



## **With or Without Peace: Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration in Northern Uganda**

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### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

From July to October 2007, Quaker Peace and Social Witness (QPSW) and the Justice and Reconciliation Project (JRP) conducted qualitative research with ex-LRA fighters on the subject of peer support and reintegration in northern Uganda (report forthcoming 2008). These in-depth discussions revealed a number of pressing insights on how to conduct a peaceful and successful DDR process.

With or without a concluded peace agreement in Juba, ex-LRA soldiers predict that further violence and unrest may continue in the region if long-standing grievances are not addressed. Hidden arms caches, unexploded ordinances, and landmines scattered throughout the countryside present a largely unmitigated security threat.

LRA rebels do not represent a group of people with a uniform 'bush' experience. Before returning to civilian life, these individuals occupy differing roles and ranks. Yet Amnesty certificates do not differentiate between a senior commander and a thirteen-year-old boy, kidnapped and forcefully indoctrinated. Young mothers return to their communities with children born of rape, often only to be rejected by their families and receive inadequate or inappropriate support. Of the individuals with whom we spoke, many acknowledged the need to refine official reintegration strategies.

Respondents frequently complained of the injustices meted out by proponents of the 'culture of forgiveness,' citing government-sponsored preferential treatment given to demobilized senior commanders in contrast to the stigma and poverty

faced by returning former 'wives' and mothers, foot soldiers, and other formerly-abducted persons. While prominent former commanders live in relatively privileged circumstances in the towns, formerly-abducted combatants expressed to us their unrealised desires to go to school or receive vocational training. Their inability to sustain meagre livelihoods, in contrast to their former tormentors, causes much resentment and bitterness. These returnees were acutely aware of the politicization of the present DDR process.

While the level of stigma towards returnees has reduced over time, a sudden and large influx of new returnees has the power to upset these social gains. An immediate, sustained and comprehensive sensitization campaign must be put in place in order to increase community acceptance and reduce fears. Our informants emphasized their willingness and special ability to assist in the confidence-building and reintegration of ex-combatants. They expressed universal discouragement with the public tones of animosity struck by the negotiating parties in Juba. Nearly all respondents implied that true peace cannot be achieved without nation-wide reconciliation.

Finally, in the unfortunate case that warfare resumes, some former LRA combatants stated that they would have little choice but to re-join the ranks of the LRA or enlist with the UPDF in order to avoid being killed by the rebels. These actions would be taken purely as strategies for self-preservation, and not in allegiance to either the UPDF or the LRA. This fact highlights what is at stake in Juba today; with or without peace, an effective DDR strategy is needed.

## INTRODUCTION

Since President Yoweri Museveni captured state power in 1986, the Government of Uganda has faced 22 armed insurgencies. Yet to date, no formal disarmament, demobilization or reintegration processes (DDR) – outside of the 2001 Amnesty process – have been developed in that country. This *Field Note* suggests the historic peace process currently underway in South Sudan (the Juba Talks) between the Lord's Resistance Army's (LRA) and the Government of Uganda presents a critical new opportunity to ensure that a comprehensive DDR process is developed and implemented towards the realization of a just and sustainable peace.

With over 1.8 million persons forcibly displaced from their homes, tens of thousands of abductions of children and uncounted numbers of civilians massacred, mutilated, raped and injured, the conflict in northern Uganda is also arguably one of the most devastating in that country. As such, the parties to the Juba Talks have identified five major areas for negotiation: 1. Cessation of Hostilities; 2. Comprehensive Solutions; 3. Accountability and Reconciliation; 4. DDR; and, 5. Formal Ceasefire. With the signing of the third and fifth agreement in February 2008, the parties to the talks are now poised to discuss DDR.

Should a final peace agreement be achieved, the DDR process will facilitate the return of an unknown number of persons who currently remain in the bush. While small-scale by the standards of similar exercises undertaken recently by the international community, even the lowest estimates of remaining LRA numbers will require a more complex and taxing DDR exercise than any seen to date in Uganda. This is particularly so given that other informal processes, such as those in West Nile, failed to address livelihood, social and gender aspects of the DDR process. Disgruntled ex-soldiers were bitter that their senior commanders received patronage posts in Government, which they were left to their own devices.

