Against all odds: surviving the war on adolescents

Promoting the Protection and Capacity of Ugandan and Sudanese Adolescents in Northern Uganda

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Abstract

This report presents the findings of a participatory research study conducted with Ugandan and Sudanese refugees in northern Uganda in 2001. Adolescents identified insecurity stemming from armed conflict as their main concern, as well as the combination of displacement, HIV/AIDS, the lack of development and poverty as severe challenges to their survival. Young people shoulder enormous responsibilities for themselves, their families and the community as a whole yet their contributions are not recognised by adults and they are not given a role to play in decision-making. The research was conducted by adolescents themselves and the research methodology as well as reflections on strengths and weaknesses of this approach are presented.
# Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Foreword</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Executive summary</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Findings</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direct Impact of War on Adolescent Protection</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education - Few Go to School</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Little Skills Training or Access to Land</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health and HIV/AIDS</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychological and Social Impact, Including Increased Sexual and Gender-based Violence</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adolescent Participation</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More Explicit Support to Adolescents Needed in Northern Uganda</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adolescents Need Peace</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adolescence and youth: a community in crisis</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An age and a stage of life</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traditional roles under siege</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some solutions</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychosocial: reintegration in an environment of disintegration</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recovery and Reintegration of Former LRA Abductees</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth and violence</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community responses</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenges to overcome</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community groups aid reintegration</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Debate over approaches to reintegration</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religion and ritual</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cooperation with the Uganda and Sudan governments</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recognising the countless other adolescents</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orphans and refugee unaccompanied and separated adolescents</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orphans</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Refugee unaccompanied minors and separated adolescents</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domestic violence and child abuse</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traditional protections for children and adolescents hanging by a thread</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community responses</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adolescent coping and resilience</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Destructive coping skills serve a purpose</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constructive coping skills offer the resources for a stable future</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turning survival skills into leadership</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adolescent researchers in charge: methodology and lessons learned about adolescent participation</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Research Teams</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Selecting the Adolescent Researchers</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Designing, Organizing and Implementing the Research</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experience, Motives and Impact of Participation</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The adolescent researchers
Adolescent Research Participants:
Adults Involved in the Project
Comparing the Youth Coordination Function in the Two Districts
Ongoing Challenges

Recommendations

Notes

Appendices

Appendix 1: Links
Against all odds: surviving the war on adolescents
Against all odds: surviving the war on adolescents
Foreword

From May to July 2001, the Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children conducted a research study on the situation of adolescents in three Districts of northern Uganda: Gulu, Kitgum and Pader. Young people's lives in these areas have been shaped by interrelated armed conflicts that have raged in northern Uganda and across the border in southern Sudan over the last two decades. The principal researchers and the principal respondents were Ugandan and Sudanese adolescents. The results of this collaborative work are presented here. While this report faithfully represents the findings of all of the researchers, unless otherwise attributed, the views expressed here should be considered those of the Women's Commission. Additional reports of the research findings produced solely by the adolescent researchers are available separately from the Women's Commission.

While the findings here focus on circumstances for adolescents in Kitgum, Pader and Gulu Districts, the neighboring Districts of Moyo, Arua, Adjumani, Lira and Apac in the north are facing a similar situation. Recommendations for responding to the situation of adolescents in the region should also apply to these areas. Children and adolescents enduring war in the west of Uganda also require urgent international attention.

This research is the second in a series of four participatory studies with adolescents conducted by the Women's Commission. The first was in Kosovo, the third will be in Sierra Leone, and the fourth in an Asian country to be determined. The studies will provide a comparative look at the experiences of adolescents affected by war and persecution and the international and local responses to their situation. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR's) Guidelines for the Protection and Care of Refugee Children, the United Nations Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement and the Convention on the Rights of the Child are used as guiding principles in this work. Reports and recommendations from these studies will be used for advocacy purposes and by program and policy decision-makers to address concerns raised in each site covered. They will also contribute to wider international efforts to improve services and protection for refugee, internally displaced and other adolescents affected by armed conflict and persecution.

This study in northern Uganda builds on the ongoing advocacy work of the Women's Commission with and for adolescents in the region. In November 1999, a delegation from the Leadership Council for Children and Armed Conflict, a joint initiative of the Women's Commission and the International Rescue Committee (IRC), visited Kitgum to support the needs and rights of war-affected children. The Leadership Council subsequently published Our Children Are Missing, a delegation report on the situation of children and adolescents in one district of northern Uganda. This work has been followed by expanded, intensive advocacy efforts to win the release of the thousands of children abducted by rebel forces, to support programs for formerly abducted children and to help bring peace to the region.

Together with other nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and governments, the Women's Commission supported efforts bringing together leaders of Sudan and Uganda at the International Conference on War-Affected Children in Winnipeg, Canada in September 2000. The Women's Commission has also provided leadership to form the Friends of the War-Affected Children of Northern Uganda, a coalition of NGOs focused on improving the lives of young people caught up in the conflicts and promoting the release of the abducted children.
Executive summary

Dozens of Ugandan and Sudanese adolescents interviewed more than 2,000 adolescents and adults in a Women's Commission-sponsored project in the Acholi Districts of Gulu, Kitgum and Pader in northern Uganda from May to July 2001. They reveal that the insecurity of armed conflict, where adolescents are principal targets for murder, abduction, forced recruitment and sexual enslavement, is their top concern. Adolescents say that a combination of war, massive displacement, HIV/AIDS, lack of development and poverty has created a world of unimaginable misery for young people. Without protection from violence and with little support from adults who do not recognize or respect their rapidly changing role in society, adolescents are shoulderling enormous responsibilities for themselves, their families and the community as a whole. Thousands are orphaned and heading households, and few - especially girls - are able to attend school or find sufficient means to support or protect themselves, as humanitarian assistance falls well short of their needs, and they suffer ongoing abduction and increased domestic and sexual violence. Adolescents are struggling to survive against all odds and too often without even recognizing their own strengths and abilities. They are urgently calling on the international community - especially the Governments of Uganda and Sudan - to act swiftly to lift their burdens and for all combatants to commit to peace.

Findings

Direct Impact of War on Adolescent Protection

Ugandan and Sudanese adolescents in northern Uganda both suffer the effects of conflicts which span the borders of their countries, and they name abduction, murder and insecurity perpetrated by the Ugandan rebel group the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) as their principal fear. Stating only general opposition to the Ugandan government as its cause, in the past 15 years, the LRA (Lord's Resistance Army) has abducted over 11,000 Ugandan and Sudanese adolescents primarily from inside Uganda, but also in southern Sudan, forcing them to become soldiers and commit atrocities against other children, their families and communities. Abducted girls have been raped and sexually enslaved as "wives" by LRA commanders.

Sudanese adolescents have faced double jeopardy, enduring LRA abduction and abduction and forced recruitment by the southern Sudanese rebel group, the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA), which has fought an 18-year civil war and claims to be seeking political autonomy within Sudan. The SPLA (Sudan People's Liberation Army) abducts young people and adults from inside Sudan and Uganda, where some 200,000 Sudanese refugees live. Some Sudanese adolescents also report Ugandan military support of the SPLA and its forced recruitment of under-18 soldiers. They testify to receiving military training at SPLA camps in northern Uganda run by the Ugandan army. Adolescents who manage to survive and escape abduction carry enormous scars - seen and unseen. Many are tormented by the acts of violence they were forced to commit. They return to communities that often fear them and are themselves in turmoil, ill-equipped to support their recovery or protect them from re-abduction.

Only in recent months has the Government of Sudan taken significant steps to end its support for the LRA (Lord's Resistance Army) and to assist with the repatriation of escaped LRA abductees in Sudan to Uganda. The Government of Uganda has committed more troops to northern Uganda, tightened control along the Uganda-Sudan border and taken steps, albeit exceedingly slowly, to negotiate the surrender of LRA commanders with an offer of amnesty. As a result, the LRA has become increasingly divided, but the lives of young people remain wholly insecure. Adolescents and others report that both rebel groups continue abductions, murderous attacks and theft in Uganda and Sudan, with an intensification of LRA attacks in southern Sudan. Young people who have recently escaped the LRA in Uganda report that the pattern of abduction has changed and currently often involves forced labor and shorter-term captivity. While these shifts may provide new pathways to peace, none of them has lessened the insecurity of adolescents and their communities, which goes well beyond physical attack.
Education - Few Go to School

Young people say that northern Uganda is facing an education crisis, requiring an emergency response to get young people back to school and save their communities from further ruin. A system of free Universal Primary Education (UPE) has provided education opportunities to many young people in the north, but most cannot take advantage of them, and drop-out rates are high, especially for girls and orphans in the later years of primary school. Access to secondary school is nearly impossible for all young people, who cannot pay the required school fees, and university is attained by only a small number. Although refugees face similar barriers to education, higher numbers are enrolled in school than IDPs (Internally Displaced Person) due to targeted support from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

Adolescents believe that the effects of physical insecurity bear primary responsibility for preventing them from completing school. Many schools have been destroyed, teachers killed and adolescents abducted directly from schools. Schools are often far from home, dangerous to get to and lacking qualified teachers, classrooms, supplies and equipment. Adolescents also report that, with limited resources, they often have to choose between eating and learning in school and that parents more often send boys to school than girls. Despite the barriers, young people cling to education as a strong source of hope and stability and go to incredible lengths to preserve their right to education.

Little Skills Training or Access to Land

Beyond formal education, most adolescents do not have access to skills training for their livelihood and have few options for meeting the huge economic responsibilities they bear for themselves and their families amid extreme poverty. Acholi society is traditionally agricultural, and all young people said that their communities are suffering economically because they can no longer till their land freely due to insecurity and fear of attack. Crowded into displaced persons camps or in the Achol Pii refugee settlement, adolescents "dig," or farm, as much as possible, but few can earn what they need to be self-sufficient.

Adolescents' nutrition level has dropped, and many go hungry regularly, as World Food Program (WFP) humanitarian food assistance does not bridge the gap and is often delivered late because of insecurity. Girls and boys also report that poverty and lack of opportunity have led to increased girls' prostitution, including with Ugandan soldiers. Adolescents and representatives of humanitarian assistance organizations unanimously agree that their situation will only dramatically improve when they are able to leave the IDP (Internally Displaced Person) camps permanently and return to their ancestral lands to cultivate safely, and when refugees have improved access to land.

Health and HIV/AIDS

All adolescents cite the spread of disease, including HIV/AIDS, lack of reproductive health services and education, malnutrition and sexual and gender-based violence as their main health problems. Although little data on adolescent health in the north exists, adolescents and health workers say that living conditions, especially in overcrowded, unsanitary displaced persons camps, are breeding grounds for diseases and other pestilence. They also suffer from insufficient medical personnel, facilities and supplies.

