

Alone Like a Tree: Reintegration Challenges Facing Children Born of War and Their Mothers in Northern Uganda

Written by Lindsay McClain Opiyo



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About the Justice and Reconciliation Project

The Justice and Reconciliation Project (JRP) was established to understand and explain the interests, needs, concerns and views of communities affected by conflict and to promote sustainable peace through the active involvement of war-affected communities in research and advocacy.

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Introduction¹

Northern Uganda was the site of numerous protracted conflicts for more than two decades. During this period, state and non-state actors—including the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) and government forces—committed widespread human rights violations against civilians.²

Central to tactics of abuse and humiliation were sexual- and gender-based violence (SGBV), including rape, defilement, forced marriage, sexual slavery and sexual exploitation.

There is mounting evidence that both men and women suffered such abuses during northern Uganda's conflicts,³ however, the magnitude and lasting effects of conflict SGBV disproportionately affect women. For instance, after being abducted by the rebels, young girls and women were allocated to LRA commanders and forced to perform domestic duties, including bearing children. Uganda's Amnesty Act, which many applied for upon returning home, makes no special provision for women who returned with children, giving them the same reintegration package as those who returned alone. In another example, women in internally displaced persons (IDP) camps, often took the lead as head of households, after men were killed or disempowered from participating in humanitarian assistance processes, such as food distribution by the World Health Organisation (WHO). Food and supplies were never enough to cater for the needs of their families, leading scores of women to fall victim to sexual exploitation, exchanging sex for basic goods and services.⁴ Others were raped by armed actors while fetching water or tending to gardens, or by fellow tenants in the congested camps.

As if the original violations were not severe enough, female victims are especially susceptible to ongoing forms of revictimisation that extend long after initial violations occur.⁵ Whether this manifests in depression and other forms of mental illness due to protracted stigmatisation from fellow community members, or increased vulnerability for future abuse and violence due to economic marginalisation, the long-term consequences of conflict-related SGBV on women are severe. Perhaps this is most apparent in the lasting effects of bearing and caring for children born as a result of conflict SGBV. For most, the children's biological fathers have long moved on, leaving the women to raise the children and face their ensuing challenges alone.

Although there is growing interest in the plight of children born in the captivity (CBC) of the LRA from national and international organisations and

1 This briefing was written by Lindsay McClain Opiyo. Data was collected by Lindsay McClain Opiyo, Nancy Apiyo, Claire Jean Kahunde, Victoria Nyanjura, Evelyn Amony, Docus Atyeno, Joyce Abalo, Harriet Aloyo, Ritah Apiyo, and Patrick Odong. The briefing was copy-edited by Oryem Nyeko. Special thanks to the Women's Advocacy Network (WAN) members and local leaders who openly shared their views with JRP, and to Lino Owor Ogora, Claudia Navas, Erin Baines, and Beth Stewart for inputting into the planning and analysis phases.

2 For more information and documentation of such abuses, see JRP's field notes, available at <http://justiceandreconciliation.com/publications/field-notes/>.

3 Nsubuga, T., "God helped me," says Acholi elder raped by NRA," Acholi Times, 22 June 2011, available at <http://www.acholitimes.com/cultureacholi/index.php/genocide-in-acholi/17-god-helped-me-says-acholi-elder-raped-by-nra>; RLP, "Gender against Men." YouTube video, 2009, available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mJSI99HQYXc>;

4 Okello, M.C. and Hovil, L., "Confronting the Reality of Gender-based Violence in Northern Uganda." International Journal of Transitional Justice 1: 433-443, 2007.

5 Lonergan, K., Gender and Generation in Acholi Traditional Justice Mechanisms. Field note XVII, 2012, Gulu: Justice and Reconciliation Project, available at <http://justiceandreconciliation.com/publications/field-notes/2012/gender-and-generation-in-acholi-traditional-justice-mechanisms-fn-xvii/>.

researchers as evidenced in the emergence of new researches and studies,⁶ acknowledgement of and redress for the broader category of children born as a result of conflict SGBV—what JRP has termed “children born of war” (CBW)—and their mothers is largely lacking in transitional justice (TJ) discourse in Uganda.

In an effort to address this gap in knowledge, the Justice and Reconciliation Project (JRP) embarked on a consultative process on CBW from September to November 2014. The consultation was part of a larger project on redress for SGBV conflict-related wrongs funded by the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation. Working through the web of the Women’s Advocacy Network (WAN) at JRP,⁷ the consultation engaged mothers of CBW and key community stakeholders in Acholi, Lango and West Nile sub-regions, in order to identify emerging needs and challenges. This resultant situational brief seeks to inform policy-makers and stakeholders on the redress challenges and needs of children born of war (CBW) and their mothers, so policies and programmes can be developed and implemented to meet and address these needs.

Methodology

The JRP consultation on CBW sought to understand the daily challenges female survivors of SGBV face in caring for CBW; to understand the physical, psychological, economic and socio-cultural challenges CBW face in their daily life; and to document the numbers and needs of CBW being cared for by members of the WAN. The consultation supposed that if policy-makers and stakeholders were better informed of the challenges and needs of CBW and their mothers, then they would develop and implement policies and programmes to meet and address those needs, providing much-needed redress. Because such data does not currently exist, the consultation further sought to fill a major gap in knowledge of TJ actors in Uganda.

