



The Survey of War Affected Youth

RESEARCH & PROGRAMS FOR YOUTH IN ARMED CONFLICT IN UGANDA

RESEARCH BRIEF: MAKING REINTEGRATION WORK FOR YOUTH IN NORTHERN UGANDA

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What is SWAY?

SWAY is a research program in northern Uganda dedicated to understanding the scale and nature of war violence, the effects of war on youth, and the evaluation of programs to recover, reintegrate, and develop after conflict.

Read more about SWAY on p.2

In this *Research Brief*:

- The reintegration of youth returning from abduction by the LRA.

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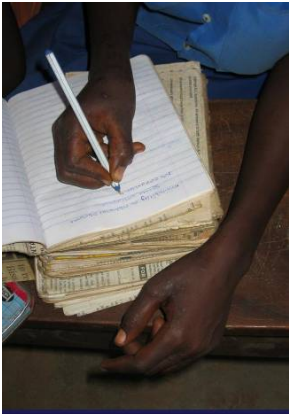
Making reintegration work for youth in northern Uganda

Findings from two phases of the Survey of War Affected Youth

New survey data on war-affected youth suggest that past approaches and programs are insufficient to meet the needs of youth newly returning from the Lord's Resistance **Army** (LRA) as well as those who have already returned. First, for the majority of returning youth, accelerated education, secondary school support, and livelihoods assistance are most needed, but remain in short supply. Government and NGO programs in these areas are still too small scale, and reinsertion packages provide only partial (and potentially problematic) assistance. Second, for the small but important minority of returnees who return with war injuries or to family discord, educational and economic support is secondary in importance to medical treatment and conflict mediation. Yet almost no specialized assistance is available for these cases.

The findings and conclusions put forward in this briefing note do not support an expansion of programs targeted specifically towards formerly abducted youth. Rather, the evidence supports the opposing view—targeting of formerly abducted youth is likely to be unsuccessful in reducing vulnerability, in addressing needs and in improving long-term reintegration. The principal reason is that abduction status is a crude and unreliable predictor of need; large numbers non-abducted youth exhibit serious educational, economic, social and health challenges, while significant numbers of abductees perform quite well relative to their peers. Moreover, targeting based on abduction experiences also carries the risk of stigmatization. Finally, targeting of reinsertion assistance based on possession of an Amnesty Certificate is problematic because, as our evidence suggests, the vast majority of abducted youth have not passed through the formal systems of reception centers or reported to the Amnesty Commission.

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Ultimately, the evidence points to an expansion of programs that are more targeted to youth with the most serious educational, economic, psychosocial, and health challenges. Such programs would not need to target former abductees in specific, but could target based on self-selecting criteria and easily identifiable needs, which we detail below.

In particular, the evidence argues for a dramatic scaling-up of programs focused on enabling secondary school transitions, adult literacy, and livelihoods. Education gaps are particularly serious for young women, and great care should be taken to ensure that women are adequately and appropriately served by new programs.

The evidence also argues for the development and expansion of targeted and specialized mental health programs, conflict resolution services, and treatment for serious illnesses and war wounds. Current funding and capacity for such programs is extremely limited.

Our experience and evidence suggests that any reinsertion packages for youth returning from the LRA should be introduced in tandem with larger programs of support for *all* youth. Furthermore, if cash disbursements are paid in the reinsertion packages, it seems crucial that they be redesigned to minimize the risks of stigmatization, misuse, and theft. Moreover, it seems important that we use this opportunity to carefully monitor and evaluate the benefits and risks associated with such cash transfers.

Finally, the evidence suggests that, in most respects, the challenges faced by women and girls in northern Uganda are at least as great as that of males. Moreover, in certain areas—such as literacy, the secondary school transition, the psychosocial impacts of violence, the incidence of domestic violence, and family conflicts upon return—women and girls are more likely to experience difficulties. Given past challenges in achieving gender mainstreaming and gender equality in policies and programs surrounding war affected youth, a fund and or specific programming that includes a focus on the needs and vulnerabilities particular to women and girls could serve a necessary step in achieving the objective of equitable needs-based targeting and assistance.

