: YES/NO

    I. Family find change in child: ……………………………………………….

If yes, mention the changes: ……………………………………………………..

………………………………………………………………………………....

Attitudes to change: …………………………………………………………..

………………………………………………………………………………....

    II. The family does not see any great change: …………………………........

    III. Family is concerned about a specific change: …………………………........

If yes, mention changes: …………………………..……………………………...

Attitude to this change: ……………………………..…………………………….

    I. Family attitudes towards child born in captivity: ……………………….......

    II. Family agrees with observations made by staff at admission: …………….............

    III. Family agrees with observations made by staff at time of going home:………

    IV. Child is returning to person/family who does not now him well: ……….............

18. Family's capacity/motivation to care for the child: YES/NO

    I. Family feels capable of looking after the child also regarding health/education:

         ……………………………………………………………………………………

    II. Family wants to receive child but does not have economy to provide:…………

    III. Family says they are unwilling to take child back: …………………………....

Reason for unwilling to take child back: ……………………………………………..

Other observations: …………………………………………………………... …

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GUIDELINES FOR VISITORS/JOURNALIST TO GUSCO

RECEPTION CENTER

GUSCO in its operation is mandated by the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Children Act 2000, and other international documents related to children affected by armed conflict, therefore, it is the responsibility of all of us to protect the children in anyway possible.

GUSCO's Vision

A peaceful harmonious and prosperous society that responds and protects the rights of children and ensures equitable access to basic needs.

Mission Statement

GUSCO is an indigenous NGO that promotes the well-being of War Affected children in Northern Uganda through Psychological support, Peace Building, Advocacy and Capacity Building of Communities.

THE RULES AND GUIDELINES

Children have all the rights of adults. In addition, they have the right to be protected from harm. Reporting children and young people carries this added dimension and restriction, especially in the current era when it is nearly impossible to limit a story's reach. This document is meant to support the best intentions of ethical journalism – serving the public's interest for truth without compromising the rights of the children.

In some instances the act of reporting on children places them or other children at risk of retribution or stigmatization. When in doubt, one must err on the side of caution and the right to be protected from harm. Because these situations are not always clear-cut, journalists and visitors are encouraged to consult with staff or determining the best interests of the child.

1. Important Principles.

The dignity and right of every child are to be respected in every circumstance.

    i. Interviewing and reporting on children, special attention is to be paid to each child's rights to privacy and confidentiality, to have their opinions heard, to participate in decisions affecting them and to be protected from harm and retribution, including the potential harm and retribution.

    ii. The best interests of each child are to be protected over any other consideration, including advocacy for children's issues and the promotion of child's rights.

    iii. When trying to determine the best interests of a chills, the child's rights to have their views taken into account are to be given due weight in accordance with their age and maturity.

    iv. Those closest to the child's situation and best able to assess it are to be consulted about political, social and cultural ramifications of any reportage.

    v. Do not publish a story or an image that might put the child at risk even when identities are changed, obscured or not used.

2. Guidelines for interviewing Children

    i. Do not harm any child: avoid questions, attitudes or comments that are judgmental or insensitive to cultural values, that place a child in danger or expose a child to humiliation, or that reactivate a child's pain and grief from traumatic events.

    ii. Listening is the key to interviewing children and not just hearing their words, but really taking them in and listening to their thoughts and feelings behind.

    iii. The visitors and adults must allow ample time to talk to children because it takes time to gain children's confidence before any interview can start.

    iv. Preparatory visits could be one of the best ways (visiting children before conducting a interview with them) to get to know children and for the children also to know the journalist or visitor.

    v. Use of language is very important: all visitors and journalists should use clear explanations which have to be understood by anyone if not, check the words and concepts with an adult who knows the children better.

    vi. Do not discriminate in choosing children to interview because of sex, race, religion, status, educational background or physical abilities.

vii. No staging: do not as children to tell a story or tae an action that is not part of their own history, or put words in their mouths or let other adults do so.

viii. Ensure that the child and guardian know they are talking with a reporter. Explain the purpose of the interview and its intended use.

ix. Obtain permission from the child and her or his guardian for all interviews, videoing and, when possible, documentary photographs. When possible or appropriate, this permission should be in writing. Permission must be obtained in circumstances that ensure the child and guardians are not coerced in any way and understand they are part of a story that might be disseminated locally and globally. This is usually ensured only if the permission is obtained in the child's language and if the decision is made in consultation with an adult the child trusts.

x. Pay attention to where and how the child is interviewed. Limit the number of interviews and photographers. Try to make certain that children are comfortable and able to tell their story outside pressure, including pressure from the interviewer. Ensure that the child will not be endangered or adversely affected by showing their home, community or general whereabouts.

xi. It is important for the children to be interviewed in small groups unless you are talking about a particular experience because they feel happier to be surrounded by their fellow children than strange adults.

xii. Use of heavy equipment for instance radio or television recording should be minimized in order to get the best out of children. In film, video and radio interviews, consider what the choice of visual or audio background might imply about the child and her or his life and story.

xiii. All visitors and journalists must remember to give feedback to children after conducting interviews with them. For instance if the photographs or articles have been written after the visit, this should be shared wit the children who were involved.

4. Guidelines for Reporting on Children

i. Do not further stigmatize any child: avoid categorizations or descriptions that expose children to negative reprisals – including additional physical or

psychological harm, or to lifelong abuse, discrimination or rejection by their local communities.

ii. Always provide an accurate context for the child's story or image.

iii. To avoid potential risk of harm or retribution always change the name and obscure the visual identity of any child.

iv. In certain cases, using a child's identity – name and / or recognizable image – is in the child's best interest. However, when a child's identity is used, they must still be protected against harm and supported through any stigmatization or reprisals. Some examples of these special cases are:

   a. When a child initiates contact with the reporter, wanting to exercise their rights to freedom of expression and to have their opinion heard.

   b. When a child is part of a sustained programme of activism or social mobilization and wants to be identified.

   c. When a child is engaged in a psychological programme and is claiming their name and identity as a part of their healthy development.

v. Confirm the accuracy of what the child has to say, either with other children or an adult, preferably both.

vi. When in doubt whether a child is at risk, report on the general situation for children rather than an individual child, no matter how newsworthy the story.

vii. Reconfirm with GUSCO's Advocacy officer or its management before publishing any story (check contact).

5. Coverage at reception centre for formerly abducted children

Please note that the issue is particularly sensitive in Gulu, where some believe that past exposure in the media of formerly abducted children may have contributed to the LRA attack. When reporting on children in the reception centre, you are asked to remember 'No names, no faces', and to exercise sensitivity when requesting a child to recount his\her experiences. Please do not probe, but accept the story as told. The child is still making sense of events and has to tell them to various people.

i. Only those children who are comfortable to talk should be engaged, anticipated to be those who have spent a relatively longer period in the centre?

ii. If any child indicates a willingness to speak with the media, centre staff will help them to do so.

iii. Full identities of children should not be disclosed. Identification through the use of single Christian names only, and obscuring of faces in photographs if for one reason or another, identity would be obvious (the centre is not doctrinaire about photos – it is only if a child has a distinctive story that concerns emerge).

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