

“WE SUFFER

ASSESSMENT OF THE IMPACT OF THE LORD'S RESISTANCE ARMY

FROM WAR

ON FORMERLY ABDUCTED CHILDREN AND THEIR COMMUNITIES

AND MORE

IN NORTHEASTERN DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO

WAR”



DTJ



HARVARD  
HUMANITARIAN  
INITIATIVE

# **“We Suffer From War and More War”**

Assessment Of The Impact Of The Lord’s Resistance Army  
On Formerly Abducted Children and Their Communities  
In Northeastern Democratic Republic Of The Congo

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Front cover photo: DRC - A 17 year old girl who was abducted by the LRA and forced to become a “wife” to an LRA commander. She had a baby as a result of this forced marriage and since her escape has faced stigma from her community. However her father has defended her and demanded that the community treat her equally.  
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## This project was a collaboration between Discover The Journey (DTJ) and Harvard Humanitarian Initiative (HHI).

### DISCOVER THE JOURNEY (DTJ)

DTJ is a nexus of journalists, filmmakers, storytellers, artists and supporters who use media to expose injustice facing children in-crisis. DTJ's solution uses media creation, distribution and leverage to contribute to the human rights movement protecting children globally.

The mission of DTJ is to realize a world in which children are valued and protected. DTJ is mandated to speak up for the protection of children, to ensure the rights of children are defended, and to see children are given opportunity to have abundant life.

DTJ has worked in the Democratic Republic of Congo since 2007 where it has assisted children in armed conflict and communities affected by war, creating original reporting and providing direct services including reintegration for former child soldiers and psychosocial assistance for children and communities affected by ongoing violent conflict.

### HARVARD HUMANITARIAN INITIATIVE (HHI)

The Harvard Humanitarian Initiative (HHI) is a university-wide center involving multiple entities within the Harvard community that provide expertise in public health, medicine, social science, management, and other disciplines to promote evidence-based approaches to humanitarian assistance.

The mission of the Initiative is to relieve human suffering in war and disaster by advancing the science and practice of humanitarian response worldwide. HHI fosters interdisciplinary collaboration in order to:

- Improve the effectiveness of humanitarian strategies for relief, protection and prevention;
- Instill human rights principles and practices in these strategies;
- Educate and train the next generation of humanitarian leaders.

HHI has worked in the Democratic Republic of the Congo since 2007, where it has engaged with communities to better understand threats to health and security precipitated by insecurity in the region.

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## ABOUT THE CO-AUTHORS

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## Executive summary

The Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) is a rebel movement that has committed some of the most grievous human rights abuses in Africa in past decades. The group is known particularly for its merciless conscription of children into its ranks.

This report synthesizes voices from those who currently face the daily threat of LRA violence and represents one of the first efforts of an academic institution, Harvard Humanitarian Initiative (HHI) in collaboration with an international non-governmental organization, Discover The Journey (DTJ), to document the effects of the LRA on the region using accounts of those currently affected, including former LRA abductees and their families, as well as community leaders, women's groups representatives, and local and international organizations. This report focuses on better understanding community vulnerabilities to LRA violence; the nature and types of violence being perpetrated; which groups are most vulnerable to violence and its sequelae; the challenges of reintegrating returning LRA abductees; and community protection mechanisms that can be reinforced. In order to achieve these objectives while working within the constraints of a limited timeline, this work draws on thirty-three semi-structured qualitative interviews conducted in four communities in northeastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) that are highly exposed to LRA violence. The research instrument was created based on informational interviews with NGO staff and community members in affected areas, and refined after pilot interviews in Dungu.

The findings from this work highlight how the impact of the LRA in northeastern DRC goes far beyond direct violence and touches every aspect of life, both for formerly abducted children and their communities. This project aims to understand the impact of LRA violence at an individual and community level. In particular, the work focuses on better understanding the vulnerabilities of formerly abducted children and their social networks once these children escape from the LRA as well as their longer term needs and opportunities during the reintegration process. Successful reintegration of formerly abducted children equates to the protection of children as well as community-wide cohesion and increased functioning. Success in this area hinges on including existing family and community systems in the reintegration process, strengthening an entire support network to actively reduce trauma and stigma together.

As in many conflict situations, those systems that are most important for social cohesion and resilience are those most disrupted by displacement and violence. The instability resulting from communities' expectations of abuse and predation has both immediate and long-term implications, including: widespread food insecurity; a destruction of the economic infrastructure; massive displacement; critical health threats and psychological distress.

There is a perfect storm of health issues as HIV, hunger, malaria, and water-borne disease coalesce to create a situation where people face multiple life-threatening issues in a place with almost no health-care infrastructure. Service providers are sounding an alarm the international community should immediately respond to: HIV/AIDS has become a significant and increasing threat in these communities.

Respondents emphasize that peace must be a foundation for other development. Communities had better functioning economic and social support systems before the LRA came to the area, and continue to underscore that the most important intervention will be to restore security so they can rebuild their lives themselves.

In addition to this, however, the international community can assist with essential services, including: ensuring food security; delivering life-saving health services; improving water and sanitation access and providing psychosocial and educational interventions to formerly abducted children and adults. While communities are facing emergency-level challenges now, they need solutions that will last into the future.

Emergency-phase funding must be complemented with sustainable long-term solutions. People do not experience problems on three to four month cycles and funders should not expect to address issues in this way. Integrated solutions are needed to respond to multi-level problems - continuing to work with communities to build on current protection and resilience strategies, while strengthening the national and international response, will be critical to addressing the continued LRA threat.

### To the Congolese Government:

- Recognize and acknowledge the threat of the LRA publicly;
- Provide an adequate military response that puts civilian protection as a top priority;
- Participate fully in the African Union's Regional Cooperation Initiative on the LRA (RCI-LRA) to solve the crisis;
- Ensure the national army is a protective, not predatory, force;
- Train FARDC troops to respond to reports of LRA activity immediately and work with local communities to respond to security threats. Under no circumstances should soldiers extort money or goods from civilians nor perpetrate violence against those they are charged to protect;
- Provide steady pay to soldiers based in northeastern DRC to remove the temptation to prey on local communities for money and goods;
- Sign a set of standard operating procedures (SOP) between the FARDC and UNICEF similar to what the UPDF has agreed upon with UNICEF (SOP signed May 15th, 2011) to ensure time limits of military possession of minors who have escaped from the LRA;
- Invest in infrastructure development in the region including road rehabilitation and construction;
- Ensure access to quality primary education by providing steady pay to primary school teachers, equipment for primary schools and structure rehabilitation to education facilities destroyed by the LRA;
- Strengthen local governance institutions including supporting operations of civil society networks.