Yet a first analysis of the LRA and Government position papers on DDR suggest that lessons of the past are not being well-integrated into their discussions. In this *Field Note*, Quaker Peace and Social Witness (QPSW) and the Justice and Reconciliation Project (JRP) present a rigorous interpretation of discussions with hundreds of

former LRA about the Juba Talks and prospects for sustainable DDR. We argue that the next agreement on DDR must take into account questions of justice, reconciliation, gender and livelihood of foot soldiers.

## METHODS

Between the months of July and October of 2007, JRP and QPSW engaged in a collaborative research project to study the impact of peer support groups on reintegration amongst former LRA soldiers in northern Uganda.<sup>1</sup> Apart from this focus on peer support, what also emerged from the data was an overabundance of returnee comments directly related to concerns over present and future DDR programmes of the region. These results were significant, and so form the basis of this *Field Note*.

Research was carried out in 19 locations, including IDP camps, return sites, urban and semi-urban areas in the Amuru, Gulu, Kitgum and Pader districts of northern Uganda. Sites were chosen to balance geographical spread and areas with reportedly high rates of abduction. In total, 376 individuals were consulted through in-depth one-on-one interviews and focus groups consisting of members of peer support groups, the majority of whom were former LRA fighters.<sup>2</sup> The selection of respondents was purposive, guided by the identification of certain individuals through the connections of researchers and local leaders.

Several key questions were put to focus groups and individuals, including the following:

- 'Do you know about the Juba Peace Talks?'
- 'What do you think will happen if they succeed?'
- 'What do you think will happen if they fail?'
- 'Do men and women have different experiences upon return?'

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<sup>1</sup> The results of this study will be released in a separate report, forthcoming in early 2008.

<sup>2</sup> Nineteen respondents were interviewed individually and 358 respondents (approximately equal numbers of men and women) were interviewed in 24 focus group discussions. Interviews were carried out by both local and foreign researchers. Local researchers conducted interviews in Acholi Luo, and a professional translator assisted the foreign researcher.

- 'Do junior and senior commanders have different experiences upon return?'

The data was then coded according to discernable patterns and themes, analyzed and cross-checked by research officers.

## DISARMAMENT

Weapons not taken out of circulation present a grave security threat to any transitional society. Since 2002 a proportion of LRA returnees have been through an *ad hoc* de-briefing process during which they are held by the UPDF and are expected to hand over weapons and provide intelligence. However, there is no comprehensive firearms collection system in place.

According to respondents, a substantial number of arms are not being turned over. Not only have returnees hidden large numbers of individual weapons, but the LRA is reported to have more sizeable arms stashes across the region. Respondents also claimed that unexploded ordnances (UXOs), including landmines, are scattered and hidden throughout the northern Ugandan countryside. These testimonies corroborate evidence collected by the Small Arms Survey in 2006, which claims that northern Uganda and southern Sudan are awash with small arms caches and that 'not only are the weapons currently used by the LRA serviceable, but many of those cached are also likely to be so for many years to come.'<sup>3</sup>

Throughout the interviews several reasons were given for holding onto or hiding arms. Some returnees retained their firearms due to fear and uncertainty about the situation they would encounter upon return. Said one, 'when we were in captivity, we were told that "when you return you will be killed."' So lots of people hid guns, and most have kept them hidden. There are even some nearby.'<sup>4</sup>

Many mentioned the possibility of hidden guns being used for restocking and rearming the LRA, remobilisation of combatants, or even launching new rebellions. As one focus group member

<sup>3</sup> Small Arms Survey, *Fuelling Fear: The Lord's Resistance Army and Small Arms (Chapter 11 Summary)*, 2006, p. 1-2.

<sup>4</sup> Female focus group discussion participant, 7 September 2007.

suggested, 'If I have a gun and another from Namokora has one, and another from somewhere else, we could form another rebellion. There might be more conflict.'<sup>5</sup> Some respondents feared hidden weapons could lead to criminal activities. This fear is well-founded, as is illustrated by the cases of Onen Kamdulu, a former LRA commander currently under arrest for armed robbery, and the criminal group *boo kec*, thought to be comprised of demobilized persons and disaffected camp residents with access to guns. 'Some people can use these guns for personal conflict. They can find them in the bush and use them,' said one.<sup>6</sup>

## DEMOBILIZATION

In November 2007, the Survey of War Affected Youth observed that '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.'<sup>7</sup> Our respondents concurred that there is little sympathy for the LRA cause. However, they did caution that should the conflict resume, their strongest option would be to rejoin the LRA or the UPDF. As one youth stated, '[If] the peace talks fail, the gun will be my best friend, no matter what side'.<sup>8</sup>

