



YOUTH VIEWS: SITUATION IN NORTHERN UGANDA

PRESENTATION BY CAP (CHILDREN/YOUTH AS PEACEBUILDERS)

IN COOPERATION WITH WORLD VISION, GULU, UGANDA

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INTRODUCTION

This report is based on consultations with young people from Gulu, Northern Uganda. As members of CAP (Children/Youth as Peacebuilders) these young people are actively involved in peacebuilding and are committed to the peaceful reconstruction of their communities.

CAP is an international coalition of young peacebuilders from countries where there is a war or conflict has recently ended. In Northern Uganda the CAP group is coordinated by World Vision. In Gulu there are three CAP groups: 1) a high school drama group; 2) a child rights group based in an IDP camp and 3) a child mothers' support group. Contributions from representatives of these three groups reflect the information and understanding they have acquired through their experiences and current situations.

This contribution was gathered by Michael Oruni, World Vision Uganda.

NORTHERN UGANDA

The 18 year old war in Northern Uganda has devastated all aspects of life in that region. While this conflict has affected the entire population, the worst toll has been on children and youth. Thousands of young people have been abducted from their homes by the Lords Resistance Army (LRA) and forced to obey the commands of Joseph Kony and his officers to kill, maim and destroy property.

During the past two years the situation has been spiralling out of control. Many villages have been abandoned with over 1.4 million people currently living in IDP camps. It is estimated that more than 10,000 young people have been abducted by the LRA in the last 10 months. Though no statistics are available, it is known that young people have also been recruited into government forces and militia. Each night thousands of rural children, called "night commuters," walk several kilometers to seek the relative safety of larger centres.

In the past year several international delegations have visited Northern Uganda. Their reports describe the utter misery inside the IDP camps; the disintegration of community life and the increasing insecurity throughout the region.

"I WANT THE PEOPLE IN THE WORLD TO KNOW THAT THEY SHOULD NOT GIVE UP ON US, NOT GIVE UP ON AFRICA.

HERE IN UGANDA MAYBE THE SITUATION IS NOT GOOD, MANY PEOPLE HAVE BEEN KILLED. BUT THEY SHOULD NOT GIVE UP ON US."

RICHARD

YOUTH VIEWS: THE CURRENT SITUATION



**"THERE IS CONSTANT FEAR,
CONSTANT WORRY."**

1. Many have lost their lives as a result of killing by the LRA.
2. Thousands have been displaced from their homes because of attacks. Others, fearing attacks from the rebels, have gone to live in the camp.
3. Camp life has very poor morals:
"There is a big problem with drinking in the camps. People have nothing to do and feel so depressed. This is mostly the men, but some women too and the drunkenness can cause problems in the family."
4. There is a low level of economic activity because of the insecurity. There is a lot of unemployment and not many job opportunities.
5. Communities struggle with poverty. There is famine and poverty. The LRA loots the crops.
6. Our services are very poor – i.e. schools, poor road networks, poor medical facilities.
7. People are afraid to travel too far out of the town.
8. There are unlawful arrests of people in the communities.
9. Many people are suffering from disabilities because of wounds.
10. Recently there were some tribal conflicts as people were blaming the Alcholi for the LRA. For example, recently the LRA killed some Langi people in Lira District and the Alcholi people were blamed for it.

HOW THIS WAR IS AFFECTING YOUNG PEOPLE



"They came very early in the morning. I was already up and had gone outside. I was just looking around. Then I saw them – and they saw me. They yelled, "Come here, come here right now." My mother came rushing out of the house and they shot at her. She ran back in.

So I went over to where they were because they already had my brother. They were beating him. The soldiers had several boys. They said, "Who, who wants to be with us? Who will be our soldier?"

I said, "Me, me I want to." Because I was afraid that they would kill me if I didn't say that. I was in the bush with the soldiers for a year and a half."

1. Many young people have been abducted.

2. *"There are many problems in the family. Parents are not able to care for their children or support their children because there is so much poverty."*

3. Night commuters suffer from many security problems.

"There can be many dangers on the roads for the night commuters. Girls can forget to be careful, to think about what might happen to them."

4. The rebels kill many of the young people they abduct.

"Life in the bush is full of looting, killing and some other things that are not normal. When you are ambushed or attacked by the army, the rebels put the children in front. These are the ones who have been abducted. So when the government troops are shooting, they are shooting directly at the children."