### To the International Community:

#### Humanitarian Assistance:

- Improve funding to ensure that projects respond to communities' most pressing needs, rather than "poignant" issues;
- Provide holistic instead of "siloed" responses;
- Increase humanitarian aid to remote and difficult-

to-access areas that are affected by LRA violence including Bas-Uele;

- Increase assistance in the food security sector, adapting to harvesting cycles and cash crops;
- Increase sensitization efforts around safety and security issues that equip communities with basic emergency contingency plans;

#### Early Recovery and Development:

- Ensure funding cycles are long enough to ensure programs are effective and address not only immediate but long-term needs;

#### Health:

- Focus on the significant and alarming spread of HIV in the region. This includes improving voluntary counseling and testing; ensuring steady and widespread provision of ARVs; and immediately beginning services to prevent mother to child transmission of HIV/AIDS;
- Increase clean water and sanitation access for remote communities;

#### Psychosocial Assistance:

- Equip family and community members to respond to the trauma and psychosocial needs of community members affected by the LRA;
- Invest in existing civil society structures to build their capacity to respond to psychosocial needs of community members and understand referral pathways;

#### Reintegration Assistance for Children:

- Increase services specifically targeted to children orphaned from LRA violence who remain a particularly neglected demographic;
- Bolster vocational and educational opportunities not only for children returning from the LRA but other vulnerable children as well;
- Increase education and sensitization efforts to actively reduce community-level stigma;
- Include parents in interventions with formerly abducted children in order to strengthen the entire family system;
- Invest in longer-term reintegration programming for

formerly abducted children that emphasizes long-term successful reintegration and is not limited to short-term reunification;

#### Reintegration Assistance for Adults:

- Increase reunification and reintegration assistance for adults formerly abducted by the LRA. Currently these services are severely lacking;

#### Security:

- Hold the UPDF accountable to adhere to the Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) signed with UNICEF in 2011 if the UPDF returns to DRC, to ensure protection of formerly abducted children.

### To the Lord's Resistance Army:

- Cease all violent activities in the tri-region of northeastern DRC, CAR and South Sudan;
- Surrender and disarm peacefully;
- Participate in the UN's DDR process (Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration).

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## INTRODUCTION



### Issue Background

The Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) is a rebel movement that has committed some of the worst human rights abuses seen in east and central Africa in past decades. The group is known for its merciless abduction of children. Boys become transporters, soldiers and military decoys; girls are used as sex slaves and domestic servants. Since the LRA's formation in Northern Uganda in the mid 1980s, the group has been responsible for the abduction of at least 20,000 children and the sustained displacement of over 1.9 million people in Northern Uganda.<sup>1</sup> However, military pressure from the Ugandan government starting in 2005 forced the LRA to leave Uganda and seek operational bases in South Sudan, Central African Republic (CAR), and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). The International Criminal Court (ICC) has issued arrest warrants for senior LRA leaders. Attempts to undertake peace negotiations to disarm the LRA have been consistently unsuccessful, and the top leadership of the group, including the group's founder, Joseph Kony, are still at large despite repeated attempts to bring these individuals to justice.<sup>2</sup> This report will focus on the LRA's operations in the DRC, and the impact the group has on children and communities in this region. This project represents one of the first efforts to document the effect of the LRA on the region through a unique collaboration between an academic institution and a non-governmental organization.

The LRA entered the Bas-Uele and Haut-Uele districts of northeastern Congo in 2006, making use of the densely forested Garamba National Park on the border with Uganda to flee military operations in their home country. In 2008, in retaliation for aerial attacks from Ugandan troops, the LRA undertook sustained and highly brutal attacks on villages in northern DRC and Southern Sudan. The weeks-long spree of killings and abductions became known as the "Christmas Massacres" and resulted in the deaths of over 800 civilians. In 2009, Human Rights Watch documented another marked campaign of executions and abductions, known as the Makombo Massacre, which resulted in over 300 civilian deaths and the abduction of 250 civilians. While these incidents bring to light the extreme impact of the LRA and its ability to create mass panic and displacement in DRC, it should be emphasized that there is on-going aggression in the Bas and Haut-Uele districts of Congo, creating a situation in which constant violence is punctuated by horrific campaigns of terror. Over the past year, LRA attacks have been marked by smaller incidents, often involving individual attacks rather than large campaigns against villages or areas. These incidents, often perpetrated by a handful of presumed LRA, result in the abduction of a few children or the pillaging of a few individuals' goods or homes. These smaller in scale, though more widespread and seemingly sporadic incidents, keep the population constantly fearful of LRA predation.

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.hrw.org/news/2012/03/21/qa-joseph-kony-and-lords-resistance-army>

<sup>2</sup> However on May 12, 2012, LRA commander Ceasar Achellam was apprehended by the UPDF during an ambush which is a significant arrest of a senior LRA commander.

The United Nations (UN) has deployed peacekeeping troops to some affected towns in Congo. However, the number of troops is inadequate to patrol the vast area bordering CAR and South Sudan, which is characterized by poor transportation and communication infrastructures. While the Congolese government continues to deny the existence of the LRA on Congolese soil, they have also deployed some national army troops to address what they call the "banditry" problem in the area. In 2011, United States President Barack Obama sent 100 military advisors to the region to provide technical support in the hunt to capture Joseph Kony and other senior LRA leaders. In the spring of 2012, the UN and African Union (AU) announced a new initiative to address the threat of the LRA in DRC and CAR. Despite these steps, effective response to the LRA from both regional governments and the international community has been lacking. Though numbers of LRA troops are now estimated to be in the hundreds, compared to an estimated peak of multiple thousands of combatants, the group's highly regimented and organized structure allows it to continue to operate with impunity across the borders of four countries.