Ex-LRA combatants expressed that a failed ceasefire would entail near-certain re-abduction and death. 'As a re-abducted [person] your only fate will be death,' worried one person, while another predicted that '[Persons] that will be re-abducted by the LRA will be killed on spot because you will have betrayed them by escaping and revealing their secrets to the UPDF.'<sup>9</sup> Remobilization is not a desire, but a pro-active strategy of self-protection. As one young woman

<sup>5</sup> Male focus group discussion participant, 6 September 2007.

<sup>6</sup> Male focus group discussion participant, 20 September, 2007.

<sup>7</sup> SWAY. Research Brief: Making Reintegration Work for Youth in Northern Uganda. November, 2007.

<sup>8</sup> Male focus group discussion participant, 6 September 2007.

<sup>9</sup> Female focus group discussion participant, 20 September 2007 and male focus group discussion participant, 31 August 2007.

told us, 'Death is painful so it's better to be holding a gun.'<sup>10</sup>

In contrast, respondents often implied that even in the event of a concluded peace agreement with the LRA, violence and insecurity will continue to plague northern Uganda if the root causes of the conflict are not addressed. Northern Uganda will remain armed and dangerous no matter the names of belligerent groups. 'We have to learn from what we have gone through. Even if we see peace return but don't learn from that experience of conflict, conflict shall still come back. Both parties should humble themselves, recognise and respect human life,' one young female ex-combatant said.<sup>11</sup>

Permanent demobilization is heavily dependent on the conditions of return to civilian life: some argued former LRA joined UPDF or local militias because it was the only viable means of earning an income. To this end, the current Government of Uganda position paper on DDR at the Juba Talks does not pay sufficient attention to the challenge of demobilizing local militias, nor what economic alternatives UPDF soldiers will have should their services no longer be required in the event of peace.

Yet the experience of the war, in which LRA numbers are thought to have at no time have exceeded 10,000 combatants and non-combatants spread over a vast geographical area, shows that relatively small numbers can do untold harm. '[We will see the] emergence of new rebel groups - those opposed to both UPDF and LRA will form new groups,' claimed one young man we interviewed.<sup>12</sup>

## REINTEGRATION

The disarmament and demobilization challenges confronting Uganda would not be as great if the process of reintegration was improved.

Reintegration has been an ongoing process in northern Uganda involving a number of actors ranging from local civil society-based

organizations, national non-governmental organizations (NGOs), international NGOs, and religious and cultural leaders. The Amnesty Act and Commission helped to formalise what was otherwise the *ad hoc* approaches of these organizations. The recent Government Peace Recovery and Development Plan (PRDP) also contains a crucial policy framework upon which to consider some of the issues of re-integration of ex-combatants and the general community of northern Uganda. A clause in the PRDP states that 'reintegration will focus on provision of resettlement packages to ex-combatants, facilitating re-unification with their families and the community.'<sup>13</sup>

However, there are three areas that need strengthening if the Juba agreement is to be sustainable. These include: improved livelihood alternatives; strengthening reconciliation and justice strategies; and, attention to gender equality issues.

### Livelihoods and Education

*'Our kids have reached school-going age, but we cannot afford the fees and materials. I started a business as a vendor but it didn't survive because I had no financial backing.'*<sup>14</sup>

Life in a northern Ugandan displaced persons camp presents challenges to all its residents. Its inhabitants suffer with endemic poverty, lack basic healthcare or sanitary facilities, rely on food aid, and endure ongoing trauma related to the war. For many formerly abducted persons, these challenges are exacerbated by missed education and narrow economic opportunities.<sup>15</sup> Many return 'home' to find that their families are deceased, unwilling or unable to care for their needs. Young women and girls, and sometimes young men, face the added challenge of caring for their own children born in the bush.

Most of those we spoke to considered themselves to be economically disadvantaged relative to the non-abducted communities in which they live. Interrupted education was a common theme, with

<sup>10</sup> Female focus group discussion participant, 31 August 2007.

<sup>11</sup> Female focus group discussion participant, 24 September 2007.

<sup>12</sup> Female focus group discussion participant, 2 October 2007.

<sup>13</sup> Government of Uganda, *Peace Recovery and Development Plan*, 2008.