Young people's vulnerability to contracting sexually transmitted infections (STIs), including HIV/AIDS, and getting pregnant is increased by the conflict. Girls are especially at risk because they are exposed to sexual violence and increasingly pushed into early marriages. The risk to both boys and girls increases as social controls break down, and young people have sex with little knowledge about prevention. Adolescents also underscore the critical health needs of disabled young people, as well as abducted girls and boys, who return home with major health problems. Adolescents say that lasting peace and the dismantling of the IDP camps would dramatically reduce most of their health problems. They also call for additional adolescent-friendly health facilities where their privacy is respected, and for additional doctors, medicines and supplies.
Psychological and Social Impact, Including Increased Sexual and Gender-based Violence

Beyond their physical wounds, adolescents struggle daily to cope with the psychological and social effects of the conflict. Those returning from captivity are frequently haunted and feel deeply ashamed by their experiences, and while most communities are now committed to receiving the formerly abducted young people, many still fear them, making their reintegration very difficult. Former abductees endure constant fear of re-abduction and almost certain death as retribution for escape. Most formerly abducted adolescents ultimately readjust well to their communities with help from family, friends and a number of agencies that reunite them with family and address their medical and psychosocial concerns. Some find relief in traditional cleansing practices. However, many also "act out" and become engaged in negative and anti-social behavior. Formerly abducted young people say they especially need education, a means to a livelihood and community acceptance. Without these, they live in despair and believe some among them who became particularly “addicted” to violence after years in captivity will return to the bush to continue fighting.

Thousands of adolescents have also become orphans, unaccompanied minors or separated from their families and heads of households and are especially vulnerable to all rights abuses experienced by adolescents. The breakdown of traditional customs that secure the protection of children and adolescents has given rise to increased domestic violence, including child abuse and sexual and gender-based violence. Young people report that this violence is worsened by a rise in alcoholism among adult males, adolescent boys and others. Ugandan girls, particularly in IDP camps, say that they are being raped, sexually assaulted and exploited principally by UPDF (Ugandan People's Defense Forces) soldiers, but also by other adult males and adolescents boys. Refugees also report rape of girls by adult males and adolescent boys.

Despite these hardships, young people cope industriously with their circumstances, forming activity, income-generation and support groups and caring for one another. Yet, their initiatives receive little support from adults, and they find few opportunities to develop their talents or share their ideas with the wider community.

Adolescent Participation

This research revealed the strong desire and capacity of young people to play important roles in making assessments and in decision-making processes concerning issues that affect them and their communities. They can and should play a strong role in advocating on their own behalf, implementing programs, monitoring their protection and providing leadership for constructive societal change.

Most adolescents, however, report rarely, if ever, being asked their opinions let alone being allowed to participate substantively in community decision-making or activities. Few feel they have any real control over their lives. Traditional authority structures that require young people's unquestioned respect for elders have not adapted to the challenges facing young people or embraced the benefits adolescents offer their communities. Adolescents call for increased dialog between adults and youth to create better understanding to improve the situation of young people.

More Explicit Support to Adolescents Needed in Northern Uganda

Although about US$100 million in international funds were dedicated to northern Uganda between 1996 and 2000, some donor commitments, including for humanitarian food assistance, were not met, and adolescents believe local corruption and insecurity curtails the relief. Young people and adults said that while the Ugandan government has sophisticated youth policies and officers that are knowledgeable about the range of issues facing youth people in the north, there are wide gaps between policy, knowledge and action.

Apart from support for reintegration programs assisting several thousand former abductees, very little assistance has explicitly addressed the overall dire situation of adolescents, including hundreds of thousands...
of orphans, IDPs and refugees. IDPs in particular have suffered without support from an international agency dedicated to intervene comprehensively on their behalf with the Ugandan government, which is failing in its duty to protect and care for this population. At the same time, shrinking resources for refugees is taking a heavy toll on programs to support the protection of refugee children, adolescents and women. Few NGOs, governmental organizations and other groups have incorporated youth issues or participation into their programs, missing out on opportunities to address their problems and develop their talents and leadership. Young people call on the international community and the Government of Uganda to ensure relief assistance reaches them and to create pathways for long-term economic development that involve them directly.

Adolescents Need Peace

The sheer magnitude of adolescents’ strength surviving in the bush, finding food and getting to school without adult support is what provides hope for a better future in northern Uganda and a peaceful Uganda as a whole. To make this hope reality, young people's strengths must increasingly be transformed into constructive leadership. Young people themselves must begin to recognize the potential of their survival skills to increase youth-led organizing and activism to address their concerns and to further constructive, democratic aims. Ultimately, however, adolescents say they need peace in northern Uganda and southern Sudan and an end to untenable dependency on humanitarian assistance. Peace and security requires the strong and steadfast political will of the Governments of Uganda and Sudan, and it also requires concrete investments in economic development in the north. The international community must join hands and hearts with the adolescents in the region to rally for peace and end the suffering of young people and all civilians in the region.
Introduction

It is just over 200 kilometers from Uganda's bustling international capital of Kampala to the northern Districts of Gulu, Kitgum and Pader, where this study took place.

Travel from south to north appears not much different from that in many countries in Africa. Crowded city streets with indoor shops turn into long stretches of deteriorating road punctuated by noisy and colorful roadside markets. Traffic jams give way to streams of bicycles laden with harvested grass and sorghum. The dirt road is a walkway where women and girls proceed step by step, erect in the blazing sun, supporting baskets of fruit on their heads and infants on their backs. The landscape is an abundance of brilliant greens and orange, of rich arable land and of seeming tranquility. The only signs of conflict are a few military checkpoints along the way and a soldier here and there, resting under a tree, his rifle across his knees.

But the tranquility is only a mirage, and the road, flanked by tall grass and trees, is a blind burrow through treacherous forest. For 15 years, the region has been the scene of some of the worst violence committed against children and adolescents in the world. Roads, schools, villages and families are falling apart. It is a society in the process of disintegration.

If you are under 20 and living here, you have known virtually nothing else your whole life but what it is like to live in a community enduring armed conflict - conflict in which you are a prime target.

You learn from adults the lessons of traditional social norms, but you have little chance to practice them. Unprotected and left to fend for yourself, you are instead a master at coping with the realities of this world you have inherited, a world with troubles you don't deserve.

Every day, you peer into the tall surrounding brush knowing that the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) is out there, somewhere, not too far away, and at any moment may suddenly appear to abduct, rape, torture or murder you. Worse, you think of your friends who have already been taken. Regular news about the LRA’s whereabouts and latest atrocities travels outward from its epicenter, and countless stories about being in the wrong place at the wrong time fill your head, making you wonder, "Am I next?" The Ugandan Army, the UPDF (Ugandan People's Defense Forces), is supposed to make you safe, but the fighting continues, and you wonder sometimes what they are actually doing. "How could it be so hard to round up these small groups of rebels?" Other times you know exactly what they are doing because they are robbing or raping you.

Thousands of you live in extremely crowded, sprawling and unsanitary displaced persons camps, "for your own safety," you are told. But there you regularly go hungry, contract diseases and are not actually very safe. The camps get attacked, too.

You see plenty of rich land before you, but if you choose to plow it and grow crops or swim in the streams, you may be attacked. You are told you have free, universal primary education, but you cannot go to school. It is unsafe; you might be abducted there; your teachers have been killed; there is not enough money for supplies; the school is too far away; boys must go first and you'll just get pregnant there. Secondary school is out of the question, the fees are too high; you must feed your stomachs before your minds.

You would turn to your parents, but they might not be there any more - many parents have died of Human Immunodeficiency Virus/Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (HIV/AIDS) or been murdered by the LRA. Even if they are there, they cannot protect or take care of you. You must take care of your siblings, but you cannot get a job, a loan or any training. You are pushed into marriage, when you are barely 12 - how else will you eat? All most adults will say is: "Youth don't respect us anymore." You are one of many thousands abducted, or one of far fewer who made it home. You return to a community that's barely surviving, and you are often mistrusted because you were on the other side.

If you are a refugee from southern Sudan, you fled attacks by the Sudanese government forces, abduction by
the SPLA (Sudan People's Liberation Army) and deprivation at home. You are supposed to be safe here. But now you must also fear the LRA, and some of the Ugandan nationals, too, who hate you for also needing the land. You are not out of reach of the SPLA, which circles freely around you, attempting to reel you in. And you are hungry, always hungry.

Even your personalities are a contradiction. Shouldn't you be hardened to the world after all this? Don't you hate the ground you walk on? No, you dance traditional and new dances, you laugh with your friends, you care about your communities and you look for solutions. You care for your brothers and sisters, pay for their schooling and try to form livelihood cooperatives with your friends. You hold onto some of the lessons of kindness of generations past. You don't talk of revenge, but of peace - when you can bring yourselves to hope. You worry for those among you who are living on the streets, turning to drugs or prostitution. There are so few to help you. You deserve much better.

The lives of these young people are described in the pages ahead. They are revealed through focus groups, surveys and individual interviews designed and carried out by adolescents. The findings of this research are organized into sections, but the concerns are three-dimensional, overlapping and interconnected in the minds and experiences of the adolescents who own this report. Massive insecurity - physical, psychological, economic, social, spiritual - is the force that binds them together in a rhythm of brutal contradiction for young people.

Both Ugandan and Sudanese adolescents feel - and are - betrayed by virtually everyone involved in this conflict, including families, communities, governments, UPDF soldiers, the SPLA and the international community. Young people realize that they are pawns in a much larger conflict and offer intelligent and constructive solutions for building a better world. At the same time, they don't often recognize their own capacity to bring change or how they can do it.

Young people in northern Uganda desperately need and have a right to support. They call for an end to the conflicts in their countries and a commitment to ending poverty through development and education, including support for the most vulnerable. They want to help, but no one is asking them. Their sentiments are mirrored in this report. The findings of the focus groups and case studies conducted by adolescent researchers with over 2,000 adolescents and adults in their communities, combined with additional Women's Commission research, flesh out the details of the effects of armed conflict on adolescents - on their roles in society and virtually every aspect of their lives. The results of their survey of adolescents' top concerns outline their broad consensus that insecurity is at the root of all other concerns. Lessons learned about adolescent participation, information on international, national and local responses to adolescents' concerns, and prospects for peace are also considered, calling for increased attention to adolescents' concerns and support for their leadership.
Adolescence and youth: a community in crisis

Adolescent researchers asked their peers and adults to discuss the question: "Who are adolescents or youth, and what is their role in Uganda today?" Strong responses reflected a keen awareness of young people undergoing changes at an accelerated rate and an awareness of a community in crisis, where traditional values and culture are not sufficiently recognizing or responding to the dilemma of young people.