The Survey of War Affected Youth

The Survey of War Affected Youth, or SWAY, is a research program designed to promote evidence-based programming for youth in northern Uganda. The Government of Uganda (GoU), international donors, UN agencies, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) will make key strategic decisions over the coming months with respect to reinsertion and reintegration assistance for youth returning from the LRA and for implementation of the Peace, Recovery and Development Plan (PRDP) for northern Uganda. The purpose of this research brief is to inform decision making within these policies and processes, especially the prioritization of funding, new programs and the general approach to targeting assistance.

SWAY combines in-depth ethnographic work with large-scale surveys. The SWAY field team surveyed more than 1,000 Acholi households and 741 young men in 2005 and 2006, and 619 young women in 2007, in eight sub-counties of Kitgum and Pader. ¹ By gathering data on youth living in the sub-counties *before* the escalation of hostilities in 1996, the study is able to understand the plight of youth who migrated, died, or did not return from abduction. The data provide a representative and accurate accounting of the eight sub-counties they represent, and provide a strong indication of levels of well-being and vulnerability across the region. The study was designed to facilitate accurate and minimally-biased comparisons of sub-groups of youth with in a region—males to females, formerly abducted to non-abducted, orphans versus non-orphans, and so forth—and we believe that these results and comparisons can be generalized to the larger Acholi region.

¹ The data and methodology for the survey of males is discussed in the Phase I report by J. Annan, C. Blattman and R. Horton (at www.sway-uganda.org) and the data on females will be discussed in detail in a forthcoming Phase II report by J. Annan, C. Blattman, K. Carlson and D. Mazurana in December 2007. Survey instruments are available at www.sway-uganda.org.

Past and present programming for youth formerly associated with the LRA

Assistance to formerly abducted youth in northern Uganda has taken two main forms: reinsertion assistance, and longer-term reintegration and development services.

The primary instruments of reinsertion have been interim care (reception centers), Amnesty, and reinsertion packages—all targeted directly at returnees who report to a reception center or to the Amnesty Commission.

- The primary focus of the interim care and reception process has included: (i) access to basic health services; (ii) basic counseling (mostly of an informational and advice-giving nature, sometimes with spiritual support); (iii) family tracing and reunification; and (iv) broad-based, community sensitization measures.
- Reception centers have offered very limited follow-up care, with incomplete investigation of cases, and small and only occasional assistance for welcoming and forgiveness ceremonies, education, health, vocational training, food, or shelter.
- Since 2006, the Amnesty Commission has retroactively paid out reinsertion packages to holders of an Amnesty Certificate.² The package includes household items, agricultural tools, seeds and an unconditional cash payment. To date, there is no national reintegration program for returnees to enter into, so within the reinsertion package, there is no assistance with managing the money given, opening bank accounts, or small business training.

To date, the Amnesty program has not been followed or bolstered by a national reintegration program. Extensive government and NGO assistance, however, have been targeted directly or indirectly at self-reported formerly abducted persons.

- The bulk of assistance for returnees comes from government programs (e.g., NUSAF) or NGO programs directed at displaced and vulnerable persons in general (and sometimes at abducted youth specifically). Common interventions include vocational training, cash and assistance in starting small enterprises, and psychosocial care.
- These programs are not necessarily directed at returnees alone, but formerly abducted persons are disproportionately targeted by aid agencies.

Key findings from SWAY

For the majority of returning youth, the most pressing needs are education and livelihoods support. However, current programs have provided only modest support in these areas for all youth, including but not limited to the formerly abducted.

- The largest and most prevalent impact of abduction appears to have been upon education—abducted youth miss out on schooling, largely due to their time away. The impact is largest among long-term abductees, male and female, who attain one to two fewer grades on average than non-abducted youth and (especially among males) are more than twice as likely to be illiterate.
- The education of women who return from the LRA with children is even more severely affected. Unlike other returnees these young mothers almost never go back to school upon return, in large part because of child care responsibilities.
- Assistance for those who are the least educated and illiterate is quite modest, unfortunately. Much of the government and NGO focus has been upon the primary school system and vocational training programs.³ Best practices programs—secondary school scholarships, accelerated adult education, child care (including feeding) for the children of students—are extremely rare and serve only a small fraction of the under-educated population, including former abductees.
- We also see a substantial economic gap, especially between male returnees and their non-abducted peers. As a consequence of lost education and work experience, male abductees are also less than half as likely to be engaged in a skilled trade or a business as their non-abducted male peers, and hence earn about a third lower wages.
- We do not see a similar gap with women, however, in part because the economic opportunities available to women are more limited and seem to require fewer skills.