<sup>14</sup> Female focus group discussion participant, 4 October 2007.

<sup>15</sup> See also Kennedy Amone-p'Olak, 'Coping with Life in Rebel Captivity and the Challenge of Reintegrating Formerly Abducted Boys in Northern Uganda.' *Journal of Refugee Studies*, Vol. 20, No. 4, 2007, p. 654.

some who had been in school prior to abduction finding themselves orphans on return from the bush. Many respondents noted the extreme difficulties faced by child-headed households. 'Since we were abducted when we were young we returned to find our parents had died. You're a [returnee], you're a child, but you find yourself at the head of a family,'<sup>16</sup> one young mother explained to us.

In addition, and despite relatively better camp security, ex-LRA are fearful of conducting business outside of camp boundaries. This reduces their economic opportunities significantly, as farming cannot be sustained without field access.

Physical injury sustained in the bush is a common problem affecting the ability of those who returned from the bush to make a living. This was in most cases physical debilitation resulting from excessive labour or physical abuse whilst in captivity. 'While in captivity we were beaten, there was so much suffering. Now I'm weak, I'm not capable of hard labour. I can't dig so I have no way of earning money. I rely on the World Food Programme,' lamented one young man.<sup>17</sup>

In the case of Sierra Leone, John Williamson concluded that the future stability of that country 'may likely depend on whether the large majority of youth will find access into the nexus of education, skills training, and employment...Ensuring the access of former child soldiers to these opportunities was a critical part of the reintegration phase of the country's DDR process.'<sup>18</sup> Uganda needs to keep such experiences in mind when it comes to reintegration assistance.

Yet to date, very few of those we spoke to were in receipt of assistance from vocational-training programmes, health services or continuing education. Child-headed households were unsupported, rape victims unassisted, and none of our respondents had benefited from educational bursaries.

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<sup>16</sup> Female focus group discussion participant, 2 October 2007.

<sup>17</sup> Male focus group discussion participant, 31 August 2007.

<sup>18</sup> John Williamson, 'The disarmament, demobilization and reintegration of child soldiers: social and psychological transformation in Sierra Leone,' *Intervention* 2006, Vol. 4, No. 3, p. 187.

## Reconciliation and Justice

Focus group discussions with former combatants revealed that reconciliation and justice are a requirement of a sustainable DDR strategy. This was highlighted at the individual, community and national level.

At the individual level, almost all former combatants indicated to us that they had difficulties coming to terms with atrocities they had committed or witnessed in the bush. A number of studies have discussed the phenomenon of *cen*, which can be described as the haunting by spirits of the dead that have been killed or otherwise disturbed.<sup>19</sup> Symptoms of *cen* can be extremely psychologically and physically debilitating and painful, and the manifestation of behaviour associated with *cen* is highly stigmatised by communities throughout Acholiland. While some have resorted to cleansing ceremonies or prayers to deal with traumatic experiences, the need to reconcile with what has happened to them and what they have been forced to do to others remains. To this end, support to individuals undergoing spiritual and psychological distress needs to be significantly strengthened.

At a community level, respondents indicated that stigma and resentment continued to manifest in the context of return, indicting the need for community reconciliation strategies. The population of northern Uganda have been reported as remarkably willing to forgive and receive ex-LRA combatants to the communities. While some people choose to forgive out of a sense of moral duty, they may distrust returnees on suspicion of past crimes and/or perceived spiritual corruption (*cen*). Returnees also reported being the targets of considerable envy, both because of their Amnesty packages or of the fact that they have survived and returned, unlike others' relatives.

'There are a lot of abusive and obscene words directed at FAPs [formerly abducted persons].

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<sup>19</sup> See Erin K. Baines, 'The Haunting of Alice: Local Approaches to Justice and Reconciliation in Northern Uganda,' *International Journal of Transitional Justice*, Vol. 1, No. 1, March 2007; Justice and Reconciliation Project, *Alice's Story: Cultural and Spiritual Dimensions of Reconciliation*, Field Note 1, February 2006; Thomas Harlacher, Francis Xavier Okot, Caroline Aloyo Obonyo, Mychelle Balthazard, and Ronald Atkinson, *Traditional Ways of Coping in Acholi: Cultural provisions for reconciliation and healing from war* (Kampala: Thomas Harlacher and Caritas Gulu Archdiocese, 2006).