An age and a stage of life

The new National Youth Policy of Uganda defines youth as "all young persons, female and male, aged 12 to 30 years." The policy also states that youth should not be regarded as a homogenous group fitting into age brackets, but rather as a group involved in a process of change. Uganda's Principal Youth Officer, Kyateka Mondo, told the Women's Commission that determining the age range for the policy was a "contentious issue" and that "people in the localities define youth with very different scenarios in mind."

Both adolescent and adult responses conveyed the importance of defined roles that supercede chronological ages. They used, for example, a variety of words in their local languages to describe people at different stages of life according to clan traditions. Both Ugandan and Sudanese Acholi adolescents, for example, offered a series of words - *latin*, *bulu*, *ladongo*, *luditu* and *rwot* - to correspond with the English for child, adolescent/youth, adult, elder and chief. Sudanese refugees from the Latuka and Didinga ethnic groups provided two other sets of corresponding words in their own languages. They explained that their definitions related to age, level of maturity and an individual’s standing within the community. The following are young people's descriptions of what they believe adolescence and youth to be, (some of which are contradictory):

Age: Adolescents are between the ages of 10 and 18. Some said that girls are adolescents from ages 13 to 17 but are women as soon as they marry, even at 12 or 13. Youth are considered to be from age 15 to 30 and distinct from adolescents in that they are sexually active. This includes females from age 12 to menopause.

Physical and sexual development: Adolescents are those beginning to reach physical maturity with the development of pubic hair, wet dreams and a deepened voice for boys, and breast development, pubic hair and the start of menstruation for girls. Sexual development can cause problems for girls if they seek to attend school and/or resist early marriage, adolescents said, adding that girls come under other pressures imposed by the physical maturity that marks them for womanhood. They also said that adolescents can be increasingly stubborn and at times overly sensitive.

Becoming an adult: A person becomes an adult upon marriage and only then commands full community respect. George Omono, former Director of Gulu Support the Children Organization (GUSCO), agreed. "Before you are married, no one really takes you seriously and you are not consulted on issues of concern to the community," he said. "Respect means that you can express your opinions in public and that people listen to them. I married late and only got respect after that. It's not about money or experience." Other adolescents longed for the freedom they perceived to come with adulthood. "As a grown up, there must be freedom. I have no freedom. We cannot go outside the gate," said one adolescent girl whose father was killed by the LRA and who lives in an orphanage. Relationship to adults: Elders are older people with authority; they carry sticks, as do teachers, and require respect from young people.

Part child/part adult: Youth is fleeting for the young. Betty, 24, from Gulu, said that she feels like a young person when she is out in the world, but that when she gets home she is treated like an adult with adult responsibilities. Betty was orphaned when she was eight years old and took on the care of her sister's two children when her sister died of AIDS. One of the children also has AIDS.

Traditional roles under siege

17
In the best of circumstances, adolescence is a difficult period in which physical and emotional changes, intergenerational conflicts, insecurity and rebelliousness can reflect social norms and a healthy developmental process. Uganda's National Youth Policy recognizes adolescence as a "period of great emotional, physical and psychological changes that require societal support for a safe passage from adolescence to full adulthood." In northern Uganda and in the south of Sudan, there is no such safe passage. The lifespans of most adolescents have been dominated by more than a decade and a half of war, marked by terror, displacement, isolation and poverty. Social structures are unraveling with an accelerated force. Relationships between adults and adolescents are undergoing tremendous upheaval without any corresponding cultural adaptation recognizing the pressures young people are facing and without support for their capacities to cope.

Most adolescents and adults are subject to extreme pressures. They are cramped into refugee and internally displaced persons (IDPs) camps with few options for self-sufficiency and little physical or emotional space to develop their skills, capacities and self-confidence. Adolescents are forced to take on adult responsibilities beyond expectations of earlier societal norms and are left to fend for themselves. An increasing number of orphaned adolescents, especially girls, are left to care for themselves and for their families.

The traditional age for marriage has dropped sharply. Girls from an IDP camp in Gulu said that the ideal time to get married would be 21 for girls - and 25 for boys. They reported, however, that girls in the camp were now getting married as young as 12, primarily for economic and security reasons. They are under constant threat of abduction or rape; their parents are unable to take care of them adequately, and girls are denied future opportunities to find gainful work. Boys, on the other hand, struggle under other constraints that have cut short their own adolescence. They are under great pressure to produce a livelihood in a poor economic setting which also undermines their sense of confidence. Should they wish to marry, they are still required to pay a traditional bride price, which few can afford.

Psychosocial pressures of war have also resulted in a decline of "morality" and of traditional respect for the authority of elders, according to both adult and adolescent respondents. Many adults complained that adolescents no longer respect their parents or other adults and that they can no longer control young people. Some young people, they said, spend all their time watching videos in video stores, going to discos and traditional dances without permission and engaging in casual sex. There is little social support for the dilemma of adolescents, and many feel abandoned by an adult society that is not responding to their insecurity or to the level of responsibility they are taking on.

Out of their own fears and pressures from this rapid change, many adults feel out of control and are clinging tightly to traditional values and structures in which adults are providers, commanding authority, while young people are required to follow a strict code of respect. These views and lingering traditional beliefs about roles and responsibilities can blind communities, including adolescents, from recognizing and bolstering the incredible strengths and coping skills of young people.

Many adults also understand and can articulate the deep social crisis and their inability to parent well as a result of unrelenting war, poverty and disease. "Our children are being raised by babysitters," said one Sudanese mother, reflecting on the struggle of many parents who must leave their children with other people for long periods to go to work and make ends meet. "We are really in a dilemma," said George Omono, formerly of GUSCO (Gulu Support the Children Organization). "Our family structure is disrupted and children grow up with little guidance. With the war, the 'fireplace values' passed on through storytelling are no longer there."
Some solutions

Overall, adults and young people interviewed articulated the strong need to improve intergenerational understanding and dialogue. This means meeting the challenge to better understand and accept how cultural tradition is being forced to recreate itself in new forms. It includes making conscious decisions about values - which to keep and which to change in order to support the healthy development of adolescents. It means adults helping their children by communicating, supporting their capacities and providing them with the opportunity to develop responsible and independent decision-making skills. Any successful outcome must involve the whole community in valuing the opinions of young people and their contributions.
Against all odds: surviving the war on adolescents
Psychosocial: reintegration in an environment of disintegration

"Coming back from the bush I thought of committing suicide because I was so embarrassed to live with people who knew me after doing these shameful practices…I thought I might have contracted STIs (sexually transmitted infections), including AIDS, so life was useless since I had a short life expectancy. People my age laughed at me and called me abusive names, and I could not stay with them. I have lost friends and company. I am lonely." - Betty, 19, from Achol Pii refugee settlement

The psychological and social, or psychosocial consequences of war on the lives of adolescents last long beyond its end, and as long as war persists they involve an ongoing and simultaneous process of disintegration and reintegration. As young people bear and cope with physical and emotional upheaval, they are continually coping in an ongoing process of recovery.

As the principal targets of war in northern Uganda, adolescents are under constant attack; their spirits depleted and their healthy development short-circuited by violence and insecurity. Surviving adolescents face drastically altered social relationships that often include physical and emotional abuse from families and communities. Violence has spread from warring parties to families and neighbors, where domestic violence and sexual abuse are on the rise. Adolescents named child abuse as one of their top five concerns.

Feeling hopeless and alone, young people are desperate for support and protection. They also protect themselves against their own vulnerability with defensive, aggressive or detached, often anti-social behaviors. Yet they are proactively surviving and continually strive to improve their lives in many creative and constructive ways.

Young people are both hindered and helped along their path to recovery by a community that views them with alternating and simultaneous suspicion and sympathy. The conflict has altered young people's lives and their roles in the community at an accelerated rate (see "Adolescence" and "Youth" in northern Uganda). They are seen increasingly as "immoral" and disrespectful, and their role as perpetrators as well as victims in the conflict has invoked confusion and fear in the hearts and minds of their families and communities.

A huge gulf is emerging between the generations as local traditions and war-related stresses discourage young people from open discussions with adults, including public officials and teachers, about their situation and changing roles. Some adults and several local organizations are, however, working to support the needs and strengths of adolescents, although most of them address the urgent and immediate needs of those returning from captivity (see International, National and Local Responses). Support for the countless other adolescents living in dire circumstances is also urgent, but less forthcoming. Psychosocial and reintegration interventions should maximize young people's direct involvement in decision-making and implementation, and there should be continuous follow-up on their circumstances and progress.

Recovery and Reintegration of Former LRA Abductees

Returning home with myriad psychosocial burdens

Former abductees carry to freedom the memories and emotions of agonizing experiences, symbolic reminders of the heavy burdens they were forced to carry during captivity. Many remain haunted by the acts of violence they have suffered and have been forced to commit. Some experience nightmares, emotional disconnections, acting out, even violence and other symptoms of what in Western medicine is called Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). To many young people, these dreams and experiences reflect spiritual distress, where they are troubled by the spirits of those they have harmed, and they feel wracked with guilt.
Formerly abducted young people also know that they are among the most vulnerable to LRA attack. If re-abducted and recognized, they are likely to be killed immediately. Many escapees have been pursued by rebels and killed. Relatives and friends of those who escape may also pay a similar price (see Protection).

Many formerly abducted young people stated that they are so afraid of re-abduction by the LRA, that each night they sleep in the bush instead of in their huts, believing they are less likely to be found there should the LRA attack their homes and villages. Like dozens of others, one former abductee from Omiya Anyima told the Women's Commission: "We don't sleep at home. We are very vulnerable to re-abduction, and our huts are dangerous to stay in at night."

Formerly abducted young people are haunted by many other worries: that they will not find or then be accepted by their families and peers; that they will be stigmatized as killers and thieves, or in the case of sexually abused girls, especially those with children, tainted and shamed; that they are infected with HIV/AIDS and will not live long. Will they be able to catch up or even return to school? Will they find employment? In addition to these weighty emotional burdens, formerly abducted young people have lost much trust in a world that has failed to protect them, and even betrayed them.