² Eligibility criteria for an Amnesty Certificate include: (a) Ugandan citizenship; (b) age of 12 years or older at time of return; and (c) have fought against the Government of Uganda. Conventionally, a length test (of three months or more) has been applied to LRA abductees, although this is not a formal part of the Amnesty Act.

³ Vocational training programs are of surprisingly unproven value given the amount of funding they receive. To better understand the effectiveness of vocational training, members of the SWAY team are presently working with the Ugandan government to experimentally evaluate a vocational training program for 9,000 youth across 15 northern districts.

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Health services and psychosocial support for the most severely affected youth have been grossly inadequate, leaving a core group of highly-affected youth without the attention they require. For these acutely-affected youth, treatment is among their most pressing concerns.

- At least 3 percent of female and 9 percent of male returnees report serious war injuries that prevent them from performing basic tasks such as walking and running, working in their fields, or even standing up with ease. Chest and back injuries from carrying heavy loads are most common, followed by shrapnel in the body—for instance, 2 percent of males reported metal or bullets still in their torso or limbs. Unfortunately, few (if any) programs for war injuries exist outside of reception centers and programs for land mine victims.
- The figures above suggest that thousands of returnees have not received adequate medical care, and are in urgent need of specialized assistance. Moreover, those abducted longer than one year report more than double the rate of injuries—a rate that we might expect to be mirrored in those yet to return from the bush.
- A small percentage of youth are also experiencing frequent nightmares, lack of concentration, insomnia, irritation, and isolation. These symptoms are often related to their traumatic past, current daily stressors, and family relationships. For this small percentage whose symptoms impact their daily functioning, targeted mental health services (other than spiritual and traditional ceremonies) have not been available.

Large numbers of youth report difficulties with their families and communities when they first return home from abduction, yet for most these problems lessen over time. Relatively few youth report conflicts within families and communities today, although for these youth such conflicts are extremely important and painful. Such conflicts may have been mitigated but not solved by blanket and broad-based sensitization programs. Like severe injuries, estrangement from one's family is painful and pressing, and few targeted services are available for these youth.

- Relatively few (3 percent of males and 7 percent of females) report any current problems of acceptance by their families. Communities appear to have come to accept the majority of former abductees. Less than 10 percent of males and females report still having some problem with neighbors or community members.
- Such acceptance was not immediate, however. For instance, 39 percent of females reported that they were called names by their community when they returned, 35 percent said they felt the community was afraid of them, and 5 percent report that they own family was physically aggressive with them. Current reports by females of such experiences were dramatically lower, however—7 percent for insults, 1 percent for community fear, and 0.4 percent reporting family aggression.



- Women and girls who returned from the LRA with children were most likely to report problems with their families and communities upon return, although the vast majority now say they are accepted into their families. An important minority of these young women do seem to have more persistent problems with family and community members than other female returnees, however. For instance, 14 percent of these females report that their families sometimes say hurtful things to them—far more than that reported by other long-term abductees. The reasons for such challenges seem to vary from case to case, however, suggesting that targeted conflict resolution or mediation may be the most appropriate intervention.
- Where youth do report problems with families and communities, these problems often relate to specific conflicts with particular neighbors or family members rather than difficulties with the entire family or community. Of course, these conflicts are no less painful

to these youth simply because they are with just a few rather than all community members. The important point is that such specific conflicts are not easily addressed by the majority of community sensitization interventions, which typically take a blanket, one-size-fits-all approach. Moreover, our study finds that conflict resolution, psychological support, and family counseling services are seldom targeted at the most severely affected.

Formerly abducted youth do not exhibit higher tendencies for violent behavior than their non-abducted counterparts and the likelihood of formerly abducted youth rejoining armed conflict seems to be extremely low. Rather, formerly abducted males are actually *more* likely to be active and productive citizens and leaders.