They call us all sorts of names: we are killers, we are *dwog paco* [returnees],<sup>20</sup> said one person describing his life upon return. Another described his experience: 'When we returned we wanted to associate with the community but we were mostly turned down. We heard obscenities, and some were even denied food by their own relatives. Because of words from the community we tended to reflect and feel like fighting the person who insulted us. But there were some who came and counselled us. They told us to forget.'<sup>21</sup>

Many people we spoke with admitted that stigma has reduced in the years since their return. This was attributed to the impact of their own work in sensitizing and building good relations with the community, especially via support groups. 'At the onset I found it difficult, people stigmatized and name called. I write songs to sensitize the community to these things...[Now] stigma is dying away- it used to be much more of a problem, but now not so much,'<sup>22</sup> said one man active in peer support networking.

Not all agree that stigma has reduced. 'Stigma is still going on. Community members find FAPs on their own and say abusive things. Some FAPs are totally mad; while in captivity they were beaten and left for dead so their heads are not okay. We have one here who is always shivering. I cannot finish because these people I cannot help them - they need proper help,' pleaded one young group leader.<sup>23</sup>

Whatever the case, a massive influx of LRA from Garamba in the event of a peace accord may upset any positive strides made in community-returnee relations. Juba stakeholders are well-positioned at this juncture to ensure the timely and sensitive delivery of information campaigns. One young woman complained that while she was told that community relations had improved over the years, her reception did not live up to her expectations: 'By the time we returned people said there was no stigma, but we've been stigmatized a lot within this community. We as FAPs...in situations with community members, like at the borehole, people come and insult us saying we

<sup>20</sup> Male focus group discussion participant, 6 September 2007.

<sup>21</sup> Male focus group discussion participant, 31 August 2007.

<sup>22</sup> Interview with peer support group leader, 30 August 2007.

<sup>23</sup> Interview with peer support group leader, 19 September 2007.

have *cen* or a disturbed head.'<sup>24</sup> Reconciliation strategies at the community level, therefore, will be vital to improving relations and promoting sustainable DDR.

Finally, at the national level, respondents identified the need to change current DDR practices which perpetuated inequalities and injustices. In the words of one:

Senior commanders are favoured by the government because their names are heard from captivity. Junior commanders return and are nobodies. Seniors are given the opportunity to voice their opinions, they are interviewed. Juniors are ignored.<sup>25</sup>

On 20 January 2008, Sunday Otto and Richard Odong Kau were both granted full amnesty by Justice Peter Onega. Although the Amnesty Act 2000 states that any one individual may only receive amnesty once, Onega granted the two men their second Amnesty certificates under the Act's 'exceptional circumstance' clause.<sup>26</sup> This instance is a glaring example of the frustrations expressed by our respondents: for the sake of political expediency, the current DDR process appears to reward chief perpetrators and neglects those who have suffered the most. 'The government fears that sometimes they may decide to go back to bush life and sometimes they have the connections that puts the government at threat so they are always treated with care,' explained one of our respondents.<sup>27</sup> The result is a growing climate of resentment. If justice is not served, some of the respondents argued, violence in Acholi could continue – with or without a peace agreement.

The Amnesty Act of 2000 formalised the previously standard practice of accepting ex-LRA back into their communities without bringing charges or requiring any form of accountability.

<sup>24</sup>Female focus group discussion participant, 2 October 2007.

<sup>25</sup> Male focus group discussion participant, 7 September 2007.

<sup>26</sup> While previously Onega had stated that only a presidential pardon could enable Otto and Odong Kau's second amnesty, he later reneged and stated that a pardon was not necessary. Charles Ariko, 'Ex-LRA Men Get Amnesty,' *New Vision*. Kampala, 21 January 2008.

<sup>27</sup> Female focus group discussion participant, 24 September 2007.

This policy has had overwhelmingly popular support in Acholiland and was introduced largely in response to lobbying by a broad coalition of Acholi elected, religious and traditional leaders. Unconditional amnesty was justified on the basis that it would help end the conflict by encouraging defection from the LRA, that the overwhelming majority of LRA were forcibly conscripted, and that in many cases they were children.