Adolescents said that these fears and anxieties are further reinforced by LRA indoctrination. The rebels warn them repeatedly that despite promises of amnesty, the UPDF will punish, torture and kill them rather than allow them to return home. The rape and sexual enslavement of girls, many of whom have borne children, has been used as a deliberate attempt to tarnish their virtue in the eyes of their community and make it more difficult for them to return. This in turn can undermine the value of formerly abducted girls to society and make them the potential objects of ridicule, humiliation or further sexual violence. Sexual violence also serves to stigmatize girls returning to their communities as potentially diseased, including with HIV/AIDS.

Such mistrust and rejection can turn into self-fulfilling prophecies, where young people become more rebellious, violent, uncaring or anti-social, pushing away the adults whose support and love they most need but which they are not getting. At the same time, the majority of adolescents are constructively coping with their circumstances.

### Youth and violence

Little data exists on increased violence committed by returned and other youth within their communities, but it is much discussed. Many adolescents stated that desperate poverty is driving orphans and other young people to steal and that some former abductees are turning to crime out of difficulty in readjusting to civilian life and finding jobs. Others blame the pervasive culture of violence within the LRA from which it is hard to break free. Unconfirmed reports from juvenile justice experts in recent months have included reports of violent acts of banditry committed by bands of youth, sometimes pretending to be LRA or UPDF soldiers. In IDP camp settings and in the Achol Pii refugee settlement adolescent boys are raping adolescent girls, as discussed earlier in this report.

While anecdotal evidence indicates an increase in such adolescent crimes, there is no supporting information or statistics. In fact, reports from people working to help reintegrate formally abducted children and young adults observe the opposite - that few to no formerly abducted young people commit crimes after their return home. A telling and complex twist on youth violence has been reported by the Kitgum Concerned Women's Association (KICWA), a center for returning abductees in Kitgum District. KICWA (Kitgum Concerned Women's Association) reports that it has received cases of adolescent boys who claim to be formerly abducted and who have committed crimes. They are then turned over to the center for rehabilitation. KICWA finds out eventually, however, that these youths are adolescents from the community pretending to be escapees out of desperation for help.

Additional research is needed on the extent to which young people are turning to violence and crime, and the
social, economic, political, psychological and cultural factors that surround these activities.

**Community responses**

**Challenges to overcome**

Young people who manage to escape the LRA return to communities that are in turmoil and which bear the weight of insecurity, displacement and poverty. The LRA are well aware that the atrocities to which they have subjected adolescents are likely to demonize them in the eyes of their communities. Creating an image of youth as irrevocably corrupted has further blurred the lines for their communities in distinguishing them as perpetrators or victims, or both.

Often preoccupied with their own concerns and unsupported themselves, families and communities have limited energy or patience to give to the returning adolescents. Young people reported that many adults face the return of young abductees with a confusion and an ambivalence that range from anger to compassion, fear to protection. Moreover, families and communities often expect the returning adolescents to behave like adults while still having the authority to treat them like children.

Despite the numerous obstacles in the way of healing and reintegration, communities have worked hard to welcome and accept the young people. They struggle to face many difficult conflicts. For example, parents of abducted girls wonder what they might do if their daughters return home pregnant or with a child. While they would rejoice in seeing their daughter, they question how they would feel about a child whose father is a rebel and how that child would be treated by the community.

In general, communities are also willing to offer forgiveness and support amnesty for the LRA. Adults said that they try to remember that the young people abducted by the LRA were not there by choice, but under the threat of death.

Community groups also recognize that reintegration is about far more than curing medical ills. They understand that healing is a long process for young people and their families, which requires determined and ongoing follow-up, even in the face of frustration, discouragement and other setbacks. Communities also understand that education and livelihood activities are particularly important to young people, giving them some hope for the future and helping to provide for the whole family. They know that the authority and responsibility their children may have had while in the LRA is hard to let go once they are back to civilian life, especially if there is nothing else to occupy or make them feel good about themselves. They believe that if young people know they can begin to lead productive lives post-abduction, they will be less likely to return to the LRA should they be overwhelmed or disappointed by life outside captivity.

**Community groups aid reintegration**

A number of community groups have formed to help these young people and their families. Most notable is the CPA (see International, National and Local Responses), which supports families of abducted children, helps to reintegrate the former abductees and prepares them and the wider community for their return home. CPA helps parents and other community members confront fears about their children's transformation and develop the support they need to give to the young people upon their return.

Programs by KICWA, GUSCO (Gulu Support the Children Organization) and the World Vision Children of War Center in Gulu help adolescents find their families and reintegrate into their communities (see International, National and Local Responses). They believe that music, drawing and other creative and sports activities have a powerful healing impact. Young people in all the centers are engaged in chores that serve the whole group, such as helping to prepare meals or cleaning up. These organizations also work with the young people afterwards to follow up on their integration, and provide skills training and other educational opportunities that the former abductees overwhelmingly want and need. They also work to minimize the time
young people spend in the custody of the UPDF following their escape and ensure that while in custody they are treated with full care and protection. Each center also does its best to create a safe and secure environment for the young people, and to this end, each center is placed in the relatively safe town centers of Gulu and Kitgum.

**Debate over approaches to reintegration**

There is debate among organizations over the best approach to reintegration. Some argue that the process should avoid institutionalization, which is believed to contribute to the further stigmatization of young people. They also believe that young people should return home as swiftly as possible, where the most critical part of the healing and recovery process takes place. These organizations provide shelter in traditional structures known as "ot lums," or grass houses, which are familiar to the former abductees and to which they will be returning. They build the capacity and skills of local community members, including parents, to work with the returnees, rather than leaving the challenge of reintegration to outsiders or those with formal education.

A different approach assumes that successful transition to community life requires more extended rehabilitation time in a center, including longer periods of exposure to Western-oriented individual counseling. This approach also involves a more dormitory-like atmosphere for the young people. Despite these differences, the majority of former abductees interviewed reported having had good, helpful experiences under each set of circumstances.

However, none of the rehabilitation programs make sufficient use of the capabilities of young people who have already been successfully reintegrated, who should be made an integral part of helping new arrivals. With further training and by involving them in decision-making, these young people could work with and inspire confidence in the new arrivals and would likely create ways to further improve the process of return and reintegration. It would also offer all formerly abducted young people opportunities to continue to build networks of solidarity and support and expand the reach of the organizations to conduct follow-up.

**Religion and ritual**

Many young people find solace in traditional rituals and by attending the Christian churches that flourish in the north. Churches provide spaces for prayer and an offer of forgiveness from God and the community. Many young people rely on churches and their belief in God for strength and to create a bridge to full community acceptance.

In the case of KICWA (Kitgum Concerned Women's Association), support is also provided to families who choose to perform traditional Acholi rituals to cleanse and renew the young person who has returned. Often until such a ritual is performed, neither the community nor the young person will be at rest. In such a poor region, however, the necessary materials to perform these rituals are often out of reach without assistance. In most cases, such activities provide enormous relief to all involved and help the healing and community acceptance process of the young person.

**Cooperation with the Uganda and Sudan governments**

Coordination has improved in recent months between local and international reintegration organizations and the UPDF's Fourth Division, responsible for the war-affected region and often the first to come in contact with escapees. Together, NGOs and the UPDF have decreased the amount of time former abductees spend in UPDF custody. Improved communication and cooperation have increased the speed at which young people can return to their communities. Save the Children Denmark has assisted the UPDF in this process with children's rights training for soldiers in the Fourth Division's Child Protection Unit. These improvements help to strengthen the climate for peace-building and bolster work being done by community-based organizations to prepare families and communities to welcome the returnees.
IOM, UNICEF and the governments of Sudan and Uganda have also increased cooperation to secure the safe repatriation of former abductees who managed to escape the LRA within Sudan and wished to return home to Uganda. In September 2000, a Joint Communiqué on Immediate Action on Abducted Children was signed by the governments of Uganda and Sudan. The Sudanese government in Khartoum subsequently established a center in Juba, in Southern Sudan to receive and process young people who have escaped the LRA inside Sudan. These young people had been abducted by the LRA in northern Uganda between 1990 and 1999. While the three reintegration centers in Gulu and Kitgum are poised and eager to assist all new returnees, should the number of returns accelerate rapidly, they will require immediate increased resources to be sure to adequately assist each person.

Cooperation among international organizations and community groups in northern Uganda could be further improved in order to minimize unnecessary problems for the young people and their families. For example, the Women's Commission encountered former abductees who had been transferred from one site to another without warning and without notifying their families. Better communication and coordination between agencies is needed, as is consistent vigilance in each case in order to avoid stressful delays.

Recognising the countless other adolescents

Several thousand formerly abducted adolescents in northern Uganda are coping with enormous assaults on their psychosocial well-being; they are also the recipients of most of the support for adolescents in the region. But they are still a small percentage of the countless tens of thousands, who have not been abducted but are living with the same insecurity and deprivation. All adolescents are suffering from hunger and poverty, fear of abduction and the destruction of traditional values that used to protect children. They are also victimized by an increase in domestic violence and child abuse, as the adult community fails to cope well with the effects of the conflict. Thousands are orphaned heads of household or refugees who are unaccompanied or separated from their families and who are fending for themselves. All of these young people are actively coping with their situation in ways that require increased support from within and outside their communities.

Orphans and refugee unaccompanied and separated adolescents

Some of the adolescents hardest hit by the conflict are the many thousands who have lost one or both parents due to war, HIV/AIDS and other diseases, including Ebola, and those who are refugees, separated and unaccompanied minors. Left to fend for themselves, they are especially vulnerable to all of the violations of protection previously described (see Protection). At the same time, forced to take on enormous responsibilities, they are among the most resourceful young people.

Orphans

Estimates place the number of orphaned children in Uganda at up to 1.8 million. One NGO report has estimated that nearly one in six children in northern Uganda has been orphaned by HIV/AIDS and another government report asserts that 16 percent of children up to the age of 17 are orphans in Acholiland. Once orphaned, adolescents are left without parental guidance and are vulnerable to extreme poverty. There are increased numbers of child- and adolescent-headed households, most of which lack access to education, livelihood sources, healthcare services, psychosocial support and protection. The growing number of orphans and lack of services that respond to their needs are also viewed as among the primary reasons behind a rising number of street children and the purported increase in adolescent crime.

Focus groups conducted at an orphanage with adolescent girls revealed their primary concerns to be psychological and physical abuse of the girls by teaching and supervisory staff. "We don't have any sanitary napkins," said some, while others were very concerned that if they don't do well enough in school to go on to secondary school, they will not be allowed to stay in the orphanage. When asked where they would go, many started crying, as they had nowhere to go.
Most adolescents expressed special empathy for AIDS and war orphans, and recommended that the Ugandan government provide free schooling for orphans. Others suggested that the Ugandan government, NGOs, religious groups and international donors provide educational sponsorships to orphans, help pay for their school fees and construct more schools. Furthermore, adolescents suggested that these same groups ensure a stable place for orphans to live with adult supervision, and that they provide food, clothing and other basic necessities to enhance their living conditions.