"When you carry heavy loads, you must continue going just like that as if you are not a human being. When you complain that you are tired, they say, "Let this man rest." What they mean by resting is killing you."

5. Many young people have lost their parents and relatives.

"When I returned home [after being with the rebels] I was hoping so much to see my parents. But when I returned home I found that my Daddy had died while I was in the bush. And my home, where my home was, is all bushy now."

6. Youth can be discouraged and fear about their future.

7. Many young people have had their future ruined. This is because of lack of education and also because many have been abducted by the LRA or forced to join the forces and become child soldiers.

8. Lucidness is a problem for former child soldiers.



9. Many child soldiers find it hard to settle back into the community.

“Even after I escaped I still had fear. I didn’t want to sit with other people. I kept remembering times in the bush. I would worry about my friends who were still there.”

“[After escaping] I don’t feel as happy as I thought I would. They call me a wild man behind my back. People don’t want to be with me, they don’t trust me. I know that I should never show anger, that I always need to be calm. But sometimes I don’t feel this way. I feel sad and also angry that I am being treated this way.”

10. Girls have special difficulties.

“We are supposed to be the most protected, more protected than boys. In fact, we are the most vulnerable. There are many who are outcasts. If a girl has a child but isn’t married she has no identity and her child will have none either.”

“As girls coming back from the bush we often hear our neighbours whispering about us. They say, “See that girl who was with the rebels. She is a killer. She killed people and see there she also has a LRA baby, LRA children too. The boys come back without children. It is harder for girls. Because people will say things to you and that thing will live with you. It stays in your heart.”

WHAT IS BEING DONE



HUMANITARIAN RELIEF AND SOCIAL ASSISTANCE

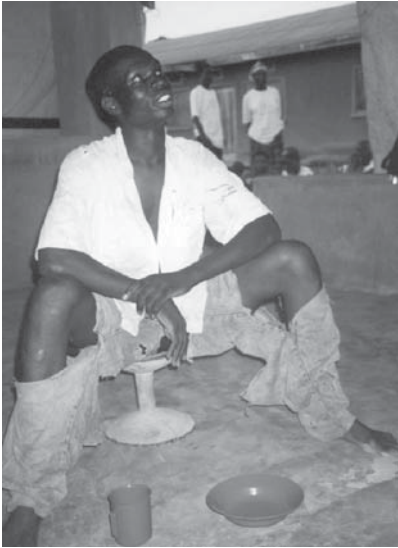
1. There is some increase in humanitarian support. Through the NGOs there is relief provided for displaced people in the camps who cannot provide for themselves. Various humanitarian agencies are providing help in times of emergencies. There are provisions for medical care – for example, care for children when they come out of the bush. Many have problems with their legs, their legs are swollen or infected from so much marching in the bush.
2. Despite the fact that the government has failed to rescue the situation, it has given some help. It is still helping to protect civilians in the camps and to provide protection for people traveling on the roads.
3. There have been attempts to provide schooling in the IDP camps. The centres helping returnees (World Vision Centre, GUSCO) try to find money for school fees so they can go back to school.
4. GUSCO, World Vision and the Amnesty Commission give support to child soldiers (returnees) so they can return in harmony to their homes.
5. We are trying to build up and maintain the infrastructures in the community to help for the resettlement after the war.

POLITICAL ACTION/PEACEBUILDING

1. Political leaders are showing more concern.
2. Some effort to have a dialogue with the rebels is being made.

YOUTH PARTICIPATION

1. Youth are beginning to have a voice in various political, community, and developmental meetings.
2. Some youth have had the chance to speak on the radio media about their concerns.
3. Through the district councils there is a youth representative to present our concerns on issues such as politics, economics and social issues. This is all the way up to the Parliament.
4. Several youth groups are forming to provide assistance for young people. For example, in Gulu, Northern Uganda there are three CAP youth groups.



CAP Play: domestic Life

“ OUR MAIN OBJECTIVE IS TO BRING PEACE AND RECONCILIATION BETWEEN THOSE WHO’RE IN THE BUSH AND THOSE WHO ARE AT HOME. WE DECIDED IT IS THE CHILDREN WHO KNOW THEIR OWN PROBLEMS, RATHER THAN THE ELDERS. SO WE WANTED TO MAKE A CALL FOR PEACE.”