Historically in Uganda, The NRM Government policy towards senior commanders of rebel movements has been to integrate them into the military or political campaigns. This has also been the case in northern Uganda, where senior commanders of the LRA have been assigned parallel roles in the Ugandan military or as close advisors to military figures. The Government has kept its enemies close, and rewarded them with material wealth, houses, 'wives' (from captivity), land, income-generating projects and salaries. 'Seniors join the UPDF when they return, and get the same rank as they had in the LRA and benefits. This is not so for juniors,' one young respondent put it bluntly.<sup>28</sup> Another commented that 'some senior commanders are favoured by the Government and the community are bitter with them. For example, [ex-LRA-Brigadier Kenneth] Banya has a vehicle which operates on the Gulu-Kitgum road and people refer to the vehicle as blood money.'<sup>29</sup>

In the case of young mothers, with children born out of their rape by these very same senior commanders, this situation is a particularly bitter pill to swallow. In one recent JRP study of young mothers, 94 percent felt no justice has been realized in relation to their experiences.<sup>30</sup>

Senior commanders were seen as being variously respected, feared and hated by communities, and several groups observed that it would be impossible for senior commanders to survive mob justice without the protection of the Government, especially if they returned to their communities. 'Government is protecting senior commanders, but if they were to go and stay among the community,

they would just be killed,' said one former lower-level LRA combatant.<sup>31</sup>

Interestingly, formerly abducted persons told us that injustice has even prevailed at the spiritual level. 'Since they're seniors they find an easy life because even in captivity when there is a battle juniors are sent to fight, to abduct, to carry out brutal killings. Seniors just give the orders. So this makes juniors find hardship when they return home. This is why you see juniors turning mad, but you don't often see seniors turning mad.'<sup>32</sup> It is not the senior commanders who directly kill people: instead they order others to commit the actual murders, and so do not suffer the spiritual or psychological consequences.

A minority of these junior combatants expected either success or failure in Juba to reveal the Amnesty Act and talk of forgiveness and reconciliation as a trick, whereby the Government would round up former LRA fighters to be imprisoned or executed. 'The community says that in case the peace talks fail the FAPs have Amnesty certificates to identify them, so we'll be rounded up by the government and dropped in Karuma Falls where there will be no evidence,' worried one respondent.<sup>33</sup> 'Others say we'll be taken to jail because our Amnesty certificates identify us. This is giving us a lot of fear,' added another.<sup>34</sup>

### Gender and DDR

Past DDR processes in Uganda – formal or informal – have failed to address the different needs of women and men, girls and boys. The forthcoming discussion on DDR in the Juba Peace Talks provides an important opportunity to redress this by designing a gender sensitive strategy. This would recognize the obstacles women and girls face on return:

When I returned, I found a hard life because I came back with two children from captivity. Personally I was a child mother so I had no one to take me up. People used to isolate me and my

<sup>28</sup> Female focus group discussion respondent, 7 September 2007.

<sup>29</sup> Male focus group discussion participant, 20 September 2007.

<sup>30</sup> Justice and Reconciliation Project, *Young Mothers, Marriage and Reintegration: Considerations for the Juba Peace Talks*, September 2006, p. 2.

<sup>31</sup> Male focus group discussion participant, 20 September 2007.

<sup>32</sup> Female focus group discussion participant, 1 October 2007.

<sup>33</sup> Female focus group discussion participant, 2 October 2007.

<sup>34</sup> Female focus group discussion participant, 2 October 2007.

children, they told not to associate with my children because of *cen*. They thought my children were possessed.<sup>35</sup>

Women's vulnerability can be exacerbated by reintegration and reconstruction programmes that fail to specifically target their needs, or that fail to address longstanding discrimination against women.

Young mothers with children born in captivity, especially those who are orphans, are particularly disadvantaged in a number of respects. The possession of children born in the bush identifies the mother as a rape victim in the eyes of the community, which leads to further stigma. The children are also stigmatised, increasing the burden of being a single mother. 'All these things, the psychological trauma, you feel like the community knows what happened to you. And those who come with children make it evident what happened. Men don't have that,'<sup>36</sup> one person told us. To an extent this has been recognised, with a number of projects and funds specifically aimed at 'child mothers'. However, many are not being supported and of those that are, their effectiveness is limited.

Economically, our respondents did not single out women as more disadvantaged than men, except in the context of being child mothers. Traditional land tenure and inheritance passes through the male line, with a woman having access to land by virtue of her husband's land rights. The social stigmatisation of ex-LRA results in both men and women having difficulties finding a partner, and if they do, of being accepted by the partner's family. For women, however, this represents a double economic disadvantage as they cannot access land and are very likely to be responsible for children, unlike single men. In addition, the possession of a 'bush child' often leads to rejection by one's own family.