**Refugee unaccompanied minors and separated adolescents**

In the Achol Pii refugee settlement, as of March 2001, some 197 unaccompanied minors and 251 separated children were registered. Many of them live in Block 14, which is located in a section of the settlement that is relatively far from UPDF installations, schools and the market center. These young people stated that they are faced with the constant fear of attack. Their section of the settlement had been the site of a particularly gruesome, lethal attack by the LRA and continues to be used sporadically as a transit point for LRA groups.

Although not sinister, the atmosphere in Block 14 is reminiscent of that in the book Lord of the Flies, where young people are left mostly to their own devices and have established their own system of group protection. Some of these young people have relocated to other, more central sections of the settlement, but many remain situated there. With limited adult support, they must take full responsibility for all aspects of their lives, including collecting, preparing and rationing out their monthly food supply, pumping water from bore holes and getting themselves to school and to medical facilities as needed.

With extremely limited possibilities for cultivation and frequently late food distributions, these young people complained of severe hunger. Even when the food supplies are not late and food is available, rationing is very difficult and young people said they find it hard to save the food for a later date.

The issue of non-food items was also of great concern to the young people. All refugees, including unaccompanied minors and separated children, are given a supply of household materials, such as a pot for cooking, soap and a blanket. If they are lost, stolen or destroyed in the harsh conditions of the camp, the only way to get more is to purchase them from local shops in the settlement, which few refugees can afford. One 11-year-old unaccompanied minor told the Women's Commission that even if he had food he would not be able to prepare or cook it because he had no pot and would have trouble making the fire with limited fuel. He said, "I sold my pot to an adult. He told me it was a good idea to sell it so I could buy food. I was very hungry."

The young people deal with many of these problems by helping each other in small groups. They guard each other's belongings, take turns preparing food and share the remaining non-food items. At times they feel very alone, and some told the Women's Commission that they miss their families and struggle over decisions about whether or not they should try to go back to Sudan and find family members. Many stay because they feel there is are more educational opportunities in the settlement and they would like to finish their schooling. At the same time, adolescents said few make it to school regularly and those that do find it hard to concentrate because of their persistent hunger. While community services staff and volunteers work closely with the unaccompanied minors and separated children in the settlement, limited resources prohibit comprehensive assistance for their needs. Their protection must be monitored, to prevent forced recruitment into the SPLA, sexual violence against girls and other abuse.

**Domestic violence and child abuse**

Young people named "child abuse" their number five concern overall in the survey. According to the focus group discussions and case study interviews, this category appears to be a "catch-all" phrase for a number of abuses they suffer. It includes physical abuse in school and in domestic settings. It also includes psychological abuse, where young people feel they are demeaned and demoralized, devalued and ignored.
No full statistics are available on the nature and prevalence of domestic violence, including sexual violence. However, testimonies from young people and health professionals depict it as very widespread and perpetrated mainly by adult males against women, children and adolescents. On one occasion when the Women's Commission was conducting interviews in the Acoli Pii refugee settlement, a woman who had been beaten by her husband was carried to the medical dispensary. Medical and other staff said such cases are common.

Young people reported widespread alcoholism among adults and smaller numbers of adolescents, particularly boys. They said that mostly women and girls make the "local brew," which is alcohol distilled from local plants and vegetables. The men, whose traditional roles as farmers and providers have been undermined and who feel they have little else to do, sit together in small communal drinking areas and get drunk regularly. Young people said that when men get drunk, they often return home and become violent against women, girls and boys, beating them, threatening them and at times raping the women and girls.

IDP and refugee adolescents also said that violence in their homes and among community residents is on the rise because of the restricted living quarters in the camps, which have increased tension. Sexual violence has resulted in an increase in unwanted pregnancies and the loss of education for girls, who are then forced to drop out of school. Fights are not uncommon among adult and adolescent males, and some boys described conflict with their fathers, who were being abusive, dictatorial and unsupportive, mostly due to alcoholism.

Adolescents also reported the use of corporal punishment in schools and orphanages. They said that it was extremely painful to be hit with sticks, for example, as a punishment for not following the rules or getting answers incorrect in school.

Apart from stating that drinking alcohol should be discouraged, the young people were not fully sure how domestic violence and child abuse should be stopped. The authority of adult males is highly traditional in the culture, as is the permission for these males to abuse their wives and children. The concept of rape within marriage is discussed little and given little credence. Nevertheless, young people's ability to name the symptoms of and discuss the issues of domestic violence, not knowing the terms themselves, was impressive.

**Traditional protections for children and adolescents hanging by a thread**

According to many adults interviewed, the decimation of Acoli culture has resulted in the loss of traditional practices and beliefs that served to protect children, adolescents and other people considered vulnerable within the society. Under the code of beliefs known as "Lapir," for example, clan elders must carefully consider the reasons for going to war with another clan and must be satisfied that there is a just cause for such a conflict. To go to war without such a just cause would be to call evil upon the community. In this setting, children and women were exempted as targets of war, which was conducted entirely by males.

Today, this traditional practice has been turned on its head as the LRA wages war on the Acoli people with children as direct targets. In a culture where compensation and guilt are borne by the whole community, the compounding evil accrued by the misdoings of those fighting in this war affects everyone. Other traditional practices, such as parents providing their children a piece of land to farm themselves, have been so undermined that young people have lost a level of financial independence and an opportunity for learning and achievement.

Adolescents and adults say that the disappearance of parental mentoring and guidance has led some to turn to violence or prostitution because they cannot fend for, or support themselves. Despite this, the Acoli tradition of storytelling has survived through organized drama and music groups, and some sing about the troubles facing their communities. Women's Commission staff watched performances by young people for their community in Padibe IDP camp. Through song, dance and theater, the performers dramatized the war between the LRA and the Ugandan government and enacted the government's lack of attention to the problems of the Acoli people. Often with humor, they described family problems such as drunkenness,
abuse and neglect. Some stories told of the spiritual causes behind tribal conflicts that they believe have led to the war.

These traditional processes should be used as a resource by the local, national and international community and should be incorporated into peace-building activities. In addition, the Acholi people must continue to create spaces for community discussion about the destruction of values that protect children and adolescents with an eye to considering courses of action for constructive change.

Community responses

Unlike the situation for formerly abducted adolescents, there are few NGOs or community groups focused on addressing the wide range of problems facing young people and their communities in northern Uganda. The international NGO AVSI, with support from UNICEF and in collaboration with the Kitgum District Community Development Office, has taken action to fill this gap through psychosocial programs in the Kitgum District. Their efforts have aimed to address the many social stresses that are tearing families and communities apart, including excessive drinking, family violence, sexual abuse and increasing school drop-outs.

AVSI's approach has involved recruiting and training a corps of 300 Community Volunteer Counselors (CVCs), who, based on their own understanding and experience, came together around their own trauma and coping to reach out to others in their community. CVCs (Community Volunteer Counselors) facilitate and support communities in a variety of ways, from helping people to identify small loans, to identifying disabled children and adolescents among the population and assisting them with access to services. The District also helps to support and coordinate their work, which includes awareness-raising in schools with students, teachers and parents about welcoming formerly abducted young people back to their communities.

While their efforts have not wholly focused on adolescents and youth alone, their issues have been incorporated into their work and provide a basis for further community organizing around youth concerns. A strong model moving forward involves training equivalent adolescent and youth CVCs (Community Volunteer Counselors), who can help to reach out to their peers and find constructive solutions to their concerns.

Adolescent coping and resilience

Adolescents in northern Uganda and southern Sudan have shown enormous strength in coping with situations of crisis. Some of the skills they have developed have helped them survive armed combat, extreme poverty and deprivation. They are incredibly resilient and have attempted to weather each new crisis as it has arisen. Some of the coping mechanisms they employ are highly constructive, while others are more destructive. Each, however, serves a purpose in getting them through a process of recovery. Adolescents are called to continually adjust and recreate their coping skills, but despite all they have done to keep their lives together, most adolescents hardly even recognize that they have strengths and capacities, and their abilities go largely unsupported.

Adolescents must recognize the skills they have developed in the process of surviving the conflict as extremely impressive and valuable. In so doing, they need international and local support during the long process of changing their knowledge and their attitudes about themselves, so that they can identify and gain confidence in their abilities. At the same time, they must also find ways to transform destructive coping strategies into more constructive outlets for promoting their ongoing recovery. Young people can and should begin to pool their resources and talents to improve their lives and their communities as leaders, not just survivors. Given the magnitude of what they are up against, however, they can only be fully successful if they are involved in serious, collaborative efforts by government and other community members to end insecurity and reduce poverty and the spread of disease.
Destructive coping skills serve a purpose

Surviving adolescence is difficult in the best of times, let alone during the assaults of armed conflict, when adolescents are the deliberate targets of war (see “Adolescence” and “Youth” in northern Uganda). Research participants identified concerns about what they believed an increase in bad behavior among adolescents, calling some of their activities “immoral” or unhealthy. What community members are not necessarily seeing, however, is that these behaviors are really about young people’s process of surviving the conflict.

By their own acknowledgement, young people have stated that they often "act out," as known in Western terms. They are at times rebellious, refusing to follow the instructions of authority figures. Some go to traditional dances or discos against the will of their parents. Some engage in casual sex, which is frowned upon by society and which may expose them to STIs (sexually transmitted infections), including HIV/AIDS, or lead to pregnancy. Many are considered to be disrespectful and stubborn. Some steal in order to get money for drink, food or other reasons. Others have been drawn into prostitution, as a means of survival. Some have learned to be manipulative and to lie in order to get what they need. They might pretend to be a former abductee in order to get care in a rehabilitation center or they might lie to refugee settlement officials so they can receive an extra set of non-food items and sell them on for a profit. And while it would not be considered particularly good for their health under other circumstances, many young people also continue to sleep in the bush at night to avoid LRA attacks on their huts.

While these behaviors may seem highly negative, they serve a purpose for adolescents, as means to an end. In some cases, acting out helps them avoid difficult emotions they may be feeling about their experiences or current circumstances. Casual sex may bring them the connection or affection they feel they need; it may provide an element of risk-taking that allows adolescents to feel as if they are free from the constraints of their world; and it may reflect a loss of self-esteem. Manipulation and lying sometimes lead to concrete solutions for getting help. Prostitution may seem like the only option for many girls, who need to make ends meet, have few other avenues of support and feel a low level of self-worth. These behaviors are condemned within the community, but they should be recognized as part of a process of coping, recovery and survival so that they can be discussed and dealt with openly with young people.