## Project Background

The objective of this project was to undertake a preliminary assessment of the impact of the Lord's Resistance Army on children and their communities in northeastern DRC, specifically in the Haut-Uele district. Goals of this assessment were to: identify the needs of vulnerable groups and communities including former LRA abductees; provide current information on the impact of the LRA to local and multi-lateral organizations; and inform current policy discussions about the effect of the LRA presence in DRC. This report focuses on better understanding community



vulnerabilities to LRA violence; the nature and types of violence being perpetrated; which groups are most vulnerable to violence and its sequelae; the challenges of reintegrating returning LRA abductees; and community resiliencies or protection mechanisms that can be built upon. This project represents a collaboration between the academic entity of Harvard Humanitarian Initiative (HHI) and the non-governmental organization Discover the Journey (DTJ). This assessment was undertaken not only to identify community needs, but also to inform future programming that will be undertaken by DTJ with children affected by LRA violence in response to the findings of this report.

In order to achieve these objectives while working within the constraints of a limited timeline, this work draws on qualitative data from interviews with a wide-range of actors, including: former LRA abductees and their families, community leaders, faith group leaders, women's groups representatives, service providers, international and national non-governmental organization (NGO) workers, and representatives of multi-lateral organizations.

## Methodology

This project made use of semi-structured qualitative interviews to elicit community experiences and attitudes relating to security challenges resulting from the presence of the LRA in the region. Qualitative data is well-suited to this type of assessment since it allows researchers to gain perspective of a community's problems in the community's own words. Qualitative data allows respondents to elucidate complex dynamics and interrelations between issues. Additionally, it points to topics that require further exploration. The research was carried out in four communities in LRA-affected areas of northeastern DRC: Duru, Faradje, Limai and Dungu. These communities were chosen because they were among the most affected areas in terms of numbers of formerly abducted individuals, and were accessible from Dungu, where the research was based. A displacement camp near Dungu was also added, in order to further examine the needs of those displaced throughout Haut-Uele.<sup>3</sup>

Unlike other areas in the DRC, the region where this research was carried out is home to only one dominant tribe - the Zande. Also unique to this area, the dominant religion is Catholicism, leading to a strong unified church that carries great influence in the area. In each field site, religious and community leaders were contacted to explain the assessment. In those sites where religious and community leaders were not available, service providers who had knowledge of the issues faced by the community were contacted for interviews. These key informants would then offer referrals to those who had been affected by LRA violence or other key informants who were knowledgeable about community issues. A researcher explained the purpose of the project to each potential interviewee and asked whether he or she would be willing to answer more questions related to violence and instability in their community. If so, the interviewee was read a formal consent script describing the nature of the research and emphasizing that the respondent could refuse to answer any of the questions or could stop the interview at any time. All data was de-identified except for general demographic characteristics (age, role in the community).

The research instrument was created based on informational interviews with NGO staff and community members in affected areas, and refined after pilot interviews in Dungu. Below is a list of topics covered in the qualitative questionnaire, with a description of each module. Extra modules were added for former LRA abductees to further examine their experiences with abduction and to elicit their needs for services.

A translator and one to two researchers were present at each interview. Interviews were transcribed by researchers during the interview. When more than one set of notes were taken, these were combined for completeness and accuracy.

Due to the exploratory nature of the study, inductive coding was undertaken through close reading of the transcripts. Two research team members generated codes, first independently, and then refined them collaboratively. This process allowed them to identify key unifying themes and relationships between themes. Codes identified as important by two team members defined categories; consistent variations within a category were captured as subcategories. Axial coding was used to examine relationships between categories. Data was analyzed by entering qualitative data into a code database in Microsoft Excel (Microsoft Excel 2011; Version 14.0.0).

This project was originally undertaken as a programmatic needs assessment for DTJ and subsequently received IRB<sup>4</sup> exemption from the Harvard School of Public Health Internal Review Board.

<sup>3</sup> According to displacement camp representatives, there are over 4,000 displaced people living in the camp.

<sup>4</sup> Institutional Review Board that ensures that research conducted is ethical

## Question Modules – General

### Health

This module addresses availability and access to health care services, the major causes of disease and access to clean water.

### Agriculture

This module addresses availability and access to arable land, security while farming, and which crops are most profitable and easy to cultivate.

### LRA

This module addresses people's perception of the LRA, their mission and their effects on communities as well as protection mechanisms.

### Vulnerability

This module addresses people's perceptions around who are the most vulnerable members of their community, the challenges experienced by vulnerable populations, and how these people are treated by others. If not mentioned, the interviewer probes to find out about children's vulnerabilities.

### Attitudes Towards Former LRA Abductees

This module addresses community and family perceptions towards children formerly abducted by the LRA, their current needs, problems, and the community reactions to this population.

### Gender Dynamics

This module addresses questions around how men and women are differentially affected by the LRA. This module also addresses the respective roles of boys and girls recruited into the LRA, as well as how boys and girls are treated as they attempt to reintegrate into communities after escaping from the LRA. The interviewer can probe to find out about pregnancies resulting from time in the LRA and how girls with these pregnancies are treated upon reunification.

### Reintegration of Formerly Abducted Children

This module addresses questions around how the respondent defines successful reintegration of children formerly abducted by the LRA, as well as perceptions around how abducted children are affected by their experiences, and how communities are affected by reintegrating former abductees. The interviewer can probe to find out about whether drug and alcohol abuse

is an issue amongst the community or former abductees. This module also asks whether there are educational and vocational opportunities in the community.

### Resilience and Protection

This module asks who the respondent turns to in times of difficulty and how the community as a whole faces threats or challenges. The interviewer specifically probes to ask about protection mechanisms and support systems that may exist. Finally, this module addresses whether there are any ceremonies or customs that exist to aid with reintegration of formerly abducted children.

### Community Roles

This module asks the respondent what they perceive their role (as teacher, student, leader, religious figure, etc) to be in the process of reintegrating children formerly abducted by the LRA. This module also asks whether the respondent feels that they know what to do to help former abductees reintegrate.

### National and International Response to the LRA

This module asks the respondent about their perceptions of the the Ugandan People's Defense Force (UPDF), the US advisors deployed to address the LRA, and the Forces Armées de la République Démocratique du Congo (FARDC).