- A common rationale for targeting aid to former combatants is the need to build peace by breaking the link between the armed group and the individual and thus discouraging the return to violence. Yet the evidence in northern Uganda suggests that the risk of these youth returning to violence is very low.
- The likelihood that a Ugandan abductee will return to the bush is, in our opinion, very small. For instance, while half of those abducted three months or more (both male and female) report having felt allegiance to Kony and the LRA at some time, virtually none currently do. The youth commonly reported in interviews that they reached a point where, having previously been convinced by propaganda and fear, they now realize that the fight is either misdirected or futile. Furthermore, to our knowledge, virtually no abductees have ever returned voluntarily to the bush and the LRA following an escape. The absence of any past recidivism may be explained by the automatic separation of abductees from their leaders when they escape or are rescued. In any group return process it will be crucial to separate returned abductees from their commanders and captors as soon as possible
- Returned Ugandan youth show no greater propensity for violence than never-abducted youth. Former abductees (even long-abducted ones who committed the most violence) are no more likely to be in fights or altercations, and do not report more hostile or aggressive attitudes.
- Indeed, formerly abducted youth (particularly males) show a greater propensity towards engaged citizenry, including voting at higher rates and being more involved with community leadership than their non-abducted counterparts. Formerly abducted females also show higher rates of pro-social behavior than their non-abducted counterparts.

The proportion of abducted youth that have been served by the formal reception and reinsertion services has likely been overestimated. In fact, the *majority* of abductees did not pass through a reception center and only a third of eligible youth have reported to the Amnesty Commission.

- Large numbers of former abductees did not pass through the formal return system. In the eight Acholi sub-counties we surveyed, only one in three abducted youth passed through a reception center. If we only consider those who were abducted three months or longer, still only two thirds of males and just half of females passed through a reception center. These figures suggest that the estimated number of abductees based off reception center records drastically understates the true scale of abduction.⁴
- The receipt of reinsertion packages (and legal immunity for any crimes) is tied to reporting for and receiving an Amnesty Certificate. As of early 2006, however, only one third of eligible reporters said that they received a Certificate. Likewise, as of early 2007, only a third of eligible females had applied, even though they had recently witnessed the handout of sizeable cash payments as part of the reinsertion package.⁵
- These low application rates may indicate that receipt of a Certificate is seen as not worthwhile, is too difficult, or is to be avoided due to stigmatization. Of course, if these explanations are untrue, it may indicate that tens of thousands of youth still desire a Certificate, and may come to see themselves as entitled to the same reinsertion package as their peers.
- The evidence also suggests that the Amnesty application process is poorly understood. To illustrate, a third of eligible females without a Certificate stated that they either did not know about the program or where to go to get a Certificate. Another third of eligible females reported (erroneously) that they were not eligible because they returned too early, or

⁴ In the SWAY Phase I report, we estimate more than 66,000 abductions of any length, after accounting for those who died, have not yet returned, and who did not pass through a reception center. A Berkeley-Tulane team extrapolating from reception center records estimate a similarly high figure—over 80,000.

⁵ The proportions do not change appreciably if we use alternative eligibility criteria, such as a minimum of four months abducted. See footnote 3 for an overview of eligibility criteria.

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because they did not pass through a reception center. This fact suggests that, if understanding of the program improves over time, more youth may come forward to request Amnesty and a reinsertion package.

A central finding of SWAY is that all youth are struggling and suffering due to war and displacement, and that abduction itself, or specific abduction experiences, are poor predictors of vulnerability or types of need relative to other measures available. The criteria for reinsertion packages and other forms of NGO assistance likely serve important political, development, and reintegration functions. Nevertheless, we should be conscious that these packages do not typically target the most vulnerable and underprivileged youth. Moreover, targeting based primarily on abduction runs the risk of stigmatization.