Constructive coping skills offer the resources for a stable future

Despite the enormous responsibilities and stresses that the conflict has placed on their shoulders, many young people are engaged in very constructive actions and have developed many skills for their survival and recovery. These skills range from those developed in the process of trying to stay alive in the bush, foraging for food, lighting fires and building shelters, to attempting to simultaneously find work, stay in school and care for siblings. All of the skills and activities described below provide a huge reservoir of hope for the future of northern Uganda and southern Sudan. These adolescents are resilient and dedicated, not just to their own survival but also to a better future. Their ideas, strengths and abilities will form the basis for continued community recovery.

Toward their recovery, adolescents:

Ask for help - It is a sign that a community is in the process of healing when its members make demands for assistance. While young people in northern Uganda may have few opportunities to influence community decision-making, many are actively asking for help from the adults around them, despite frequently being turned away or disappointed. In perhaps one of the most stirring examples of desperation and tenacity facing adolescents in asking for help, a 15-year-old boy saw Women’s Commission researchers on the street in Gulu and randomly said hello. Not even knowing their names, he later traveled over 80 kilometers along a dangerous road to Kitgum to find them again and ask for help. Like countless others, he was an orphan with many brothers and sisters to care for, with no one to help pay for his schooling or other needs.

Attempt to learn new things, including by staying in school - Young people's commitment to education, in
school and elsewhere, is overwhelming. They cling to the possibility of an education with great hope, and do whatever they can to be able to finish their schooling. If they cannot go to school, adolescents still desire to, and do, participate in non-formal education and learning activities. All of these provide enormous stability to their lives and a sense of purpose and self-esteem.

Care for others and themselves and take responsibility - Young people go to great lengths to support themselves and others, particularly orphaned adolescent heads of household. Very young teenagers frequently make enormous personal sacrifices in order to work to support their siblings. Girls especially work very long, exhausting days, accomplishing many tasks. Keeping busy with this work provides a needed sense of structure and regularity for some, and while the tasks are exhausting and often create barriers to doing other things, many young people say that they enjoy them and enjoy the responsibility.

Form clubs, associations and organizations - Many young people have initiated and joined dozens of activity and recreational groups, which provide them with constructive and creative activities. Such involvement increases their self-esteem and their sense of accomplishment, gives them hope and is a source of fun. Refugee young people have formed a peace club in Achol Pii, for example, and countless other young people are involved in recreational and creative groups that play sports and engage in artistic activities (see International, National and Local Responses).

Go to church, practice religion - Many young people turn to a belief in God or the spirit world for strength. The process of prayer, community acceptance, forgiveness and serenity that comes from religious practice assists many young people. Traditional cleansing rituals also help formerly abducted adolescents recover from their experiences in captivity.

Undertake group income-generation activities - In order to find a solution to the poverty they are facing, many young people have formed cooperative income-generation projects. These creative activities provide young people with opportunities to earn money, teach them about working with others and give them a sense of purpose and accomplishment even if they do not produce enormous profit. They also provide opportunities for young people to come together to talk and find support and companionship.

Raise adolescent and community concerns through art, music and drama - Many young people are engaged in creative groups. At times, these groups perform for their communities and even enter competitions with one another. In so doing, they provide entertainment and relaxation for others, but they also use the opportunities to address important community issues. In Padibe IDP camp, for example, Kitgum District and AVSI sponsored a competition for youth drama, music and dance groups around the theme "Living Happily Amid Difficulties." The young people revived the storytelling tradition through depictions of the problem of alcoholism in families and its effects on youth, as well as the problems of orphans and Ebola.

Socialize - Many young people cope with their circumstances by spending time with their peers, talking, laughing and having fun when possible. For example, girls stated that although the work is hard, they enjoy talking to others at the bore-holes when they go for water and when they "dig" together. Peer support and opportunities for recreation are important ways that young people take their minds off their worries and find care.

Form support groups for the formerly abducted - Some former abductees, including boys in the village of Omiya Animya and Awer IDP camp, have formed their own support groups. They said that sometimes a group of former abductees will get together to plan a project, or they will just sit together, talk and pass the time. These meetings help them to feel supported and give them confidence. While former abductees do very much interact with other young people, they tend to look to one another for solace and support. As fewer girls have escaped than boys, it is not clear that they have opportunities for mutual support to a similar extent.

Help other refugees who are more "vulnerable" - One way that young people cope with their own
problems is to help others. In Achol Pii unaccompanied minors are helping others who are even more "vulnerable" than they are. One group is building new huts for other "vulnerables" in the camp in exchange for an allotment of blankets, which they will then decide how to distribute to others in need. This project allows them to feel good as they help others and focus less on their own problems.

**Turning survival skills into leadership**

Few of the young people interviewed appear to recognize their strengths and abilities or see themselves as valuable to their communities. Few expressed any sense of personal agency or ability to make positive changes in their situation or community. The reliance on humanitarian assistance and the inability of the governments of Uganda and Sudan and the international community to end the war have contributed to a growing sense of dependency among young people, and almost every single solution put forth by the young people for the concerns they raised was something that had to come from outside their world to help them.

The level of need facing them daily has moved many young people beyond any level of realistic expectation, to a point where they are hoping for miracles to change their circumstances. Young people cling to religious beliefs in the hope that their problems may suddenly be solved through a deus ex machina ending.

Young people may not recognize their own abilities in part because they are so preoccupied with survival and feel so vulnerable to attack that they feel completely powerless. They also lack encouragement and support from adults, who in general do not affirm their abilities or provide them with opportunities to share their opinions or participate in community decision-making. Yet the sheer magnitude of the strength involved in surviving in the bush or finding food and getting to school without adult support, is what is going to make a better future and provide hope for northern Uganda and a peaceful Uganda as a whole.

Young people's strengths and coping must increasingly be transformed into leadership. Young people must find ways to recognize how their survival skills can be built upon to increase youth-led organizing and activism in ways that constructively and democratically address key adolescent and community issues. Support for young people's capacities and involvement in decision-making is urgent, and it must be balanced with protection, humanitarian and development assistance that addresses their immediate needs for security, food, education and health care.
Against all odds: surviving the war on adolescents
Adolescent researchers in charge: methodology and lessons learned about adolescent participation

Central to the approach of this study is a belief in the need and right of adolescents to participate in the decisions that concern them. Adolescent participation in this study and adult support for this participation took several principal forms, which are reviewed here in the context of the approach to the research.

Adolescents were: lead researchers; advocates; and research participants, who were interviewed by the research teams.

Adults were: advisors to the adolescent researchers; research coordinators; advocates; supporters; and research participants, who were interviewed by the research teams.

Like the first of the Women's Commission's participatory studies with adolescents in Kosovo, this study provides important lessons about adolescent participation in decision-making processes that affect them:

Adolescent Participation: Some Lessons Learned

- Adolescents are sources of enormous and invaluable ability, creativity, energy and enthusiasm, and their ideas are important and valuable;
- Adolescent participation is necessary, achievable and may take many forms;
- Adolescents enjoy and learn from being engaged in constructive activities, especially those where they are making decisions, providing leadership and taking action, and their participation builds their capacity in ways that are useful to their lives beyond the tasks at hand;
- While participatory processes can empower young people, they can also further manipulate them, depending on the level to which adolescents are consulted and able to make choices within them - full participation goes beyond consultation to opportunities for leadership;
- Involving young people in research and assessment work places them in a position to advocate on their own behalf and enter community discussions using information and knowledge gained, adding legitimacy to their contributions;
- Adults can and should support adolescents' participation in a variety of important ways, requiring them to suspend authority structures that privilege their opinions and contributions; and
- The variations in experience, skills and perceptions, including about themselves, that young people bring to their activities influence the quality and nature of young people's participation.

The Research Teams

Fifty-four Ugandan and Sudanese adolescents living in the Gulu, Kitgum and Pader Districts of northern Uganda participated as "adolescent researchers" in this study. They were the principal researchers, in collaboration with the Women's Commission. They designed and shaped their methodology, organized and conducted the research, and analyzed and reported their findings.

The young people worked on two separate teams, one in Gulu, known as the Gulu team, and one in Kitgum and Pader, known as the Kitgum/Pader team, with 26 and 28 adolescent researchers respectively. Eighteen adults serving as "research advisors" assisted them in their responsibilities, nine on each team. A local,
Kitgum-based youth NGO, the Watwero Youth Group served as a "youth coordination group" for the Kitgum/Pader team, and a group of four adult individuals acted as a "youth coordination group" for the Gulu team. Many of the adults involved also worked with NGOs in the region and were respected members of the community, including parents and teachers.

The IRC (International Rescue Committee) Uganda's Psychosocial Program in Kitgum and World Vision Uganda's Children and War Center in Gulu provided invaluable support to both of the teams, encouraging and facilitating their work from start to finish.

The objective of the teams' work was to identify and investigate key issues facing adolescents in their communities and to identify solutions for these concerns. The results of their work will be used for advocacy purposes, to bring international, national and local attention to adolescent and youth concerns in northern Uganda and the surrounding region. Their recommendations will inform decisions made about programs and policies implemented in northern Uganda, including strengthening current efforts and implementing new pilot projects for young people that involve young people. It is also hoped that the process will inspire young people and provide them with ideas about ways they can take action on their own behalf, with or without help from adults.

**Selecting the Adolescent Researchers**

The Women's Commission laid out basic guidelines and developed criteria for selecting adolescent researchers, adult research advisors and the youth coordination groups according to a Terms of Reference laid out for each. Diversity was a key criterion to ensure the representation of the range of experiences and perspectives of young people in the community and to ensure the maximum opportunity for the researchers to learn from one another.

As a result of consultations with adolescents and local and international NGOs in the districts, the research teams were chosen in a variety of ways - from a process of democratic, community self-selection to interviews with the Women's Commission, as discussed further ahead. Team participants were of both sexes, aged from 10 to 20 years and included returned abductees, internally displaced Ugandans, Sudanese refugees, adolescents living in and out of camps, those orphaned by war and by HIV/AIDS, students and out-of-school youth, working youth, adolescents with disabilities, youth activists (e.g., for peace) and adolescent heads of household. They also included adults with a commitment to and/or experience working with young people.

In Kitgum and Pader, adolescents also represented four distinct settings: a Sudanese refugee settlement (Achol Pii, Pader); an IDP camp (Padibe, Kitgum); an isolated and particularly war-torn village (Omiya Anyima, Kitgum) and a town center (Kitgum Town Council, Kitgum). The Gulu team had representatives from Gulu town, the Awer displaced persons camp and rural villages outside Gulu town.