## Question Modules for Former LRA Abductees

### Self-report

This module addresses former LRA abductees' behavioral difficulties and challenges upon reunification. This module also addresses perceptions of how they are treated within their own family and community systems including their opinions on what challenges they face as a result of their time in the LRA, and whether they face different treatment in their household and communities compared to their siblings and peers.

### Perception of Acceptance / Stigma

This module asks the respondent about their perceptions about how they are treated in their community, social network, and family now as compared to before the abduction. The respondents were also asked to share their challenges as well as what their vision of what a "normal" life would look like. Finally, the module asked respondents what advice they would give to others in their position and what their hopes for the future are.

In total, thirty-three people were interviewed for this project. Respondents included civil society and religious leaders, former LRA abductees and their family members, medical and educational service providers, and NGO workers. For a complete list of interviewees, please see the table below.

People Interviewed	Dungu	Limai	Duru	Faradje
<b>Community and civil society leaders</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Displacement camp leaders' focus group – five individuals: the President, Vice President, Secretary, Treasurer and Advisor</li> <li>One local religious representative regionally active in civil society and the NGO community</li> <li>One local NGO leader and community activist</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Chief of the Bazi sub-division in the village of Duru</li> <li>Local Administrator</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Vice president of civil society</li> <li>Curate of the parish at the Catholic church</li> </ul>
<b>Service providers (medical, educational and NGO workers)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Three UN officials</li> <li>Four interviewees from different international NGOs</li> <li>International NGO worker</li> <li>Doctor in charge of the obstetrics and gynecology unit at the general hospital</li> <li>Women's group leader and activist</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Local NGO worker</li> <li>Primary school teacher, trained as a focal point for early warning</li> <li>Primary school teacher</li> </ul>		
<b>Parents of former abductees</b>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Father of male abductee</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Mother of female abductee</li> <li>Father of female abductee with child from LRA</li> </ul>	
<b>Former LRA abductees</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>17-year old boy</li> <li>16-year old girl</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>15-year old boy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>14-year old girl</li> <li>Girl, age unknown, with a child from LRA</li> <li>18-year old girl</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>17-year old boy</li> </ul>

## Limitations

- Qualitative data has certain inherent limitations. The prevalence or scope of the issues being investigated here cannot be determined based on the interviews conducted. In addition, this data cannot be generalized to the population in north-eastern DRC as a whole. Rather, this project aims to provide insight into experiences from individuals who have witnessed and survived the consequences of the LRA in their own communities. While every effort was made to include a diversity of experiences, perspectives and backgrounds, due to the time constraints of this project, the focus rested on those voices that were easiest to access or most outspoken. To attempt to address this, results have been reported that have been triangulated from a number of different respondents. This approach helps ensure that the dynamics described here are representative of the community experience. However, places have been highlighted where respondents' opinions diverge or contradict one another.
- Another challenge of this project was the short timeline. Data collection was undertaken over a period of eight days from January 16 to January 23, 2012. Respondents were asked to reflect on the impact of the LRA over time in their communities. However, these results still represent data collected at one point in time, which provides a "snapshot" into community experiences. Being able to return to communities and undertake a project with a broader scope over a longer amount of time would help elucidate and provide further support for the results presented here. The researchers would in particular like to visit Bas Uele - a region that is deeply affected by LRA violence and is extremely challenging to access. This has resulted in the region being consistently under-researched as well as under-served by service-providing organizations. Finally, combining these qualitative results with quantitative data would be a powerful way to use mixed-methods to triangulate in on both the scope and dynamics of these issues.

## RESULTS



## DESTRUCTION OF ECONOMIC AND HEALTH SYSTEMS:

*"AS FAMILIES GO TO BURY ONE CHILD, ANOTHER IS DYING AT HOME"*

### **Economic instability, food insecurity and destabilization of the agricultural system**

Communities have constricted access to farm, hunt, fish, go to market, or undertake trade due to a deep sense of insecurity related to ongoing LRA violence. Respondents in each field site commented on the fact that farming in particular was disrupted by the threat of violence. People felt their ability to generate income was increasingly constrained - to the point that the economic foundations of their communities were seriously undermined. This section examines the dynamics surrounding farming, hunting, fishing, gaining access to markets and undertaking trade.

In many instances, people noted that they continued to try to farm directly on the outskirts of their villages. However, the land was becoming increasingly poor from over-use. The more fertile fields that would allow for cultivating a diversified harvest were too unsafe to access. In particular, respondents in the remote towns of Duru, Faradje and Limai were more likely than those in the larger town of Dungu to speak about this kind of restricted access, although displaced populations in Dungu face other kinds of difficulties surrounding land access that will be addressed later in this report. A 14-year-old female former LRA abductee from Duru noted, "Crops are bad here - the further fields were better at food production but the LRA can attack further away." Echoing this sentiment, the vice president of civil society in Faradje explained, "The fields are not fertile close to town, but the fields far away are insecure, so people cultivate close to town... but it's not fertile and the fields are producing insufficiently. Fertile land is seven kilometers away at least. People are scared to go to the fields and are scared to go to other villages as well." The chief of a sub-group in the village of Duru noted that this was the first year that he had been more than five kilometers away to farm. A man in Limai noted, "To get a very fertile field you need to go far, but it is dangerous to do so." In all three field sites outside of Dungu, people remarked that they tried to restrict travel to less than five kilometers to access their fields, and that going



much further than this was a risk. The mother of an abducted child explained this in detail, saying, "The LRA pillages and abducts children, kills adults. We go to fields but not more than those that are one or two kilometers away. Before, we went more than 10 kilometers away."

As was the case with farming, men noted that before the threat of violence from the LRA, they would provide for their families by hunting and fishing to supplement what they were able to grow in the fields. However, it was often necessary to go deep into the forest to find animals. As a result of the LRA's occupation of the forests, men were no longer able to hunt or fish as freely as before. As one farmer from Duru said, "I don't know why [the LRA] are there, I just know that we can't farm or hunt." A man from Limai echoed this sentiment, saying, "We feel secure in town, but can't go hunt or fish anywhere outside of town."