In a few focus groups, men were identified as also having disadvantages, having fewer domestic skills, and being less likely to receive humanitarian assistance. It was also pointed out that there are some male child-headed households, though we were unable to find more information about how often this occurs.

<sup>35</sup> Female focus group discussion participant, 1 October 2007.

<sup>36</sup> Female focus group discussion participant, 1 October 2007.

Several focus group discussion participants expressed fear of former-LRA commanders attempting to reclaim their 'wives' from the bush against their will, a danger that has emerged in other JRP studies.<sup>37</sup> One young woman told us that while she would welcome peace and the return of all LRA to civilian life, 'It will also bring grief because some are ex-wives of those in Garamba and have become more beautiful than they were in captivity. The husband will be tempted to reclaim them. This may bring conflict.'<sup>38</sup> Indeed, this is likely to be a much more widespread difficulty in the event of mass demobilisation following success in Juba. An earlier JRP study found that 'approximately 59 percent of young mothers have knowledge that their 'bush husbands' are still alive and at large. Ninety seven percent stated that they are uninterested in reuniting with former LRA 'husbands'.<sup>39</sup>

Yet the Government of Uganda has shown a dangerous willingness to tolerate this behaviour, as was demonstrated in the case of ex-LRA-Brigadier Kenneth Banya, who is known to have continued to live with his teenage 'wives' of the bush after his return. In the case of Sierra Leone, DDR was largely successful but for one grave exception: girls were frequently excluded from the process.<sup>40</sup> This was despite the fact that, as in Uganda, many girls were abducted and forced to become 'bush wives'. Uganda should take care not to repeat those mistakes.

Experiences of sexual violence have not ceased upon return from captivity, or with the current cessation of hostilities. Specifically, camps offer little protection to women. Although sexual violence often takes place within the family structure, with main perpetrators known to the survivor, those charged with the defence of camp populations are also often responsible for abuse. In some camps incidences of rape by UPDF soldiers were described as frequent. However, reporting was rare due to fear of reprisals.

The problematic global trend of sexual violence against women in war is reflected in the northern Ugandan conflict. Rape, defilement, forced

<sup>37</sup> Justice and Reconciliation Project, September 2006

<sup>38</sup> Female focus group discussion participant, 2 October 2007.

<sup>39</sup> Justice and Reconciliation Project, September 2006, p. 2.

<sup>40</sup> Williamson 2006, p. 186.



marriage, and forced pregnancy were identified as common experiences of women in our study. Sexual violence was experienced regularly in captivity. It is therefore crucial that a northern Ugandan DDR programme takes women's protection into account.

## CONCLUSIONS

The PRDP and the Juba Talks represent historic opportunities for correcting shortcomings of past approaches to DDR in Uganda. Our findings suggest that with or without peace, a comprehensive DDR approach is necessary to prevent violence from reoccurring.

The threats currently posed by a flawed process of disarmament and demobilization process would be removed if three specific strategies were used to improve the reintegration of ex-combatants. These include:

1. Ensuring that sustainable livelihood and education alternatives are made available for all former combatants, whether ex-LRA, ex-UPDF, or local militia fighters.
2. Ensuring that DDR is connected to the process of reconciliation and justice at the individual, community and national levels. At each level this includes:
  - a. Strengthening existing programmes that facilitate individual healing, such as traditional, religious and social programmes like peer support.
  - b. Creating community-level reconciliation mechanisms that allow those who continue to harbour resentment towards former combatants to redress their grief and pain.
  - c. Creating a national DDR process that is just and equitable, de-politicizing processes which 'reward' those who are most senior and responsible with patronage positions and material wealth.
3. Recognizing the different needs of men, women, girls and boys in the process of DDR, protecting the legal needs of women and girls and developing a strategy to combat sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), including

seeking justice for those who have survived SGBV.

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*Field Notes is a series of reports by the JRP (Gulu District NGO Forum and Liu Institute for Global Issues: this issue was written in collaboration with QPSW). Each issue features a new theme related to justice based on research carried out with war-affected persons in camps. Drawing directly on their experiences and initiatives, results are intended to inform and improve local, national and international policies and programmes on justice and reconciliation.*

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