1) *A high school drama group:* The high school drama group includes a mixture of former child soldiers and students. This group has produced a play about life with the LRA. This play, which calls for reconciliation, has been performed to many villages, schools and IDP camps.

“ Our play addresses issues that are central to prospects for peace. We are using drama because it is easier to act what is taking place. We bring out the reality of things in Northern Uganda - we change the script to keep up to date.”

“For me [as a former child soldier] it comforts me. When I am not acting I feel that I am alone. But when I am acting, I feel at least I’m among my friends so I feel relieved.”

“Mothers and fathers usually cry, they shed tears because they see the way their sons are killed or abducted.”

“People in the audience often say that they wish the President could see our play. Is there any way he could see this play? Because if he did, maybe he would try harder for peace.”

2) *A child rights group based in an IDP camp:* This youth group had organized a number of activities to provide constructive alternatives for young people living inside the limitations of camp life. They have an active dance, sport and drama group and are developing a garden cooperative.

Their skits focus on camp life, particularly the high level of civil violence and drunkenness. In a humorous way the skits show effect this behaviour has on children and youth. The audience is asked to discuss these issues.

3) *A Child Mothers’ Group:* This is a peer support group for girls who have been with the LRA. Until recently, the girls have focused only on their immediate needs for support. However, they have now elected an executive and have plans to do public education work in the schools to increase people’s understanding of their experiences. A high priority for the child mothers’ group is to ensure that their children do not suffer from discrimination.



CAP Play: LRA Raid

WHERE ARE THE GAPS?

HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE

1. The military manpower is not enough to protect the people.
2. Lack of infrastructure in the IDP camps.
3. Poor health facilities.
4. Recruitment and abduction of children soldiers continues and has risen.
5. Roads and transport are inadequate.
6. There are not many recreational activities for youth to develop their abilities.
7. Regional and community relationships which results in few economic opportunities or income generating activities.
8. Inadequate schools or education support for children.
9. Inadequate support for HIV/AIDS clients.
10. Inadequate support for orphans.

YOUTH:

“Young people have been both the victims and the unwilling participants in this war.

Youth can have many positive roles to speed up the restoration of peace in our country.

Youth have suffered the most because they are the ones who were abducted.

We should have a strong role in talking about peace.

However, when it comes to our roundtable discussions on peacebuilding, young people are often not represented.

Youth want to be involved in these peace talks.

We have a lot of bright ideas but the adults are not listening.”

THERE ARE LAWS THAT ARE NOT BEING ENFORCED: LAWS AGAINST THE RECRUITMENT OF CHILD SOLDIERS AND LAWS TO PROTECT PEOPLE'S BASIC HUMAN RIGHTS.

POLITICAL/PEACEBUILDING

1. There seems to be a lack of commitment to seek peace from the Government. It doesn't seem like the peace process is fully supported by them. For example, some of the personnel can say bad words about the rebels, destroying possibilities for reconciliation.
2. We worry that there is a lack of action and transparency by the Government of Uganda. The Government seems to be slow in taking decisions to capture rebels or to stop the situation in Northern Uganda. Worst of all, some have used the conflict for financial gain rather than to initiate peace in our country.
3. The Political Leaders seem to care mostly during election campaigns.
4. There is a lack of unity amongst the Acholi leaders, differences in political views.
5. There is commitment by some political leaders, especially those from the North, though their mandate is limited by the government.
6. People are not fully aware of the amount of conflict in Northern Uganda. More publicity needs to be done all over the world.
7. The rebel (LRA) side hasn't demonstrated much commitment to peace or reconciliation.

ARE THERE LAWS THAT ARE NOT BEING ENFORCED?

1. Yes, there are laws that are not being enforced: Laws against the recruitment of child soldiers and laws to protect people's basic human rights.
2. Yes. But there are also other laws that are being enforced because of the war and these laws can reduce people's ability to participate in their society and to defend their rights.
3. Decisions are made but, in most cases, not followed-up. The politics in Uganda hinders implementation of these decisions. Also, some decisions have consequences. For instance, the decision to keep people in camps hinders their participation and involvement in many activities. We think it would be better if people were guarded in their villages by Local Defense Units (LDUs).