Being able to access markets was also an issue - not only because people had less to trade but also because people were more reluctant to travel between villages to sell goods. A high-level religious leader in Dungu noted, "Markets exist - and they do sell the crops but it is not sufficient because there are so many people

and the area for farming is not enough." Respondents in the field sites outside of Dungu noted that markets in the center of town might still be safe but the price of goods could become inflated as a result of the restricted access to trade. In addition, people explained that there simply weren't as many products to sell or people with the ability to buy them. As a man in Limai noted, "There is one market. People sell products at the market - manioc, other vegetables, cassava roots, rice, groundnuts. But it's not abundant - there are not enough products from the field. The little we have, we sell to survive." The chief of a sub-group in the village of Duru noted, "There used to be a lot of traders here but

now there is no one here to make trade." Other people noted that markets, like fields, were too dangerous to access with the same freedom that existed before the LRA's presence in northeastern DRC.

These challenges have led to a general constriction of the economy as people find themselves unable to make income in normal ways. Families used to depend on income generated from trade to supplement their incomes. This surplus would pay for their children's school fees, medication, clothing and other basic needs. Currently, survival has become the focus. The vice president of civil society in Faradje said simply, "Commerce has plummeted because people are too scared," and went on to describe how people may still try to come to the market in his town but this is much more sporadic. A local NGO leader and community activist in Dungu, summed up the problems in the system, saying:

*People used to cook what they needed and they would sell the rest to get other things like salt and soap for their basic needs. But currently, what they cultivate is not enough for themselves, much less what they can sell. And*

*the price of things has become very high... like rice. Eleven kilos of rice with the husks on is five dollars, but before it was less than one dollar. People don't have the power to buy these things and they don't have the means to farm their land. For those who buy basic goods like clothing and salt, it has been difficult to get them because of insecurity. That makes things rare. Since things are rare, they become expensive. So everything has become expensive.*

Men, in their role as the head of the household, were particularly likely to describe how they found it difficult to effectively take care of their families. In the past, they could go to market and sell goods when the family faced extraordinary expenses, such as those associated with medical care. Currently, however, families, social networks and whole communities are left without any financial safety net. The curate of the parish in Faradje noted, "People here used to make a living from farming, but now they can't farm because of insecurity. This means they have no money and can't seek medical care. The LRA is the cause of the insecurity." In Duru, the father of an abducted child said simply, "Parents of kidnapped children are vulnerable because, before the LRA, they had fields and children. Now we are deprived of both."

When speaking about trade and agriculture, respondents - men and women and at all ages and roles in the community noted that the fear of LRA violence deeply threatened their economic well-being. Not only did this have implications for whether individuals were able to farm, fish, hunt and trade, but it also changed communities' freedom of movement and ability to engage with other villages. A female former LRA abductee from Duru associated the ability to travel freely as a fundamental aspect of normal existence saying, "Normal life is moving around freely. Before we could hunt and fish, and now we can't go."

This general "constriction" - of movement, freedom and trade; and the concomitant diminution of ways to earn money and diversify income has implications for

other aspects of life. People's inability to find income has direct effects on health, well-being and the ability to care for themselves and others in difficult times. The following sections explore how these changes in the agricultural and trade systems clearly feed into severe malnutrition, other health problems and communities' consequent inability to take care of its most vulnerable members, including formerly abducted children.

## Malnutrition

The effect of the LRA on agriculture translates to immediate impacts on health and well-being: people, and above all, children, are facing the constant threat of malnutrition. Repeatedly, respondents from all research sites talked about hunger as one of the biggest threats to their communities. Very simply, the inability to farm, fish, hunt and trade translates directly to undernutrition and malnutrition. The leaders of the displacement camp near Dungu said they used to be able to eat a diversified diet, but now they subsist principally on cassava leaves. In Duru, a female former LRA abductee noted, "children are suffering from hunger. We don't have enough food."

While The World Food Program (WFP) has provided some relief in the form of food rations, people say this is often inadequate or sporadic. A doctor at the general hospital in Dungu noted that malnutrition is a problem both for children and adults. Many adults that were interviewed felt frustrated that they had the skills and knowledge to farm and make a living, but that insecurity has made it impossible for them to provide for their families. The mother of a female former LRA abductee in Duru said simply, "End the war because until then, we will be hungry."

Malnutrition makes all individuals, and especially children, more vulnerable to communicable disease and other infections. The threat of LRA violence has dire down-stream consequences for community health, as people are more susceptible to disease at a time when the health infrastructure has been almost completely abandoned or destroyed.

## Water and water borne diseases/access to clean water

Respondents identified water-borne disease as the next most urgent health need in their communities. In all the field sites, people said access to clean water was a pressing problem. In the internally displaced persons camp, the camp leaders noted that there was no access to clean water. They described how internally displaced persons (IDPs) had to walk four to five kilometers to access clean water, and that diarrheal disease was a problem as a result. Even within the larger town of Dungu, there are water access issues. NGOs have built wells, but there remains a pressing need for clean water, and sometimes people are charged fees to access this water. As a result, service providers who work with vulnerable children both at NGOs and at the general hospital talked about the high rates of water-borne diseases.

These problems are exacerbated in the farther flung towns of Duru, Limai and Faradje. Water points are even further away from the village centers and there are limited medical care facilities to treat water-borne diseases. In Faradje, the vice president of civil society noted, "There is access to clean water, but with much difficulty. An NGO made water sources but there is still not enough for everyone. The closest source is one kilometer away but it can take two to three hours to go and get water and come back because there are so many people waiting for the water." In Limai, the primary school teacher noted, "It is two kilometers to the nearest water source. There is no clean water especially during dry season. There is dysentery as a result." Another primary school teacher in the same town noted, "People are often sick because of bad water - they have intestinal problems and diarrhea." They both noted that the primary school where they work is lacking water as well as sanitation facilities. A number of respondents both in Duru and the smaller villages noted that the dry season exacerbates problems as water availability at the water access points becomes more limited.