- While the impacts of abduction are real and cannot be ignored, a number of the reintegration gaps are small in comparison to the overall impacts of war on all youth.
- One reason is that Ugandan youth and their families have proven tremendously resilient. For instance, many abducted youth, especially young men, currently report relatively low numbers and frequency of distress symptoms, in spite of the tremendous amounts of violence most experienced. Looking at those who were abducted more than three months, 64 percent of males and 40 percent of females who returned before the age of 21 went back to school (usually primary). The majority of returnees, even long term ones, report no insults, fear or hostility upon return. But it is worth noting, as we do above, that it is only a slim majority—for the substantial numbers who do return to insults or aggression, acceptance comes, but only with time.
- Another reason that the gaps between abducted and non-abducted youth are not large is that *all* youth have been adversely affected by the war, and the levels of health, education, income and employment for all youth in the war affected north are terrible. All youth face tremendous difficulties reaching secondary school. Many young adults—abducted or not—are illiterate because they never had a chance to attend primary school. Employment levels for all young men and women are abysmally low (most work just one week in a month) and yield meager incomes (on average about 50 to 75 cents a day). These gaps are reflective of problems faced by all youth in the war affected region.
- Abduction is also an inconsistent predictor of need because, among abducted youth, there is tremendous variation in war experiences and capabilities, generating equal variation in outcomes. Many, perhaps the majority, of formerly abducted youth are functioning at least as well as their non-abducted peers. Certain experiences are indeed associated with big reintegration gaps—extremely long abductions, or returning with children to support, for instance—but even these experiences do not consistently predict poor well-being or identify specific vulnerabilities.
- As a consequence, having been through a reception center or being eligible for an Amnesty Certificate is too coarse a targeting mechanism to: (1) identify the most severely affected returnees and never-abducted youth, and (2) address what these youth need. Importantly, many non-abducted youth have experienced great losses and significant violence, as have those abducted less than the (original) three month cut-off for qualifying for Amnesty reinsertion packages.
- Observation suggests that the targeting of abductees for aid is highly resented by other war affected groups. If true, such aid runs the risk of increasing resentment and stigmatization rather than promoting reintegration. Our field work uncovered evidence of stigmatization associated with Amnesty reinsertion packets. To illustrate, in 2006, during announcement of return packet recipients over the radio, focus groups were almost impossible to conduct due to village resentment over the packet payments. One group of informants even voiced an interest in burning down an Amnesty Commission office should one be opened locally.

Implications for program design and targeting

Two mechanisms will fund and frame national policy and programs for specific war affected populations in northern Uganda, including but not limited to former abductees and members of the LRA. The first is the Disarmament, Demobilization and

Reintegration (DDR) agreement and subsequent programming that results from the Juba peace talks. Second, it is likely that all national reintegration activities will take place within the Peace, Development and Recovery Plan (PDRP) for northern Uganda. In what follows we frame our findings and analyses in the context of these two mechanisms.

Recommendations for reinsertion

For the special but important case of youth still within the LRA, a three-stage program of return assistance would be consistent with the guiding priorities suggested by SWAY evidence.

- A first stage would be to identify the specific needs for each returnee, including the key aspects of education, health, livelihoods, and family mediation that have been detailed in this briefing note. Such assistance would include more and better medical treatment than has been given to those who previously passed through reintegration centers or the Amnesty program, including the presence of war surgeons and assistance for reproductive health. It would also include more extensive family reintegration services, in particular follow-up of problem cases and mediation assistance to these families. These services could be funded by and provided within DDR mechanisms.
- A second stage would provide a reinsertion package that provides key items and goods, or the means to purchase these items or goods through cash installments. Again, this assistance would likely be a part of DDR mechanisms. The evidence from SWAY does not weigh directly on the merits and risks of in-kind versus cash assistance, of the conditionality or support best provided along with any cash payments, or of the provision of reinsertion packages. However, our observations from the field suggest that caution should be taken with such programs, especially in the case of children, and we suggest below a number of potential steps that could mitigate some of the most acute risks. We also suggest that careful monitoring and evaluation of the impact of such programs is imperative given the evident uncertainty of the program.
- A third stage would be assistance based on specific unmet needs and would be provided by services based within the larger community (and targeted by need, not abduction status). Our evidence is most applicable to the design and targeting of this broader reintegration and developmental assistance (and is the focus of the following section). Such services would be based within the larger PDRP.

A disbursement package to newly returning members of the LRA (containing some combination of goods, services, and cash) appears highly likely. If cash payments are to be made, we recommend increasing the focus on maximizing their effectiveness, minimizing the risks, and evaluating what works, why, and for whom.

- Currently, reinsertion packages from the Amnesty Commission include a cash payment that is designed to be used for consumption needs (e.g. food, household goods, and so forth) upon return. Officially, the payment is intended to be a basis for reinsertion, not full reintegration.
- There appear to be risks associated with these transfers that (to our knowledge) have not been addressed. Poor decision-making is only one of the concerns. Our field team also observed examples of female cash recipients losing decision-making power over funds to husbands, brothers and fathers. Our field team further encountered angry and threatening reactions to the payment of Amnesty packages in 2006, mostly among non-abducted community members. These experiences raise concerns regarding misuse, misdirection, and stigmatization. The uncertainty of such impacts should put the minimization of such risks at the forefront of discussion of reinsertion program design and implementation.
- Our evidence also suggests that two-thirds of formerly abducted youth have not applied for Amnesty or packages. The data show that the Amnesty Commission's requirement that an eligible recipient must have been subjected to abduction by the LRA for a minimum of three months is not based on needs (as short term abductees can exhibit serious difficulties in health, well being, education and livelihood opportunities) but rather more on the political landscape that saw an upsurge in abduction with the military of-