In order to fulfil the aforementioned objectives, it employed a mixed-method approach, consisting of 13 focus group discussions (FGDs) with 125 mothers of CBW from Gulu, Amuru, Nwoya, Pader, Lira, and Adjumani districts in northern Uganda; 3 storytelling sessions with 100 WAN members from groups in Pader, Lira and Adjumani; 6 FGDs and 8 interviews with 60 local leaders (48 male, 12 female) from the aforementioned districts, including sub-county chiefs, local council (LC) IIIs, local councillors, religious and cultural leaders, elders, police officers and teachers, purposively selected for their local jurisdiction over matters relevant to CBW and their mothers; and 380 individual surveys with members from the 13 member groups of the WAN. One male CBC appeared at the site of a FGD and informally shared his views. The consultation gathered the views of a total of 447 respondents. Interviews and FGDs were conducted in a combination of English, Luo or Madi, depending on the respondents’ preferences, and translated and transcribed into English.

6 There are at least three pending researches on CBC, or the broader category of children born of war (CBW), currently being undertaken by the International Center for Transitional Justice (ICTJ), Watye ki Gen, and the Human Rights Focus (HURIFO). Reports are expected to be released in 2015.

7 The Women’s Advocacy Network (WAN) at JRP is a forum where war-affected women come together to advocate for justice, acknowledgment and accountability for gender-based violations inflicted upon them during war in northern Uganda. It consists of thirteen women’s groups in Acholi, Lango and West Nile sub-regions, and boasts nearly 500 members. Find out more about WAN here: <http://justiceandreconciliation.com/initiatives/womens-advocacy-network/>.

The methodology was designed to consider feasibility (in terms of access, funding and time), whilst generating quality data and new information. As such, its scope was narrowed to identify challenges needs of CBW and their mothers according to WAN members and key community members in areas in which the WAN operates. We recognise the following limitations in this scope:

- *The views of mothers of CBW in the WAN may not reflect the views of all mothers of CBW in northern Uganda’s conflicts.* Measures were taken to include WAN mothers of various conflict circumstances (i.e. mothers who conceived by different forms of conflict-related SGBV by a range of conflict actors) in focus groups, however, it is unclear at this time how many CBW are being cared for by WAN members and the spread of circumstances of their birth. For this reason, the consultation, especially the survey, was very important in filling gaps and establishing numbers.
- *Not all CBW are cared for by their mothers,* as the children may be in the custody of other people, such as in-laws, strangers, fathers and grandparents. The concerns and challenges of these other caregivers may be different than the mothers, and the scope of this research may not capture those views.
- *The views of mothers may be different than the views of their children.* However, due to the sensitivity of discussing the circumstances of their birth with children and youth, some of whom do not yet know this information themselves, we have elected to focus at this time specifically on mothers as the primary caregivers and the champions of WAN-identified advocacy recommendations. More direct engagement with older CBW who know their identities could be a focus for future research, but it must be done in a manner that is ethical and sensitive to their circumstances.

Key terms

Conflict SGBV—A violation that is inflicted upon a person on the basis of his or her sex or gender and occurred during, or as a direct result of, armed conflict. This includes physical, psychological, sexual and economic acts that use force, blame, coercion and other deprivations of freedom to inflict harm, pain, suffering and/or power over another. Examples may include, but are not limited to: rape, forced marriage, defilement and sexual exploitation. Such acts could have occurred during or as a result of raids, battles, abduction/forced conscription, displacement and/or detention by state or non-state actors.

Children born of war (CBW)—Children that are conceived as a result of conflict-related SGBV. Examples may include, but are not limited to: children born in captivity; children born of war-related rape, defilement or sexual exploitation.

CBW and TJ policy in Uganda

Transitional justice (TJ) can be defined as the broad spectrum of measures that “have been implemented by different countries to redress the legacies of massive human rights abuses.”⁸ This includes prosecutions, truth-telling, reparations, and institutional reforms, among others.

In Uganda, TJ gained recognition among the Government of Uganda (GoU), civil society and victims during the Juba

8 ICTJ, “What is transitional justice?” available at <http://ictj.org/about/transitional-justice>.

peace process, in which the GoU and the LRA signed Agenda Item Three on Accountability and Reconciliation.⁹ This effectively created a TJ blueprint for Uganda, and the government's Justice, Law and Order Sector (JLOS) was mandated with implementing the agreement and creating a Transitional Justice Working Group (TJWG). Since then, JLOS has developed a draft TJ policy, which proposes a combination of traditional justice, truth-telling, formal criminal justice, amnesty, and reparations.

Although these documents mention women and children as especially vulnerable categories of victims that need support, there has been little done to define the parameters of this vulnerability, nor to determine the exact needs and challenges of children born of war (CBW) and their mothers. For instance, Agenda Item Three commits to address the special needs of women, girls and children and to adopt child-sensitive approaches, but does not elaborate on what these needs and approaches may entail, nor does it name CBW as a special group.¹⁰ The final draft of the national TJ policy names children born in captivity as a category of victims who merit reparations, but completely omits recognition of other types of CBW, such as those who were conceived through rape by state forces.¹¹ The Amnesty Act of 2000, which grants blanket amnesty to "any Ugandan who has at any time since the 26th day of January 1986 engaged in or is engaging in war or armed rebellion against the government of the Republic of Uganda,"¹² offers a reintegration package to adult reporters irrespective of whether or not they return with underage children.

As alluded to in the introduction, there is some movement and greater recognition and acknowledgment for the plight of children born of conflict SGBV and their caregivers. For instance, more than a year ago, the community-based organisation Watye ki Gen in collaboration with Children/Youth As Peacebuilders (CAP) International began developing a database of the "numbers and living situations of [children born in captivity] and their families in Acholiland."¹³ They have since documented more than 1,500 CBC in seven districts.