**Designing, Organizing and Implementing the Research**

Each team participated in a three-day training, where Women's Commission researchers and local professionals guided them through a process of identifying their purpose as a team, learning about research and developing and practicing their methodology. The Women's Commission provided a framework for the researchers, including the following general questions: "What are the main problems of adolescents/youth in northern Uganda, and what are some solutions?" and "Who are 'adolescents' and 'youth' in northern Uganda today?" A combination of focus groups, case studies of individual interviews and a survey for ranking adolescents' top concerns were also suggested. After the training, the research teams conducted their research for roughly three weeks, followed by a week of analysis and two weeks of drafting a team report.

Beyond this framework, which the adolescents affirmed, the adolescent researchers identified topics and sample questions to be covered in focus group discussions and individual case study interviews. They also
designed their own surveys, containing a list of concerns, of which research participants were asked to rank their own top ten. Although each team worked separately, they developed very similar questions, and their survey categories were virtually identical. Consequently the same survey was used for each. (See Appendix for methodological materials.) The case studies conducted by the adolescents covered a range of issues and experiences they identified in their work, providing a more in-depth look at typical adolescent experiences.

In both teams security and logistical restrictions played a role. While the full Kitgum/Pader team was trained together and did their final analysis together, four subgroups of the team conducted their research in each of the four sites where researchers were from. Security constraints prevented each of these subgroupings of young people from traveling outside of their area to conduct research. In Gulu, security problems restricted the team to the town limits and nearby villages and "protected camps," which are home to thousands of IDPs. All of the Gulu researchers had the opportunity to work together in all locations. Of the IDP camps included in the research, a total of seven were involved - Anaka, Awer, Lugore, Pabbo, Pagak and Parabongo, in Gulu District, and Padibe in Kitgum District.

Focus groups and surveys were carried out by smaller groups of the larger research team, including two to four adolescent researchers, accompanied by one adult research advisor. The adolescent researchers in these small groups took the lead explaining the project to participants, posing questions, generating dialogue, taking notes and administering the survey. Following the sessions, the adolescents also wrote up summaries of the overall findings of the sessions. Adults acted as guides, helped the young people to organize themselves and endeavored to intervene only when needed. Adolescent researchers acted individually to invite research participants to be interviewed separately for case studies. These interviews at times lasted several hours, following which the adolescent researchers wrote written reports of their case studies.

Each focus group/survey session aimed to involve no more than eight to ten people to provide ample opportunities for individuals to speak. Sessions were conducted in the language of choice of the participants, mainly Luo, also known as "Acholi," the native language of the Acholi people. Although the length of the sessions varied, in general the groups spent an hour and a half talking in the focus groups and then half an hour filling out the surveys.

Attendance at the sessions was voluntary for participants and they were informed that their testimony might be used in printed reports, but that their identities would be kept confidential for their protection. The taking and publication of photos was only permitted with the verbal agreement of the research participants.

Who was interviewed?
Adolescent researchers conducted focus groups with the following groups of young people:

- females
- males
- the disabled
- internally displaced persons
- those out-of-school
- heads of household
- prisoners
- males and females together
- orphans
- refugees
- primary and secondary students
- former child soldiers
- working young people
- formerly abducted

They also interviewed the following adults:

- mothers/fathers/guardians
- religious leaders
- elders
- refugees
- the disabled
- teachers
- widows
- women vendors
- internally displaced persons

The Women's Commission also interviewed NGO, government, military and United Nations (UN) representatives in the three districts and in Kampala.

Experience, Motives and Impact of Participation

The adolescent researchers

The experience was undoubtedly the most interesting and meaningful to the adolescent members of the research teams, who were exposed to the hundreds of research participants they interviewed and to the issues they uncovered. The research team members worked together for many weeks, developed enormous enthusiasm for their work and felt a huge sense of accomplishment. Some joined the team to make "a little bit of money" or "to pay school fees," others joined to learn new skills and to better understand youth issues. Despite the scores of youth associations and clubs focused on income-generation, sports, drama or music, relatively few young people have been involved in community decision-making or program development. None of the research team members had previous experience in such an action-oriented, adolescent-led study, and few had ever been asked to express their views about how to improve their society.

Most had some understanding of "peer-to-peer outreach" models, which in their experience involved young people being taught something by adults and then "sensitizing" other young people in their communities. It was very difficult for them to understand that they were not going to be sensitizing anyone about anything.
Instead, they were going to develop and ask questions about topics they would identify themselves and attempt to do a lot of unbiased listening. Thus, for the adolescent researchers, the challenges of participation included developing critical thinking skills and ultimately deciding for themselves what young people need and what young people's role in community decision-making and programming for youth should be.

Overall, the researchers on both teams enjoyed getting to know one other and the adolescents they interviewed. They confronted their fears of leading discussions and speaking in front of others and met new challenges with growing confidence and excitement. They also worked through disagreements and dissent about the process and supported each others' progress. While having received no promises that their efforts would produce desired outcomes, the process instead showed the young people the potential value of research and advocacy, of hope and of confidence in themselves and others. All these skills and experience are useful to other areas of their lives.

“I've joined this research team so that youth can better understand their rights and needs, for better protection for youth and to sensitize the community about youth problems. Understanding youth problems can bring more understanding and cooperation within the community and create peace in the community.”

Kinyera Richard, 17, adolescent researcher, upon joining the Gulu research team.

Knowing that the research would be followed by advocacy activities involving adolescent members of their teams in the United States and in Uganda, including making presentations to governmental, nongovernmental and UN decision-makers, such as at the UN Special Session on Children in September 2001, the adolescent researchers were doubly motivated to do their best and faithfully report the concerns of their communities. Given their excitement for the project and the skills and confidence they developed, the participating youth are likely to undertake more activities with adults and activities together or individually. In effect, they form energetic, knowledgeable nuclei for further youth-led community-based action. The Watwero Youth Group in particular has the potential to immediately build on the capacity and experience gained in the process of coordinating the study and to provide leadership in developing new opportunities for young people to take on additional youth-led projects.

Adolescent Research Participants:

The hundreds of adolescents who participated in the research had a much different participatory experience in the research process than the adolescent researchers. The collective impact of their participation is potentially large, but its immediate impact on their individual lives is small.

As respondents, they had opportunities to express their thoughts and opinions for roughly one to five hours through the survey, group discussions and individual interviews. They also received a commitment that their views would be included among the findings of the study. Beyond this, the researchers basically came and went, and the participants will receive no other feedback until the teams return with reports of their findings some months later. They may hear radio shows and participate in future community discussions that focus on the issues they raised. Together, their contributions form a useful, powerful voice representing the experiences of thousands that can be used by decision-makers to target programming and policies for young people. However, unless these young people become animated and supported to act as a result of this work within their local communities, their individual participation will remain limited.

For broader adolescent participation to occur and for additional support to come to young people already engaged in meaningful activities for youth, strong efforts are needed to spread the words and ideas of these participants and generate concrete interventions that involve and impact many more young people. The same holds true for the adults involved in work with young people, and a challenge remains for all - locally and internationally - to keep young people's active input and leadership at the center, not the at periphery, of
efforts on their behalf. When merely consulted, young people must continue to be informed of the outcomes of their efforts and as much as possible and re-engaged more substantively.

“There's just one thing I want to know. Are you going to pay our school fees or not?”
- Jackie, an adolescent from Kitgum, questioning the adolescent researchers on the motives of the research study.

Adults Involved in the Project

Adults involved in the project needed to come to terms with their relatively limited role as guides and facilitators in the service of the young people's leadership. Their role was to keep the young people generally on track and help them to organize themselves. They would intervene in their conversations and decision-making only when necessary or requested.

At first, it was difficult for the adults to put aside traditional authority structures that give precedence to their opinions or ways of doing things. By their own admission, they had trouble resisting impulses to fill gaps of silence with their own thoughts or to jump in with help rather than letting the adolescent researchers work through their tasks. Ultimately, most adults managed to assist the young people well, offering them only helpful suggestions and limiting their control.

“I'm here because of the problems that people in the north are experiencing and because it has caused a break between the old and the young. Adolescents have lost their status because of the conflict, and it is important that the old discuss problems with the young. We need to create love and peace for all and friendship in local and international relationships, irrespective of age or sex.”

Wokos Martin, adult research advisor, upon joining the Gulu research team.

Adults interviewed by adolescents were also largely welcoming of the young people's research activities, and responded to them openly as long as the questioners showed them the proper respect. Younger adolescents were especially in need of guidance from adults and older adolescents in undertaking their research responsibilities. All the adults were impressed by the enormous dedication of the adolescent researchers and their ability to accomplish their work so successfully.

Comparing the Youth Coordination Function in the Two Districts

The central role of youth coordinators in Kitgum and Pader in contrast to the Gulu Team demonstrated perhaps the most significant difference between the two Districts. In Kitgum and Pader, for example, the Watwero Youth Group took responsibility for coordinating all of the team's training, research, analysis and reporting activities, facilitating the young peoples' initiative in undertaking these activities. In Gulu, because no established youth entity could be identified, a group of four adult individuals acted as a coordination group and directed the organization of the research process in a more centralized way. Under the leadership of the Watwero Youth Group, with help from IRC (International Rescue Committee), the team selection process in Kitgum and Pader was well organized with essay competitions and an election by peers. With the Gulu team, in the absence of a youth coordination group, the team selection took place before the formation of a coordinating body of adults. Young people were nominated by their community, with the help of World Vision and other NGOs in Gulu, and then interviewed and chosen by the Women's Commission. The survey design and results were nearly identical, and both teams did a thorough and exceptionally thoughtful job, but in many respects it was ultimately easier for the youth group to support the activities of the adolescent
researchers than the group of adults.

Watweoro Youth Group, for example, found it much easier to coordinate and motivate the adolescent researchers than did the adult-led coordination body of the Gulu team. Notwithstanding their dedicated and hard work, it was still much harder for the Gulu coordinators as a group of adult individuals randomly brought together to depart from a relatively stratified approach to project implementation and to create a non-traditional atmosphere of youth-led teamwork. The budgeting and management functions of the study were also less in the hands of young people in Gulu, who at times felt stunted in their activities and argued that "adolescents should be coordinating this work." This may have led, in part, to fewer opportunities for the adolescent researchers on the Gulu team to hold focus group sessions. A total of over 1,400 respondents were interviewed in Kitgum/Pader compared to more than 500 in Gulu - still, both amazing accomplishments.