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fensive Operation Iron Fist. If Amnesty packages are to continue to be offered to newly returning youth, the already returned youth (up to twice the number of current Amnesty recipients) may also come forward to request assistance. This consideration should be taken into account in implementation and communication of any future reinsertion programs.

- Finally, the emphasis on the consumption of unconditional transfers may represent a missed opportunity. In the absence of a comprehensive and large-scale reintegration program, cash payments made within reinsertion packages may represent a returnee's largest source of cash for some time to come. Our field interviews with recipients and non-recipients suggest that the package is commonly perceived as support for livelihoods and social reintegration. This perception is probably well-founded. Evidence in the SWAY Phase I report (along with new evidence in the forthcoming Phase II report) show that access to cash is one of the most crucial but rare inputs for new income-generating activities (and hence for economic reintegration). Even the modest amounts of cash associated with the reinsertion package are more than sufficient for generating livelihood opportunities. In this context, even small interventions—facilitation, business skills training, or self-help group formation—could have significant impacts on the effectiveness of these funds.

Females currently with the LRA may require gender-specific interventions and attention, most especially the opportunity and assistance to leave their captor husbands if they so choose.

- Mass departure from the LRA of both genders is unprecedented and unfamiliar. Of forced wives who have already returned, the primary exit route from the LRA was escape (83 percent) followed by outside rescue (10 percent).
- Former forced wives who have returned in the past generally want no further association with their former captor husbands. No forced wives reported that they currently live with their captor husbands and nearly all former forced wives reported that it is best that they remain separated.
- Since forced wives remain with the LRA in the bush to date, it should be anticipated that some forced wives—and perhaps the bulk—will want to separate from their captor husbands, increasing the need for empowerment strategies and opportunities for separation immediately upon their return. Offering viable economic alternatives will be essential for these women, particularly those with children, to feel they are not dependent on their captor husbands.

Recommendations for reintegration support

Programs should be targeted to youth with the most serious educational, economic, psychosocial, and health challenges. Beyond basic reinsertion support, abduction status should not be a special category, determinant, or precondition of aid.

- An abduction experience or Amnesty eligibility is a coarse measure of needs and vulnerability given the heterogeneity of impacts of abduction. The Amnesty criterion is especially problematic, given that most eligible abductees do not appear to have applied for this status and that some aspects of the eligibility criteria reflect more political priorities than needs of returnees. For the same reasons, a one-size-fits-all approach to services does little to meet the actual needs of returnees. Moreover, a near exclusive focus on returnees leaves out many thousands of never abducted who have suffered terrible impacts due to the war.
- Programs that target based on specific and identifiable needs—literacy, secondary or adult education, child care and feeding during school hours, serious war wounds treatment, conflict mediation with neighbors, family reunification, severe emotional distress analysis and counsel, and livelihood development—are likely to be less stigmatizing as well as more inclusive, self-selecting, and effective than targeting based on categories such as “formerly abducted” or “orphans”.
- Furthermore, such programs are less likely to create resentment or stigmatization as the provision of literacy for the illiterate and surgery for those with war wounds targets specific needs and encourages self-selection. Moreover, based on our findings, we anticipate that those formerly abducted are likely to have a greater propensity towards having the needs identified above and as such will self-select into such programs at a higher proportion than the non-abducted.

Support for formal and non-formal education programming for all youth should be dramatically scaled-up, with special attention to adult literacy and the secondary school transition, especially among young women.

- Support for secondary school fees is crucial, especially for young women. Large regional bursary programs could be targeted both on vulnerability and also on merit. Such bursary programs would provide much-needed funds to a secondary school system in need of rebuilding and retraining.