In April 2014, the WAN presented a petition in the Parliament of Uganda signed by more than 1,250 women demanded for intervention in addressing issues and challenges faced by war-affected women in the Acholi sub-region.¹⁴ This resulted in Parliament unanimously passing a resolution on the plight of persons affected by the LRA rebellion, in which clause five calls for the establishment of a gender-sensitive reparations fund; clause six calls for budgetary provisions for free health services to women and children affected by the insurgency; clause seven calls for a regional mechanism to "identify, integrate, and regularise stateless children born in captivity" and clause eight calls for the GoU to "identify, integrate, and resettle child victims of formerly-abducted women whose clan, social/

9 GoU, Agreement on Accountability and Reconciliation between the Government of the Republic of Uganda and Lord's Resistance Army/Movement, Juba, Sudan, 2007, available at http://www.beyondjuba.org/BJP1/peace_agreements/Agreement_on_Accountability_And_Reconciliation.pdf.

10 Ibid, pp 8-9.

11 GoU, "National Transitional Justice Policy," final draft, 2014, p 32.

12 GoU, The Amnesty Act, 2000, section 3(1).

13 Watye ki Gen, Children Born in Captivity: Amuru, Gulu and Nwoya Districts, 2015, p1.

14 JRP, "Women's Advocacy Network Petition," 2014, available at <http://justiceandreconciliation.com/uncategorized/2014/womens-advocacy-network-petition/>,

tribal/cultural belongings are unknown."¹⁵ From this resolution formed the Consortium for War Victims, a coalition of civil society organisations (CSOs) who are keen to see the components of the resolution actualised. As such, JRP is responsible for generating information and concrete policy recommendations for clauses 1, 3, 5, 7, 8, and 10, and this consultation provides input into those pertaining to women, children, and reparations.

Establishing numbers and characteristics of WAN CBW

As aforementioned, JRP administered a one-on-one survey with 380 WAN members in an attempt to document the numbers and characteristics of CBW in their care, as well as the major challenges they are facing. This quantitative tool was designed to supplement the qualitative findings obtained through FGD and storytelling sessions.

The survey revealed that 1,609 children (CBW and non-CBW) are being cared for by the participating women, resulting in an average of approximately four children per woman. Eighty percent of the interviewed women are the biological mothers of these children. According to reported dates of birth, the children range in age from less than one-year-old to 31-years-old, suggesting that the women view their children as dependents long after they reach the legal age of an adult. Fifty-five percent were born between 2000-2008, making them between the ages of seven and fifteen in 2015. Eighty percent of the children older than five years old are reported to be in school.

The participating WAN members reported that 493 (31%) of the 1,609 children documented are children born of war. When prompted further, 437 (27%) of the 1,609 children were reportedly conceived because of an act of sexual violence against the mother. Of the children conceived through sexual violence, the women reported that 311 (68%) were conceived in captivity, 80 (18%) were conceived of rape, 33 (7%) were conceived of defilement, and 33 (7%) were conceived of sexual exploitation.

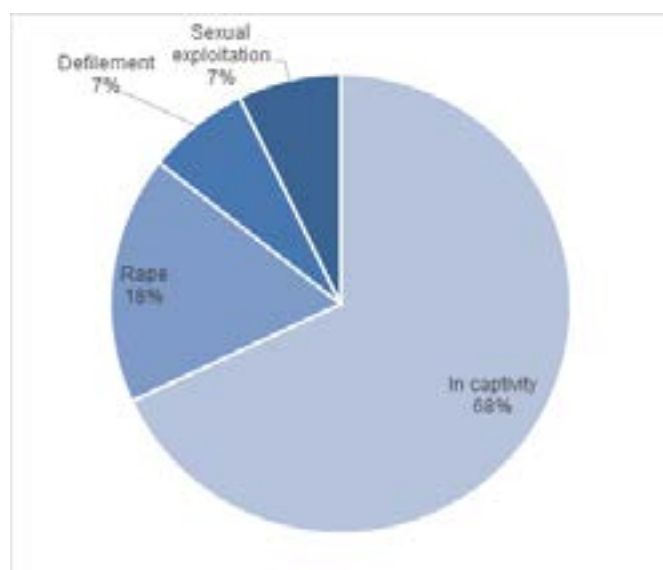


Figure 1: Circumstances of conception of CBW

15 GoU, "Motion for a Resolution of Parliament on the Plight of Persons Affected by the Lord's Resistance Army Rebellion," 2014.

When describing the fathers of the children conceived through sexual violence, 26 (6%) of the women described the father as a husband, 10 (2%) as a neighbour, 3 (1%) as a family friend, 385 (86%) as a stranger, and 21 (5%) as 'other.'

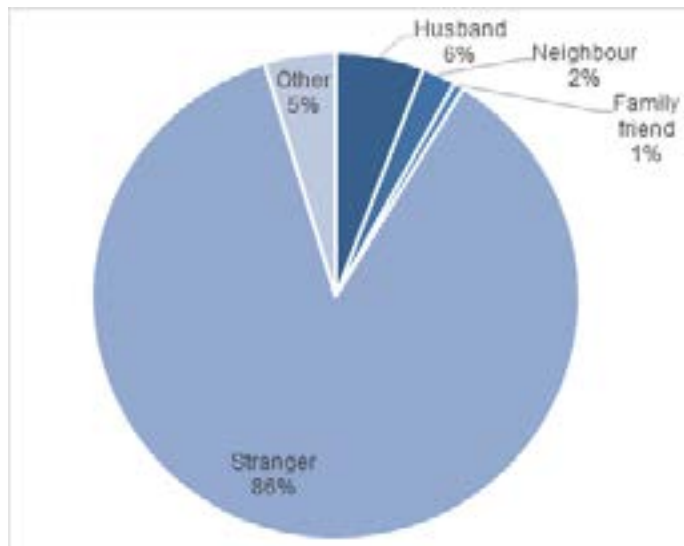


Figure 2: Description of fathers of children conceived through sexual violence

The women reported that 481 (30%) of the fathers of all children reported were in an armed group at the time of conception. Of the children conceived through sexual violence, 330 (88%) of the fathers were in the LRA and 46 (12%) of the fathers were in the states forces (Uganda People's Defence Force [UPDF] or National Resistance Army [NRA]).