## General health

In general, timely access to healthcare was described as a significant problem everywhere except for those in the center of town in Dungu. Many of the healthcare facilities in the smaller villages were either abandoned, or severely understaffed and understocked. As a result of the insecurity, health professionals have moved to safer areas and medical supply routes have been disrupted. A female former LRA abductee in Duru said, "Most nurses have run away and now medicine is expensive." Even in the few functioning health facilities, there are often shortages of medicine for days on end and little to no other supplies or medical equipment. Often people cannot afford health fees and so they wait until a problem is critical to seek service. As a leader in the displacement camp described, "The most important thing is lack of money, and the hospital is overcrowded, so people will stay at home instead of getting treated and the sickness will get worse." The inability to access or pay for health services, combined with the fact that people may have to wait in line for days before they can see a health professional, means that health outcomes are extremely poor. Respondents also talked about the public health problems that arise from people becoming displaced and then crowded together in certain areas - describing how extreme poverty along with over-crowding and little or no healthcare creates a dire situation. A local NGO leader described the situation in Bas-Uele in particular as one of the worst he had seen, saying, "as families go to bury one child, another is dying at home."

People also associate the presence of soldiers with epidemics, including the spread of HIV/AIDS. While interviewees in the villages did not mention HIV/AIDS, service providers including religious leaders working at NGOs and the doctor at the general hospital in Dungu described HIV/AIDS as a dire and worsening problem. A religious leader noted, "There is vulnerability to disease and pandemics such as sexually transmitted diseases (STIs) and HIV because of the LRA and the FARDC - there are so many [soldiers] around, and also

UPDF who was here trying to secure the villages." He went on to note that overcrowding means that young girls may be exposed to sexual abuse from armed groups. A local NGO leader echoed the link between the presence of armed groups, overcrowding and the spread of sexually transmitted diseases, saying,

*"For HIV/AIDS, Doruma<sup>5</sup> is really the worst. The village is tiny, second it has been attacked so many times, in June it was attacked five times. There are so many soldiers around there - people live very close. There is a lot of promiscuity so HIV spreads very fast... I think if it continues like this, Doruma will disappear someday."*

The doctor at the general hospital in Dungu described HIV as the biggest health problem he confronted. He also drew the connection between armed men and HIV, saying, "There are so many soldiers around, living with people. Promiscuity started especially with younger girls." He went on to say, "It's because of the war. The LRA caused this." He described how 30 to 40 percent of the women who come to the hospital to deliver babies are HIV positive in Dungu, and that this number jumps even higher for women who had been abducted by the LRA at some point in their past.

All three service providers who talked about HIV/AIDS as a problem also noted that there are few, if any, services responding to the issue. The Catholic diocese in the region collects statistics from the few voluntary counseling and testing (VCT) clinics in the area. VCT centers based out of general hospitals report rates 26.5% positive for women (out of 2212 women tested) and 16.3% (out of 1348 men tested) in 2010. While this is clearly not an estimate of prevalence, the rates are notably high. Access to antiretroviral therapy (ART) is highly limited and impossible in all but the larger towns, and even then sustained access is not guaranteed - giving people little incentive to learn about their HIV status if there is no access to treatment. Both the doctor and a local NGO leader said sensitization and education around HIV/AIDS was desperately needed. The local NGO leader noted,

"Zande culture is very shy so there is no education about sex - either in school or in churches. People are not educated so they are very exposed and vulnerable. The rate [of HIV] is very, very high." A local NGO leader summed up the danger by saying, "[HIV] is the silent LRA - HIV kills without saying anything, mutilates people without saying anything. It is very silent. It is really killing families."

## Displacement and land tension

As in any environment where people are uprooted from their communities and have to compete for limited resources, tensions around land run high in this region. Interviewees in the displacement camp described the many difficulties they faced, all of which were exacerbated by the challenge of finding enough resources to share between camp residents and those who already live in the area. One man noted, "The first thing is we lack fields where to go and grow crops - there is nowhere to stay without trouble. If you stay and build your house someone will come and say, 'This is my land, you have to leave.' So it makes you very vulnerable."

A religious leader described how displacement is a hardship for all, "The first effect of the LRA in Dungu is that there are so many IDPs in Dungu now - it has made an economic crisis for most of the population - for the displaced - and even those who are not IDPs, host families." In the areas visited for this project, people described the strain between those living in displacement camps and the host community. Finding arable land was cited as particularly difficult and contentious. "Sometimes a community pretends to invite you to cultivate a field, but if you are successful and have a good harvest, they will chase you from it. The host community can curse you," said a leader in the displacement camp. Another man from the camp said, "Communities don't welcome you very well - they can chase you from the fields." People in the camp noted that the resentment from the host community meant that they were cursed by the host community. Illness or injury in the camp was often attributed to witchcraft from people in the host community who resented their use of limited resources.

<sup>5</sup> A town less than 10 miles from the South Sudan border in Haut-Uele



**KILIWA** A 9-year-old girl who is part of a DTJ psychosocial intervention for children affected by LRA violence in Kiliwa, DRC. According to a recent quantitative study by DTJ and Queens University, Belfast, over 80% of children interviewed reported that the worst event of their lives was related to LRA violence, including personal abduction by the LRA, the loss of a family member to the LRA, or the witness of massacres.

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“An IDP can go to the bush and cut a mango tree down to make charcoal but then the host community will be angry and the next morning he will see his hand swollen from witchcraft,” said a camp representative. Thus, tension around land use continues to be an urgent issue and greatly restricts people’s access to subsistence farming opportunities.

## THE IMPACT OF THE LORD'S RESISTANCE ARMY:

*"WE SUFFER FROM WAR AND MORE WAR"*

### LRA's effect on Women

The LRA's effect on adult women is acute and multidimensional. Some adult women are abducted by the LRA and used as porters or transporters, but most often women talk about how they have lost a husband or children to LRA violence. Often left behind after attacks, women who have been widowed must find a way to care for their children without the critically important support of a husband, whose traditional role is to build the family home, farm the field and create an income for the family.

Interviewees noted that women who are widowed or separated from their husbands are particularly vulnerable to poor outcomes in the future. As the curate in Faradje noted, "Women support the family, they work for the family's survival." Those who are not abducted by the LRA are often left trying to provide for their children after displacement and with limited options to earn an income. Respondents noted that men are the ones who traditionally build a house for the family, and if a woman is widowed and displaced, there is simply no one to ensure she has a structure to call home. The secretary of the displacement camp noted, "For women it is terrible. Married women find it very, very hard to find food, and provide for their family. It is even worse for widows because no one builds houses for them." As a local NGO leader noted, "Women are the most affected - they are the base of the whole family. They are the one carrying the family, so for them to feed the family and to make sure the kids are not sick, the husband eats, that everything goes well it's such a big problem."