- Where vocational training opportunities are offered, they should be offered alongside the option of secondary schooling so as to provide choice.
- Alternative education should be accelerated and age-appropriate, offered in afternoons or evenings, with opportunities for child care for young mothers. Where such programs exist, they are seldom accelerated, are based on primary school (rather than adult) curricula, and serve a very small number of people.
- In all cases, child care (potentially including meals) for the children of students should be included to enable young mothers the opportunity to participate.
- Several NGOs are attempting to cater to women who returned from long abductions by the LRA (often with children) by providing education and training combined with child care (e.g. CCF in Pader and Food for the Hungry in Kitgum). These programs appear to be very positive for the individual women and their children. Such programs are limited, however, because they do not work collaboratively with the families and communities where the women experienced problems (and where they will return following the programs). These education programs should be continued, replicated, and expanded, but with more community links, conflict mediation and resolution, and access for non-abducted youth.

There is an urgent need to provide treatment opportunities for care of serious injuries and illnesses, including war wounds.

- There is a need for several war surgeons, or small team of such professionals, to remove metal and bullets from the bodies of youth (primarily, but not solely, formerly abducted males). Perhaps one to two thousand such cases exist.
- Treatment for serious back and chest injuries (from carrying heavy loads) should also be investigated, given its prevalence in both male and female youth.

Mental health programs should specifically target the minority whose distress is interfering with daily functioning. Such programs would not need to discriminate according to abduction experience, but by default would include a disproportionate number of abductees and those who experienced the most violence.

- To date, there seems to have been a lot of investment at community level to train lay persons with skills to visit and provide social support. The impact seems to have been generally positive.
- There is an urgent need, however, for an appropriate referral system for those with severe psychological or social problems. Presently there are a small number of trained counselors who can provide more in-depth individual or family counseling for those highly affected, as well as a handful of specialists trained in psychiatric care. Clear systems of referral and capacity building for this higher level of care are needed.

Targeted interventions are needed for the minority that continues to experience conflicts and family dislocation.

- Family based interventions are needed for those with family problems—both the abducted and non-abducted. Because the majority of formerly abducted youth—both males and females—are eventually accepted into their family when they return, those who have problems could be identified, the conflicts explored and supportive family interventions conducted. This does not need to be separate from family-based programs for non-abducted youth with family discord. Interventions could include problem solving and mediating around core issues, which seem to include resource sharing and alcohol abuse.
- Efforts should focus on fostering local conflict resolution and mediation mechanisms that can be targeted to those experiencing family and community conflicts—again, whether the youth were abducted or not. Conflicts reduced over time among those who have already returned, but more targeted conflict resolution programs could likely (1) speed and smooth that painful transition, and (2) help resolve the most persistent cases.
- Several community institutions—including LC1s, LC3s, camp commandants, local police, clan elders, women leaders, and community volunteer counselors—have shown themselves to be effective in preventing and responding to aggression, insults, and other conflict. The capacity and accountability of these institutions should be broadened and strengthened. At the same time, we should recognize that high levels of domestic violence have persisted under (and potentially been reinforced by) government and clan leaders, and so strengthening of these institutions should go hand in hand with efforts to reduce the acceptability of gender-based violence.

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- With the completion of the peace process, many parents who have been hoping that their children will return will realize their children are dead, and may exhibit and act upon strong feelings of resentment toward those who do return.⁶ Some current conflicts observed in our study had just such a source. Community-based mechanisms of helping these parents cope with their grief and loss will thus be important.

Finally, policies and programs coming out of the Juba DDR process and the PRDP, and implemented by national agencies, donor governments, and national and international NGOs must be conscious of addressing the needs and rights of females.

- Females have a history of being underserved by DDR and development programs alike. The above evidence suggests that, in most respects, the challenges faced by women and girls in northern Uganda are at least as great as that of males. Moreover, in certain areas—such as literacy, the secondary school transition, the psychosocial impacts of violence, the incidence of domestic violence, and family conflicts upon return—women and girls are clearly more likely to experience difficulties.
- As a result, we should expect a truly needs-based targeting strategy to result in at least equal and in several categories a disproportionately greater level of assistance to women and girls. Failure to observe such a pattern will be a first indication that females are not being adequately served.
- Consequently, a fund or specific programming that includes a focus on the needs and vulnerabilities particular to women and girls could serve a necessary step in achieving the objective of equitable needs-based targeting and assistance.



⁶ We estimate that 15 to 20 percent of male abductees and 4 to 5 percent of female abductees have died due to circumstances surrounding their abduction and presence within the LRA.