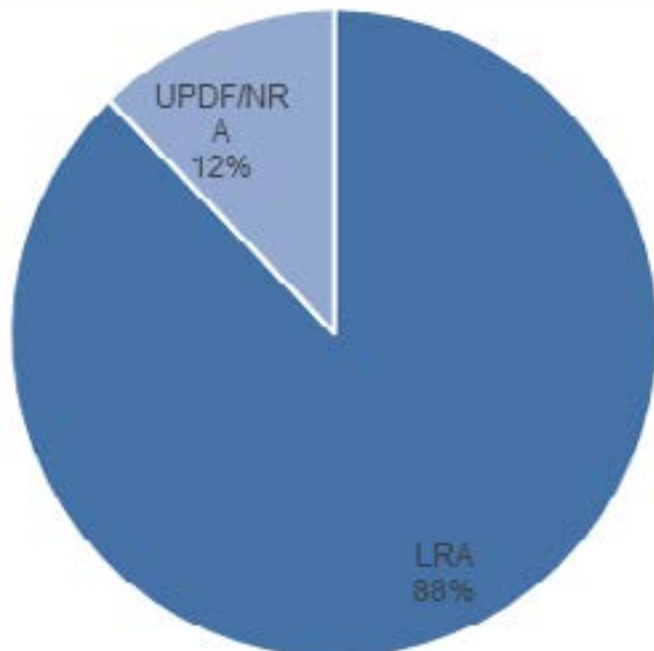


Figure 3. Fathers of CBW according to armed group

Challenges facing CBW and their mothers

As aforementioned a primary goal of the consultation was to identify the daily challenges facing children born of war and their mothers. The following summarises the key challenges identified across all groups and locations.

Stigmatisation and Rejection

Family and community stigma against female survivors of conflict SGBV and their children born of war continues to greatly affect the day-to-day life of such persons. In most cases, the women have tried to settle with new partners, especially after returning home from captivity, but these new relationships are rife with challenges and further abuse. In the new relationships, the slightest disagreements between husband and wife gets blamed on the women's past. Even when the man is also formerly-abducted, he can stigmatise the woman, accusing her of sleeping with many men from the bush as a means of justifying his abuse. Alcoholism exacerbates conflicts in homes, and women and children report having to run away and hide when the men are drunk. Neighbours and in-laws further sabotage these relationships, telling the men that they have gotten wives who have been killing people in the bush. These relationships break down, often after the woman has bore additional children, increasing her vulnerability and burden as she moves from one relationship to another. As one woman in Adjumani asked, "With all these children from different men, where can I take them?"¹⁶ Some reported staying with as many as five men, leaving each one after going through the same insults.

Unfortunately, CBW are not spared this stigmatisation and rejection, with their existence being a major topic in marital disputes. For many, their mothers' new partners do not want to pay their school fees, and the step-parents are reportedly a major source of insults against CBW. They are continuously ostracised and isolated in some homes. The distinction is especially apparent when comparing the treatment of CBW versus the non-CBW biological children of the new partners. For instance, some women report that when it is time to sleep at night, CBW are forced to sleep on the ground, whereas non-CBW are given mattresses. New spouses provide their biological children with timely school fees and requirements, but give nothing for their CBW stepchildren. Even when the children report such insults, the mothers feel there is nothing they can do. They often face more severe insults and beatings when their mothers are not around. Some children are now fearful because the men mention killing them when quarrelling with their mothers.

The stigmatisation and rejection for CBW continues outside the home within the wider community, and is especially apparent in how they are treated at school. They complain that no one wants to sit near them during class, and then when prompted to fight with other children, they are called "Kony". At one school in Gulu town, CBW reportedly rallied together to write a letter to the school administration and their sponsors regarding the severe stigma they are facing from students and teachers. They threatened to strike if the issues were not addressed. Derogative nicknames they face from the community include:

¹⁶ Female member of the WAN, storytelling session, Dzaipi sub-county, Adjumani district, 18 September 2014.

- *Dwog paco* to indicate someone who has “come back home” from the bush (Palaro)
- *Otin luk* to indicate children who are bastards and were born from illegitimate relationships (Barlonyo)
- *Lakwena* or *Kony* to relate them to well-known rebel leaders (Awach)
- *Olumolum* to signify that they are from the “bush” (Alero)
- *Oniangwa* to demean them as the small stone used for grinding foodstuff that always accompanies the bigger mother stone (Adjumani)

According to their mothers, “The future of our home lies on these children.”¹⁷ In order to spare them the abuse from relatives and community members in rural areas, some women have moved to towns and urban centres where they can enjoy some level of anonymity. Such a situation is still difficult, though, because they are alone and often do not have social or economic support to care for their families. HIV infection among some women is also adding to their stigmatization, with community members saying they killed their partners. The effects of these challenges have let some women to contemplate and even attempt suicide. According to one woman in Adjumani, “My husband has abandoned me and the children, and because of bitterness, any time I will buy a drug to swallow and die.”¹⁸ Some CBW are also allegedly threatening to commit suicide.

Trauma and Behavioural Challenges

With all of these challenges, it is no surprise that some CBW have begun to pose behavioural challenges at home and school. According to one mother in Koch Ongako, “The problem we are facing is that most of the CBW are mentally-disturbed.”¹⁹ This leaves one to wonder the extent to which the violence they witnessed during the war and continue to experience in the post-war society, are leading to trauma, depression, and other manifestations of mental illness and spiritual disturbance. For instance, many of the mothers reported sustained physical and sexual child abuse against CBW in homes and communities. One respondent from Awach recalled how she wept when she returned home to discover that lashes from stick had permanently scarred her child’s back.