RECOMMENDATIONS

RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY

1. The International Community should advocate for the rights of children and provide relevant support to ensure that these rights are protected. The International Community should help reduce abuse of human rights.
2. The International Community should help with the peace talks. Attempts for peace talks (amongst religious, local councils, Members of Parliament etc.) have been interrupted. When they arrange to meet in Uganda it always fails.

There needs to be a better collaboration, better process. Perhaps the peace talks should take place outside the country. Maybe they would function better there and it would not cause suffering of local citizens.

3. World leaders should ensure that rebel collaborators are arrested. Some people are making a good business from this war.
4. The Superpowers should intervene and remove the LRA leader Joseph Kony from the Bush. Why do people help the children in Iraq but not those in Northern Uganda?
5. World leaders should promote the livelihood of children who are at risk. Children are the future generation – they need help so that they develop well.
6. Both conflicting parties should face the International Courts for atrocities. Both parties have engaged child soldiers in this war. Therefore we are concerned and the world leaders should focus on this.
7. More publicity about our situation needs to be done all over the world. People are not fully aware of the amount of conflict in Northern Uganda.

8. **The International Community should intervene to**

- Establish adequate security
- Encourage dialogue with the rebels
- Find ways to stop the recruitment of child soldiers by the rebels, the army and the militias
- Provide relief support for people in the community
- Establish arms embargos on governments aiding the rebels
- Assist in the reconciliation between conflicting tribes
- Support peace talks between the two main conflicting parties (rebels and Ugandan Government). The international community can help ensure that there is transparency.
- Ensure that laws protecting human rights are enforced

“WE NEED TO RELY ON INTERNATIONAL SUPPORT. OTHERWISE OUR GENERATION MAY NOT DREAM OF A CONSTRUCTIVE FUTURE.”

RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE GOVERNMENT OF UGANDA

1. The Government should surrender some power to achieve peace. It should seek international support for this.
2. The Government should cease its relationships with rebels in neighbouring countries (eg. SPLA) and uproot rebel groups inside Uganda.
3. People should be allowed to go back and settle in their villages instead of being placed in camps.
4. The Amnesty Commission should exercise its duties intensely.
5. The Government should seek international support
6. **The Government should:**
 - Encourage dialogue with the rebels.
 - Provide adequate security for people in the North.
 - Improve and pave roads so that transportation is possible
 - Develop the economy of the North and help establish income generating activities for vulnerable groups.
 - Discourage the recruitment of child soldiers.
 - Ensure that the laws are enforced.
 - Provide more support to orphans
 - Provide more support to HIV/AIDS clients
 - Strengthen regional/community relationships so that economic opportunities develop and the social status of the North improves.
 - Improve health and education and provide more opportunities for children's education.



Cap Youth visiting IDPcamp

RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE LOCAL COMMUNITY

1. The business sector should employ more youth to divert their interest from armed conflict. They should provide youth with loans to encourage them in income generating activities.
2. The community needs to get organized and to make plans to go forward.
3. People in the community need to organize themselves as a sign of reconciliation.
4. Rebels should be allowed to surrender and forget about the atrocities they committed. They should be able to re-unite with the community.
5. We need to develop a process for reconciliation and forgiveness.
“ Many people have done wrong things. In South Africa they went through Peace and Reconciliation. It was good. People were given amnesty if they spoke the truth about what they did. You have to ask for forgiveness first and then we can think about the future.”
6. Youth should have a role in peacebuilding and a responsibility to help ensure that this peace continues.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS



CAP is a South-based coalition and movement of young people involved in peacebuilding in countries where there is a war or war has recently ended. It includes youth-only organizations, churches, international NGOs and community based agencies who are committed to the active participation of children/youth in peacebuilding and the realization of their rights.

CAP members include youth from Angola , Burma/Thailand, Cambodia, Colombia, Guatemala, Northern Uganda and the Philippines. CAP's work involves local youth-generated peace initiatives; regional training and international advocacy.

CAP is sponsored by DCI-Canada and funded by the Canadian International Development Agency.

All members are required to demonstrate their commitment to peacebuilding, non-violence and reconciliation. A primary objective is to show other young people that there are alternatives to the violence of war. Just as important is to persuade decision makers to include youth in peacebuilding work and to ensure that young people's rights are included in all peace negotiations.

In Northern Uganda, CAP works with the World Vision Centre based in Gulu. WV has had a long and strong commitment to young people in this region.