### LRA's effect on Men

As in many conflicts, men are the most vulnerable to fatal violence. Respondents repeatedly talked about the fact that the LRA will simply kill men, and are more likely to abduct or beat women and children (but leave them alive). The President of the camp noted, "For men, it is terrible because when LRA finds you, you are

killed directly, there is no discussion. Children will be kidnapped." Respondents in each field site talked about how vulnerable men are to being killed by the LRA.

Those who survive raids are left to rebuild their homes and communities from nothing. LRA attacks are almost always characterized by looting, and often burning, of people's homes and communal structures. The burden of reconstruction falls on men who have lost all of their own possessions. Often, families leave insecure areas only to find themselves displaced and homeless. This displacement combined with an inability to earn an income was described as both frightening and disempowering for men, who are no longer able to fulfill their traditional roles as caretakers and providers for the family. A young male former LRA abductee in Faradje said, "Men are scared - they don't know how they will protect their families and their children are being abducted."

In particular, men place importance on having land that then allows them to shelter and feed their families. Displacement was therefore described as being particularly disempowering. A male primary school teacher in Limai noted, "It traumatizes men who don't know if you will ever come back to your home." An NGO representative said, "Men are traumatized. They lose all of their things - they are living in a displacement camp. How can a man help his family?" Echoing this sentiment, a leader of a women's organization in Dungu stated, "Since [men] are strong - you can't see it in their face, but they have to move their family and start from scratch." A local NGO leader noted:

*Men feel powerless - when you leave your own house you feel powerless in front of others. Secondly they are also traumatized. They can't help their family be a leader in the family like*

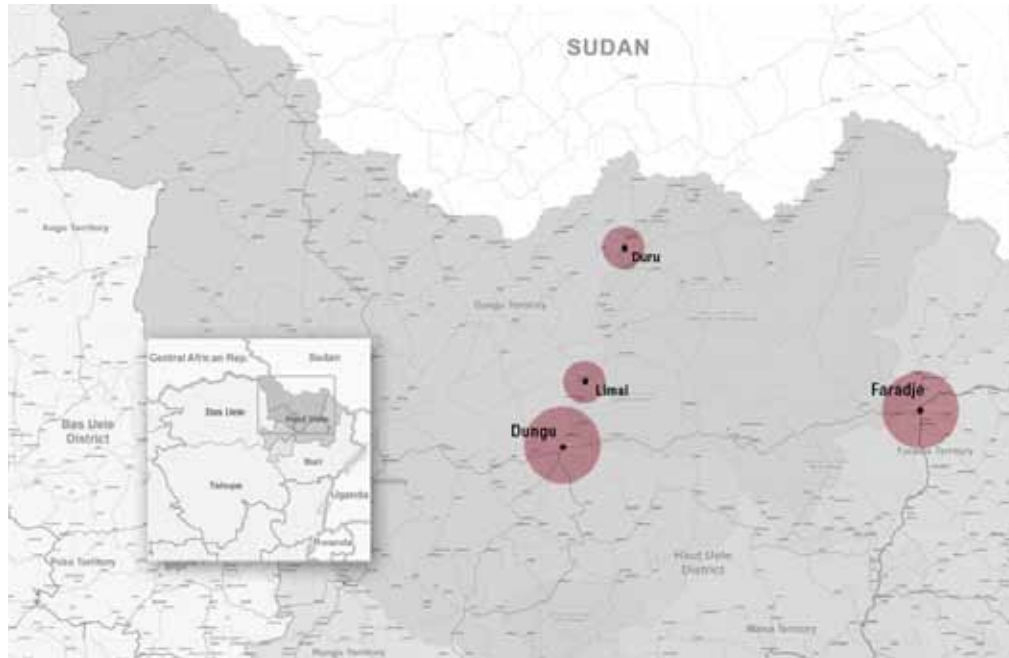


*they used to be. The most difficult thing for a Zande is to beg, but now they are doing it. It's strange - it's not the culture. They are used to working hard and getting food from their work but now they don't have land, call you IDP, whatever, so they chase you away, you feel powerless. Men are so affected.*

### Vulnerable populations

Interviewees were asked who they thought were the most vulnerable in their community. Answers varied widely and after taking into account all the responses, almost every group in the community was cited as highly vulnerable, because everyone, in fact, is. Having said this, responses tended to emphasize the particular challenges of widows; the handicapped; the elderly; the displaced; as well as all children and orphans in particular. A United Nations representative said, "When a school is burned down, who suffers? The children. When a parent is killed, who suffers? The children. Children are the most touched by LRA violence."

While all community members are vulnerable to violence and catastrophic losses from LRA violence, it is worth making a special mention of the needs of orphaned children. Many respondents, particularly those who worked with children in a professional capacity described how this population faces special challenges. The vice president of civil society in Faradje said, "I think that orphans who have lost both parents are more vulnerable than children returning from the LRA." A religious leader elaborated on the communities that were most affected, "Mostly in Doruma, Bangadi, Ngilima and Faradje, children have lost both parents. Mostly because those places have been attacked so much."



### LRA's effect on communities

Service providers noted that these children would often be taken in by extended family, but could face psychological or physical neglect. These children might be forced to work harder than others in the host home, or would not be sent to school. A women's advocate said:

*Orphans who have lost both parents from the LRA have so many problems - if they lost their mother and father they have a difficult life. They have to work in someone else's house. These orphans are given more responsibility than other children in that home - they aren't truly loved like the other children in the home. There are many like this.*

In Limai, a man said, "[Orphans being cared for by extended family] are not physically mistreated, but emotionally mistreated - they are not seen as equal with the other children, or given the same love."