As the children become older, this is leading to a shift in their attitudes and behaviours. Some are beginning to insult their mothers and become violent in the homes. One woman told a story of how her CBW wanted to set the family’s house on fire while they were all inside after his school fees were not paid. According to a mother from Barlonyo, “Even if I talk to him, he does not answer. Dealing with him is becoming hard.”²⁰ Another woman in Koch Ongako lamented, “My children have rejected me, saying they want their father, and yet their father died a long time ago. The girl closes herself inside her room until evening, while the boy left home and went to Karuma.”²¹ This is by

17 Female member of the WAN, storytelling session, Atanga sub-county, Pader district, 25 September 2014.

18 Female member of the WAN, storytelling session, Dzaipi sub-county, Adjumani district, 18 September 2014.

19 Mother of CBW, focus group discussion, Koch Ongako sub-county, Gulu district, 20 October 2014.

20 Mother of CBW, focus group discussion, Agweng sub-county, Lira district, 2 October 2014.

21 Mother of CBW, focus group discussion, Koch Ongako sub-county, Gulu district, 20 October 2014.

no means indicative of the behaviour of all CBW, however, many mothers report such challenges, in which the children idealise their fathers and blame their mothers for unmet needs and poverty.

A lack of parental guidance could be another contributing factor to such behaviour. Some of the mothers feel they are still children themselves, and they cannot give advice to their progeny. Others feel that the lack of guidance from a father figure is putting all of the responsibility for guidance on the mothers. Other children are not being cared for by either parents, such as in Awach, where they allegedly roam from place-to-place like street children.

With regards to school, some CBW are described by their mothers as wild, unruly and disinterested. Some have turned to fighting in response to the insults they receive. People in the communities say that the diseases disturbing the children are demons they brought back with them from captivity. There is concern that if the children do not become productive members of society and receive an education, they will become alcoholics and thieves. Some have already turned to drugs like marijuana.

“I’m one of the children born in captivity. Children born of war are being segregated. For instance, when it is time to go back to school, other children are sent first, then children born of war are sent last... This is so painful to the children and mothers, too. We are sometimes told the home we are staying in is not our home, and the person taking care of us is not our father. That we should go and look for our father. This is always said by other children in that home. This makes our lives miserable.”

Odokorach (name changed), 17-years-old, Atiak sub-county, 21 October 2014

Meeting Basic Needs

According to a mother in Koch Ongako, “CBW are getting difficulties in life because we do not have enough money to provide for their basic needs and pay them at school.”²² Sometimes, this forces their mothers to leave the children with other people like grandmothers and uncles in homes where they are stigmatised and not wholly welcomed. The following highlights the major challenges in meeting the basic needs of CBW.

First, an overwhelming number of women reported education as a major challenge facing CBW. In fact, the greatest challenge facing female and male CBW was reported by their mothers as paying school fees at 62% and 64%, respectively. Many current partners refuse to assist in paying their school fees saying they do not have a bright future because they were born from captivity. As a result, many

22 Mother of CBW, focus group discussion, Koch Ongako sub-county, Gulu district, 20 October 2014.

CBW are in lower grades than their age because their fees are not paid consistently and they have to sit for terms at a time at home. The mothers report that it is painful for them when their children do not take school seriously (perhaps in part because of the aforementioned stigma from teachers and fellow students, as well as psychological trauma) despite all of the efforts they go through to raise money for fees.

Second, feeding remains another challenge in meeting the basic needs of CBW. Many children are only eating one meal a day, and due to stigma in the home, they receive less food than non-CBW. This is leading to increased susceptibility to illness, and nodding disease if affecting CBW in some areas.

Third, mothers report medical care as another challenge facing CBW. There is often no money to provide medical care for these children when they fall sick or, as if the case for CBC, when they require treatment for ailments related to their time in captivity, such as burns, wounds, respiratory illnesses, and hearing problems. Some women report giving half doses of prescribed medicines after which the children remain weak and do not recover from the sickness. Others report taking children to subsidised government hospitals and health centres for treatment, only to be told that the medications needed are not available and must be bought from private pharmacies and clinics. When they cannot afford the medications, the children must either continue suffering from the ailments or heal on their own.

Identity

As many CBW enter their teen years and come of age, identity becomes an increasingly present challenges. Twenty-two percent of the women who participated in the aforementioned survey predicted that identity will be the number one challenge to face CBW as they grow into adults.

Many CBW do not know their fathers or fathers' clans, and they have begun to ask very many questions, creating a dilemma for their mothers. For instance, "The boy wants me to take him to his father, and yet I do not know where the father is." Some women have wanted to wait to tell their children about the circumstances of their conception and birth until they reached a certain age and maturity, but neighbours and others have gone ahead and told the children the information without the mother's knowledge or permission. According to a mother in Adjumani, "These children are asking for their father. I always mention their uncle but they now know the truth."²³

Further, when conflicts arise in homes and schools, the mothers are told to take their children back to the fathers, which is not possible when the fathers are not known. Teachers do not exhibit sensitivity when asking the children for the names of the fathers. Because of the high risk of stigma and rejection, the children feel like they cannot tell them that they were born in captivity and do not know.

In most traditions in northern Uganda, identity and belonging is tied to one's father. This includes key areas like access to land, inheritance, and marriage. Mothers report that no one on their mother's side wants to stand up and support the boys who want to get married and need dowries for their brides. More so, even when the identity of the father is known and the mothers initiate communication

²³ Female member of the WAN, storytelling session, Dzaipi sub-county, Adjumani district, 18 September 2014.

with them or their families or clans, there is no guarantee that the paternal side will welcome the women and children and provide support. For instance, women who produced children with LRA commanders frequently complained that the ones who returned home and were amnestied do not provide any support, despite receiving monthly salaries from the government.