The Watweoro Youth Group, in contrast, was used to regularly convening young people, garnering their opinions and energy and knowing how to combine work and fun. They had an easier time encouraging and supporting the natural energies and inspirations of the adolescent researchers. At the same time, the youth group had other issues to contend with, struggling to reach consensus on the management of finances and on planning the future direction of the organization. In general, those who were more active and involved in the project were more interested in deepening the scope and expertise of the organization. Those less involved were more concerned about short-term gain and opportunities.

While it is perfectly possible and very important for adults and adolescents to work together to create successful participatory experiences for adolescents, where adolescents play strong leadership roles, the adults involved must be able to create a balance between young people's need for autonomy and support. Individuals with youth organizing experience, including young activists, are likely to be particularly familiar with the dynamics of youth leadership and better equipped to support it.

**Ongoing Challenges**

The research process also demonstrated that adolescents' ability to be proactive decision-makers decreases the risk of their becoming merely passive observers, or worse, being manipulated by adults, even those with their best interests at heart. If the adolescent researchers had not been able to shape the questioning of their peers, to review the budget and make decisions about its implementation, they would have essentially been following the direction of adults. Moreover, the adolescents showed a healthy skepticism during their work, which helped them to question and shape the process in ways that made sense and which seemed fair to them. Without these variables, adolescents risk being co-opted into processes that may simply use them, as opposed to help them develop their skills or empower them. A key challenge for communities and organizations in northern Uganda is to support adolescents' participation in ways that are not merely tokenistic or solely about following adult leaders, but that build their confidence and skills and that foster real leadership and hope among them.
Recommendations

Bring peace to northern Uganda and southern Sudan

The Governments of Uganda and Sudan should:

- Once and for all, abide by the provisions of peace agreements signed by Sudan, Uganda and others to end the wars in northern Uganda and southern Sudan, securing the immediate release of all children and adolescents abducted by the LRA and the SPLA.

- Immediately halt all support to the LRA and the SPLA, and urge them to disarm and release all captives.

- Provide strong leadership and resources to implement the amnesty process in Uganda and secure the demobilization and reintegration of LRA fighters in cooperation with the United Nations and local and international NGOs.

The United Nations and the International Community should:

- Urgently call on the Governments of Uganda and Sudan, and LRA and SPLA to end the wars in northern Uganda and southern Sudan, and support the immediate release of all children and adolescents in captivity.

- Monitor the implementation of local and international peace efforts.

- Support the peace efforts of the Carter Center, the Acholi Religious Leaders’ Peace Initiative, Kacoke Madit, the Kitgum Peace Initiative, the Gulu District Peace and Reconciliation Team, Acholi Parliamentary Group and other local and international groups.

Improve security for all civilians and secure the protection of children and adolescents in northern Uganda and southern Sudan

The Governments of Uganda and Sudan should:

- Implement and enforce all the provisions of international human rights and humanitarian law in domestic law, including the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC).

- Sign and ratify the Optional Protocol to the CRC, end recruitment of under-18 soldiers into government forces, and demobilize all child soldiers currently within government ranks.


- Protect children and adolescents from rebel abduction, forced recruitment, forced labor and sexual enslavement; and continue to support the demobilization and reintegration of children and adolescents who have escaped from rebel groups.

- End the rape, "defilement” and sexual exploitation of adolescent girls and women by enforcing national law and prosecuting all perpetrators of this violence, especially UPDF soldiers in northern Uganda.

- In northern Uganda, increase work with District officials, NGOs and civilians to improve Ugandan army security patrols, particularly around IDP camps, refugee settlements, schools, medical facilities and transportation routes.
- In southern Sudan, cease the military bombardment of civilian targets by government forces.

- Establish national programs to increase the professionalism of the Ugandan and Sudanese armies, including education on human rights, international humanitarian legal standards and the protection of refugees and IDPs.

- Allow stringent independent monitoring of military conduct vis a vis children and adolescents, especially in Ugandan IDP camps, where rape and sexual exploitation of adolescent girls committed by the UPDF is rampant.

The United Nations should:

- In cooperation with the Organization for African Unity, mandate the High Commissioner for Human Rights to increase monitoring of human rights violations against children and adolescents in northern Uganda and southern Sudan committed by government forces, the LRA and the SPLA, and the implementation of recommendations made by the UNHCHR delegation to northern Uganda in 2001.

- Appoint an Ombudsman for Children's Rights in East Africa to work with international, national and community groups, including adolescents, with a focus on the northern Uganda/southern Sudan conflict.

- Employ the Security Council to invoke the United Nations Charter and authorize the deployment of peacekeeping forces by the Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) to northern Uganda and southern Sudan to demilitarize and disarm rebel groups, in cooperation with the Governments of Uganda and Sudan.

- Ensure all United Nations agencies working in northern Uganda and southern Sudan involve adolescents and youth in human rights and protection monitoring.

- Assign a lead agency for IDPs in northern Uganda to work with the Ugandan government to provide a comprehensive response to their protection and care, including children and adolescents.

- Continue UNHCR’s work with the Ugandan government, international donors and refugee communities in northern Uganda to fulfill their protection function and avoid further sacrifice of programs addressing the protection of children, adolescents, and women in the face of shrinking resources. UNHCR field staff must also increase their presence in refugee settlements to facilitate cooperation between refugees, Ugandan settlement officials, NGO settlement administrators, the military and police on protection issues.

- Increase advocacy efforts on behalf of IDPs in northern Uganda and southern Sudan by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Internally Displaced Persons, Mr. Francis Deng, including a joint international/national investigation into alternatives to the protected IDP camps in northern Uganda.

- Increase advocacy efforts to speak out against atrocities committed against children and adolescents in northern Uganda and southern Sudan by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict (SRSGCAC), Mr. Olara Otunnu. The SRSGCAC should also work closely on advocacy efforts with adolescents in the region, facilitate peace negotiations at all levels, and promote the deployment of a Child Protection Advisor by DPKO to the region to assist and monitor all child protection efforts.

The LRA and SPLA should:

- Respect and adhere to international human rights and humanitarian law, including the Convention on the
Rights of the Child, and cease human rights abuses against children and adolescents and other civilians, including abduction, forced recruitment and sexual slavery.

- Immediately release all abducted children and adolescents.
- Enter into peace negotiations with the Governments of Uganda and Sudan, the international community and local peace representatives.

The International Community should:

- Increase pressure on all warring parties in northern Uganda to immediately commit to peace.
- Provide sufficient funds to support all United Nations and NGO work in northern Uganda and southern Sudan, particularly the work of UNHCR and support for IDPs.
- Mandate and ensure independent monitoring of child and adolescent protection in all security and humanitarian operations in northern Uganda and southern Sudan. This should be a priority of the new United States Special Envoy to Sudan.
- Ensure local and international NGOs work in partnership with adolescents and other community members, UN bodies and governments to address and needs, rights and protection of children and adolescents in northern Uganda and southern Sudan.

**Fulfill adolescents' right to education, health and psychosocial support**

The Ugandan Government, the United Nations and the International Community should:

- Act immediately to counteract the decimation of children's and adolescents' right to complete primary education in northern Uganda with emergency support for Universal Primary Education in the north, ensuring especially that girls, orphans, IDPs and refugees have full opportunities to attend school.
- Initiate a combination of expanded governmental and private sponsorship support to increase the number of young people finishing primary school, where additional school structures are constructed, teachers are better trained and school lunches, clothing and other learning supplies are provided to young people.
- Prioritize UNICEF support for education in the north, and implement Integrated Community Services programs, or "Child-Friendly Spaces," in the IDP camps.
- Establish an education fund for war-affected adolescents in northern Uganda to support their higher education, and enable greater numbers of Ugandans and Sudanese refugees from northern Uganda to complete secondary school and university.
- Support the inclusion of reproductive health, HIV/AIDS, conflict resolution, peace-building and civic education in school curricula.
- Improve access to public health information for all adolescents, including on HIV/AIDS and reproductive health, and facilitate access for adolescents to appropriate health services suited to their particular needs.
- Establish and increase support for existing psychosocial support services for adolescents, including especially formerly abducted young people, orphans and those living with HIV/AIDS.
Increase support for adolescents' capacities and leadership

The Ugandan government, the United Nations, the International Community and Adolescents should:

- Ensure the active involvement of adolescents in the planning, design, implementation and evaluation of all services and activities, with special attention paid to the inclusion of girls.

- Create opportunities for enhanced dialog between adults and adolescents in the community, and ensure young people's full participation in community decision-making, including peace initiatives.

- Provide existing youth structures within the Ugandan government more support to become more responsive to the range of adolescent and youth issues in the north, supporting young people's creativity, energy and enthusiasm.

- Encourage and provide support to the creation and strengthening of community youth groups and associations.

- Ensure young people remain or become more involved in groups and activities at the community level, and support their leadership to become more active advocates at a local, national and international level to achieve all of the aforementioned recommendations.
Against all odds: surviving the war on adolescents
Against all odds: surviving the war on adolescents
Notes

1. The Lord's Resistance Army is a rebel group from the areas of northern Uganda dominated by the Acholi people, known as Acholiland. The LRA opposes the current Ugandan government, led by Yoweri Museveni, and is the principal enemy of the Ugandan army, the UPDF, in the north. The rebel group professes to fight a spiritual war for the Acholi people but has been responsible for countless atrocities committed against civilians in northern Uganda and southern Sudan, including the abduction of thousands of children and adolescents. Until very recently, the LRA has been heavily supported by the Government of Sudan, and has participated in military actions against the rebel group in southern Sudan, the SPLA.

2. The Sudan People's Liberation Army is the principal rebel group in southern Sudan. The SPLA claims to be fighting for political autonomy in southern Sudan. It professes to represent the interests of the southern black, Christian and traditional religion adherents in its fight against the Arab, Islamic government of the north. The SPLA receives support from the Ugandan government. It is known to have forcibly recruited adolescents and adults into its fighting forces from Sudanese populations in southern Sudan and from Sudanese refugee settlements inside northern Uganda.
Against all odds: surviving the war on adolescents
Appendix 1: Links

Women’s Commission for Refugees Women and Children: http://www.womenscommission.org/
http://www.womenscommission.org/

Accord report on peace initiatives in northern Uganda:
http://www.c-r.org/accord/uganda/accord11/index.shtml
http://www.c-r.org/accord/uganda/accord11/index.shtml

http://www.unhchr.ch/Huridocda/Huridoca.nsf/TestFrame/d481877f4017842cc1256baa00554d5f?OpenDocument
http://www.unhchr.ch/Huridocda/Huridoca.nsf/TestFrame/d481877f4017842cc1256baa00554d5f?OpenDocument