Access to Land

As aforementioned, in northern Uganda, identity is closely linked to access to land. Women who are chased away from their family home or the home of their new partners often have nowhere to go. They do not have land for themselves or their children. This is proving to be more problematic as the children come of age and seek livelihoods opportunities. For instance, one woman recalls how her CBW "gave [her] a condition that he wants his plot of land after finishing his studies because this [where they are staying currently] is not their land."²⁴ The women report that the future of these children does not look bright because they do not have land for their futures. Of the 283 women who answered a question in the survey on the future, 145 (51%) said they predict that land access will be the greatest challenge CBW face as they grow into adults. This is seen as being a challenge that is especially pervasive to the male CBW because girls often get married and settle with their spouses' families. Boys who want to marry and have children with have nowhere to settle with them. However, if the current levels of stigmatisation are any indicator, even women who get married may face rejection from their husband's families, which may further affect their access to land.

Gender Dimensions

When trying to further differentiate challenges according to gender, the mothers expressed mixed views on the extent to which gender plays a role. Basing off of the diverse views obtained, it appears as though the most pervasive challenges in the present are similar for boys and girls.

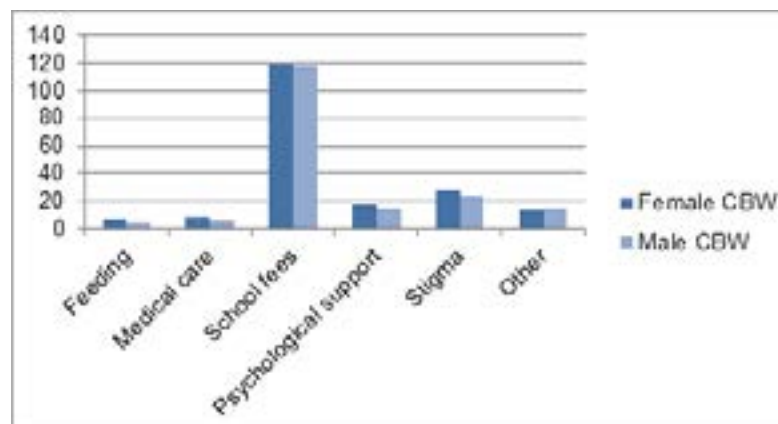


Figure 4. Greatest challenges facing CBW in the present

However, when looking to the future as the child grows, the long-term challenges may differ greatly. For instance, some mothers felt that female CBW face more severe challenges because they are more susceptible to sexual exploitation and abusive marriages. Girls are becoming pregnant at a young age, adding to the number of children the women are caring for. Several women alluded to step-fathers and other relatives sexually abusing the girls, such that "Step-fathers always show love to girls when the

²⁴ Female member of the WAN, storytelling session, Dzaipi sub-county, Adjumani district, 18 September 2014.

mother is around, but when the mother has gone somewhere he can have sex with the girl,”²⁵ although others acknowledge that boys are also being sexually abused. They reported that it is difficult to report this abuse, especially when it is done by new partners who are from armed forces.

Others felt that male CBW face more severe challenges because, while female will eventually leaving the home once getting married offering them some measure of escape, the boys have to live in the stigma and rejection indefinitely. Further, the boys do not have access to land or resources for marriage dowries. Some mothers feel like the boys are more loved by their families because they are seen as a source of labour in the home. Others feel girls are more loved in their families because they are a source of dowry.

Lastly, accommodation is a growing concern that varies according to gender norms. For instance, as the children mature, it becomes inappropriate for boys to share a room with their mothers, and girls to share a room with step-father or other males. This creates challenges as the children have to look for their own accommodation elsewhere.

Community leaders' views of CBW

According to the mothers, communities do not recognise or acknowledge CBW as a vulnerable category. JRP spoke to 60 community leaders in 10 locations across Acholi, Lango and West Nile sub-regions, in order to understand the challenges facing these children and their mothers from a community perspective.

First and foremost, community leaders reported being aware that such children exist and that they were born as a result of sexual violence by the LRA, UPDF, home guards and other armed actors. For the most part, they were able to identify the challenges facing these children that were also noted by the mothers, such as isolation, stigmatisation, identity, lack of basic needs, lack of parental guidance, sexual exploitation by the girls, rejection, unfair treatment, mental illness and early pregnancy. However, some erroneously suggested that the children lack love from their mothers, which is in stark contrast from the message conveyed by the mothers that they love these children and go to great lengths to support and protect them. According to one local leader in Atiak, “A child grew up alone like a tree because there was little love to give to him or her.”²⁶ Others suggested that the community fears that these children will be a source of rebellion and conflict in the future, and even went so far as to say, “Our worry is... if they are not taken care of or sent to school it means we are sitting on a time bomb.”²⁷

When JRP asked what services and programmes are available for CBW at the sub-county-level, there were mixed reactions. Some said that nothing is available because there is no data showing numbers and needs. According to one leader from Palaro, “It is now an eye-opener that we should do something for these children because

we know they exist though we don't have the data.”²⁸ Most, however, claimed that these children and their mothers are benefiting from projects or programmes, either implemented by the government or by other stakeholders. This contradicts the information obtained by the mothers, in which 149 (31%) said no one is helping them to care for their children. Only 9 (2%) reported receiving assistance from non-governmental organisations (NGOs) or government. This suggests that the local leaders may genuinely think that CBW and their mothers are benefiting from government programmes, but that in reality, these groups are missing out. Examples provided of accessed services included child protection units, which provide psychosocial support; restocking programmes that provide cattle; youth livelihoods projects which provide seed money and training; and community-driven development (CDD) grants, which support group livelihoods projects. Oftentimes, the leaders deferred to NGOs, to which they refer cases for school fees and medical care. They advised the mothers and children to be in groups because that is how they can benefit from more programmes.

In terms of the roles of local leaders, some felt it was the mandate of the local government to look after the welfare of these children, for example, by budgeting for them so that they can benefit from projects administered by the local governments. Others countered this, saying that it is relatives who are responsible for these things. They feel they play a referral role to development partners for support. Oftentimes, though, they do not have the fuel to do sensitisation in the community or reach victims, so they deferred that work to national authorities. They suggested that cultural leaders should punish clans who continue to reject these children. Rituals have been performed on some CBW to chase away the evil spirits they are believed to carry, but there has been little change.

Recommendations

From these consultations with conflict-affected women, including mothers of CBW, and local leaders, JRP offers the following recommendations to address the challenges facing CBW.

More data is needed on the numbers and needs of CBW in order to inform interventions, especially at the sub-county-level.

Community leaders admit to having very little data on the CBW living in their areas. This makes it difficult to plan and budget for activities to benefit them. JRP's colleagues at Watye ki Gen, a community-based membership organisation of formerly-abducted women, have documented the numbers of child born in captivity living in the Acholi sub-region. More needs to be done to expand that documentation to include CBW conceived from different circumstances (rape by government soldiers, sexual exploitation, etc.) and in all conflict-affected sub-regions. However, in any identification, measure must be taken to protect the confidentiality and identity of the children from further abuse, stigma, and exploitation.

25 Mother of CBW, focus group discussion, Pader town, Pader district, 17 October 2014.

26 Community leader, focus group discussion, Atiak sub-county, Amuru district, 21 October 2014.

27 Community leader, focus group discussion, Atiak sub-county, Amuru district, 21 October 2014.

28 Community leader, focus group discussion, Palaro sub-county, Gulu district, 23 October 2014.

There is need to better understand the challenges facing CBW from their own perspectives, and what the women and children's justice and redress needs and expectations are.

Much of the responses gathered from consultation focused on daily life challenges and general recommendations for assistance. Further research should be done to link these challenges and recommendations to the TJ discourse, so that expectations, rights and needs of CBW and their mothers are met.

Every stakeholder has a role to play in addressing the challenges raised.

According to the old adage, it takes a village to raise a child. This could not be truer in addressing the challenges facing CBW and their mothers. The community has a role to play in accepting these children and making them feel like valued members of society. Local leaders have a role to play in sensitising the community to not reject CBW, mediating conflicts as they arise, and attracting projects that can support such persons. The GoU has a role to play in establishing TJ mechanisms that provide redress and accountability, such as a gender- and age-sensitive reparations fund. Parents have a role to play in meeting basic needs and providing guidance and love. Relatives and extended families, including step-parents, have a role to play in reinforcing a positive identity and building self-esteem of CBW. Cultural leaders have a role to play to ensure that CBW and their mothers have access to land. The list goes on and on. Ongoing dialogue at the grassroots-level on these roles that everyone must play can assist in sensitisation and accountability of all parties.

CBW need counseling and social support, so they can come to terms with their complex identities.

Without doubt, not all CBW are exhibiting outward signs that they are troubled. According to a mother in Adjumani, their socialisation “depends on how you treat them.”²⁹ Still, there are many examples of CBW demonstrating signs of trauma and emotional distress. One suggestion we received from their mothers was for there to be counseling for these children involving many actors and not just parents. Such services are not available in many areas in which the children are staying, however, teachers could be well-suited to provide such guidance. Parents also need additional skills in how to counsel these children. Further discretion should be left to the mothers to tell the children about their origins, not teachers, neighbours and other children.

The Government of Uganda must prioritise support to CBW and their mothers.

Many women feel that the GoU failed to protect them during the war, and has continued to fail in helping them to take care of CBW. They call upon the GoU to budget for CBW in social services. According to one mother from Gulu town, “The Government should budget for us in the next financial year, so that our lives are improved.”³⁰ This

29 Female member of the WAN, storytelling session, Dzaipi sub-county, Adjumani district, 18 September 2014.

30 Mother of CBW, focus group discussion, Gulu town, Gulu district, 25

should involve the support for the following services:

■ **Medical care:** CBW and their mothers need provisions to access quality medical care. This includes specialised care for trauma and mental illness. Facilities should be nearer to these populations and offer quality treatment for free.

■ **Education:** Special bursaries should be established to sponsor CBW in school. Sixty-one percent of participating women cited school sponsorship as being the most helpful in overcoming challenges facing CBW. For younger children, this may include traditional education, but older children this could necessitate specialised vocational skills training. According to one mother, “Educating CBW is the only way their lives can be improved because, once they have studied, they will cater for themselves and help their own mothers, too.”³¹ However, since schools are a major setting of rejection and stigmatisation for many CBW, special training should be provided to teachers, so that they do not perpetuate the abuse. Programmes like Laroo School for War-Affected Children which have been set-up by the government need further overhaul to ensure that children attending are not subjected to further abuse, and that CBW are also sponsored to attend.

■ **Child- and family-tracing:** Many women requested that government provide resources for the paternal, and at times maternal, origins of CBW to be traced. Further discretion should be used to ensure this is a voluntary process for the women, and that they are not forced to marry the men they stayed with in captivity or the men's male relatives upon tracing the origins of a child.

■ **Land and housing:** Some women report being promised houses by the GoU, but this has not been done. Many women interviewed requested land and housing as a form of reparations for their experiences. These will also provide redress for their CBW.

■ **Livelihoods:** According to one mother, “The government failed to cater for our livelihoods. We were given amnesty and some little help like mattresses, basins, etc. of which we appreciate, but it's not enough to put food on our plates every day.”³² In addition to livelihoods providing opportunities for the women to meet their basic needs, such as purchasing medicine for a child when s/he falls sick, it is believed livelihoods will contribute to a decrease in stigmatisation for the women and children. “Livelihoods and income-generating activities will prevent stigmatisation because, when we are busy, they will admire what we do and we will be an example.”³³ Further, livelihoods project should not only be given to the mothers, but to the CBW, too. This will ensure they become productive and respected members of society. Twenty-seven percent of participating women cited livelihoods as being the most helpful in overcoming challenges facing CBW.

■ **Equal support as men:** There is a general feeling that the GoU is only supporting men who returned home, such as those who joined the UPDF or top commanders who are receiving monthly stipends. There is also a

October 2014.

31 Mother of CBW, focus group discussion, Dzaipi sub-county, Adjumani district, 19 September 2014.

32 Mother of CBW, focus group discussion, Gulu town, Gulu district, 25 October 2014.

33 Female member of the WAN, storytelling session, Atanga sub-county, Pader district, 25 September 2014.

feeling that the Government is not valuing women survivors of conflict SGBV, but rather victims who lost property and livestock, as evidenced in compensation being awarded to such groups. According to one woman, “The government is only helping men and LRA leaders who returned, but women that were abused forcefully by the same men and came back with children are not given any support.”³⁴

The Government of Uganda must investigate allegations of corruption and nepotism, especially with regards to government programmes for vulnerable groups, such as CBW.

Some women also reported feeling as though the GoU is only supporting those with more education or with connections to people in high positions of authority. Stricter measures are needed to ensure that nepotism and corruption do not permeate TJ processes and programmes meant to provide reparations and remedy to victims.

Fathers who are alive and known should be held accountable and provide child support.

Many women requested the government to put into place measures to hold fathers of CBW responsible for caring for their children. It is believed that many men interpret the amnesty they have received as absolving them of any responsibility to care for children they produced while in the bush. For instance, “The Government should deal with the fathers of these children by law, and for those who are employed as soldiers, the Government should [cut] some percentage of their salary...monthly to support the children.”³⁵ For the children who have lost their fathers or whose fathers are unknown or untraceable, they should be sponsored by the Government.

More steps must be taken to involve men and the community in programmes that offer assistance to CBW and their mothers.

Some partners of the women do not understand the programmes or groups that the women participate in. For example, they say that the women are coming to programmes of the rebels, and even block the women from attending. There is need for such projects to include men in some way, perhaps by talking to them about the purpose and activities of the programmes, so that they do not become a source of violence and tension in the home. For partners and neighbours that continue to stigmatise women and their children for the past or for participation in programmes, higher punishments should be inflicted by local authorities.

CBW and their mothers should be encouraged to seek unity and relief through groups and peer support.

Groups, like the ones in which the WAN members participate, offer opportunities for positive interactions between victims and others in the community. Groups create spaces for dialogue, reflection, and counseling, as well as plat-

forms for external interactions with others. Participating women reported that talking about the shared challenges in raising CBW has helped them in coming up with new ideas on how to raise these children. Further, group savings and loan scheme allow for the women to progress economically and provide for their families. As aforementioned, much of the government support is only available to groups, and groups therefore can seek remedy through their association with others. To date, there are very few known groups of CBW, but this may change in the future as the children come of age, learn more about their histories, and have more opportunities for networking with others.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the challenges facing CBW and their mothers are many and severe. From stigmatisation and rejection, to inability to meet basic needs like medical care and education, the day-to-day struggles affect their ability to reintegrate into society and enjoy peace dividends. Without doubt, there is much still to be done by all stakeholders in ensuring that such persons are able to come to terms with the past and move forward in the future.

As the GoU, NGOs and communities create TJ policies, processes and programmes in Uganda to provide remedy, reconciliation and accountability for past wrongs, the needs and challenges of CBW and their mothers must not be forgotten. Rather, they must feature prominently and inform the design and implement so the outcomes are gender- and age-just and sensitive. One must consider these needs and challenges, so that TJ in Uganda is responsive to the diverse experiences of conflict victims, especially those most susceptible to ongoing forms of abuse and revictimisation.

³⁴ Mother of CBW, focus group discussion, Alero sub-county, Nwoya district, 15 October 2014.

³⁵ Mother of CBW, focus group discussion, Gulu town, Gulu district, 18 October 2014.

Appendix 1. List of WAN groups consulted and their locations

SN	Group Name	District
1	Dii Cwinyi Child Mothers' Group	Amuru
2	Lacan Pe Nino Women's Group	Amuru
3	Rwot Lakica Women's Group	Gulu
4	Awach Tailoring Group	Gulu
5	Rubanga Ma Twero Women's Group	Gulu
6	Tam Pi Anyim Women's Group	Nwoya
7	Okony Wa Women's Group	Pader
8	Can Rweede Pe Women's Group	Gulu
9	Bed Kic Tek Abducted Child Mothers' Group	Gulu
10	Kica Pa Rwot Women's Group	Gulu
11	Amandrea Women's Group	Adjumani
12	Kuc Odwogo Women's Group	Lira
13	Rwot Okonya Women's Group	Pader

Appendix 2. Challenges predicted as CBW grow into adults

NO	CHALLENGE	#	%
1	Marriage	16	6
2	Land access	145	51
3	Identity	61	22
4	Livelihoods	4	1
5	Survival	20	7
6	Education	13	5
7	Relationships with others	15	5
8	Health	7	2
9	Other	2	1
	TOTAL	283	100

Appendix 3. Help mothers desire to overcome challenges facing CBW

NO	CHALLENGE	#	%
1	School sponsorship	224	61
2	Free medical care	6	2
3	Community acceptance	6	2
4	Compensation	2	1
5	Livelihoods support	99	27
6	Counseling and psychological support	6	2
7	Skills training	4	1
8	Land/housing	16	4
9	Government acknowledgment	1	0
10	Other	1	0
	TOTAL	365	100