The LRA's multidimensional impact on communities is a theme that runs through this report. In this section, however, the ways community members themselves describe the effects of the LRA on their societies, social networks, and families are outlined. Direct effects of LRA presence include sustaining and witnessing extreme violence. The LRA has burned schools and churches, killed and mutilated civilians, pillaged and looted, and abducted children and adults to be part of the armed group. A local NGO worker in Limai noted,

*The LRA for us, how can I say it? They are assassins. They kill people, [they are] murderers. They are terrorists, bringing insecurity here... They killed people, burned the houses, did massive kidnappings, and looting also.*

In Duru, the father of a female former LRA abductee with a child born of rape said, "When they come, they kill fathers, pillage and burn, kill some children and abduct others. They have been here since 2008." In one particularly brutal display of violence, the LRA had undertaken a massacre in a village. A few days

later, when the survivors had re-grouped and were burying their dead, the LRA came back and massacred the survivors. The consequences of this radical and unpredictable violence include mass displacement, a destruction of social support structures, an inability to cultivate or undertake trade, destruction of medical and educational infrastructure, extreme poverty, widespread health issues and exponential impacts on individuals' psychological well-being.

Beyond the direct effects of violence, respondents said the LRA has contributed to an undermining of social support structures and has devastated access to needed services in affected areas. A local NGO-worker in Limai described how, "The LRA has destabilized our community - we have almost no school, no access to health services, and no medicines. There is a destruction here." A women's activist in Dungu said simply, "we suffer from war and more war." A religious leader in Faradje was able to describe just how much of his community has fled because of the violence:

*There are many effects on the community from the LRA. We were a big community. There were 75 chapels, now only 36 are left, the rest have disappeared due to the LRA. People are starting to regroup here and there. For us, we don't leave, but we live in difficulty - material and psychological - because of the insecurity.*

At its most extreme, the effects on communities are that they simply cease to exist. As a local NGO leader described:

*The whole structure of the community is destroyed. The larger family can no longer support each other. Like my own family, we are scattered. We don't have the land we can cultivate and feed ourselves, so we have to live in different places. So the structure has been destroyed. Villages are disappearing. The village where my mom was has disappeared. It used to have more than 5,000 people. Schools disappearing; health services, people are all disappearing. The effect is that huge.*

### Community self-defense groups

When the LRA first began attacks in northeastern DRC, self-defense groups were created locally to respond to the violence. These self-defense groups consist of locally armed non-state individuals tasked with protecting a particular area. In 2008 for example, a civil society leader in the displacement camp near Dungu said that Bangadi was protected solely by the presence of a self-defense group, but that when the FARDC finally came, they intimidated the group, took their weapons and disbanded them. "Then the FARDC came and arrested them and said you can't kill LRA even while LRA is killing people in the community," said the civil society leader.

Self-defense groups reportedly existed in Ngilima, Npopo, Bangadi, and Doruma to name a few, but all have since disappeared except for a group still operating in Doruma. "If there hadn't been self-defense groups in Bangadi originally so many more would have died," said a leader in the displacement camp near Dungu. There is frustration toward the FARDC for not allowing the self-defense groups to exist, citing them as their best protection. "The government stopped self-defense mechanisms but it was our best security," said a doctor in Dungu.

In exasperation, the same doctor asked what communities are supposed to do now, simply be forced to flee if there is a problem? Due to a feeling of vulnerability combined with the lack of consistent and strong civilian protection, at the suspicion of an LRA attack, communities will easily displace themselves in anticipation of an attack. In early March, 2012, there was a series of gun shots fired near a school in Dungu and people suspected an LRA attack that sent panic through the population and an exodus of several hundred people fled to the opposite side of Dungu seeking refuge. The incident at the school was later deemed not an LRA attack by UNOCHA. However, the community response highlighted the heightened alertness and sense of fear within the population.

Other protection mechanisms that communities cited besides the presence of the FARDC and MONUSCO were simply vigilance, alertness, walking in groups and not going too far away from villages. "Community protects itself by not going far away from the village and if the LRA attacks everyone runs to the FARDC camp," said a 14 year-old female former LRA abductee.

## Resilience and protection

Despite intense hardship, communities have found ways to tap into sources of support and resilience beyond the creation of self-defense groups. Interviewees noted, however, that their ability to help themselves and others was severely constrained by the privations they all face. "If people are in trouble, a community is in trouble, how can we help ourselves? We are all suffering, we need peace to be able to rebuild," said a primary school teacher in Limai. Despite this, there were quite high levels of social cohesion displayed through community members' willingness to participate in actively reducing stigma or defending vulnerable members of the community. This will be discussed further in the reintegration section.

Respondents cited the community response to death and funerals as a time when people came together to help each other. In the case of the death of a community member, people said that other community members would always respond and provide small things to show support. "There are many ways for resilience. For instance, when there is a death in your family, the community gives you money, helps you," said a leader of the displacement camp. Interviewees mentioned that although people will sacrifice something to show support during a time of mourning, that truly helping one another financially is limited. "What I see is that there isn't a general help from the whole community but there are small groups in the community that can help each other - the family system," said a 17 year-old male former LRA abductee. A local NGO leader explains how the insecurity caused by the presence of the LRA has damaged community resilience overall:

*Before the conflict people were really supporting each other but now they don't have the means to help each other. But there is always emotional support - not financial support as such but when there is a problem you see people coming and talking and that is always there. If you lose a member to LRA everyone comes to say sorry and be compassionate with you and at least be there with you during difficult times.*

A few respondents noted that this support during funerals was critical, but that help often came too late, and that getting even small contributions when people were sick and could still seek healthcare would be more helpful than after the person had died. In Faradje, the curate described a community-run microcredit system called *mutualités* in French (or mutual insurance in English):

*It is very difficult for the community to help itself now. There is not a lot of resilience. Before there were organizations or "mutualités," which were associations of people with a common tie, such as a profession - like teachers, nurses, or people who were from the same tribe or extended family. They would give each other financial support for a celebration or funeral.*

## Perceptions of the LRA's mission and attitudes towards future amnesty

Though the impact of the LRA is clear, communities were at a loss to explain why the LRA was preying on them. This confusion contributes to communities' sense of vulnerability and frustration.

"I don't know why the LRA exists. . . I don't know why they've come," noted a leader of the displacement camp. Elaborating further, he said, "I feel like they've just come to kill all of us." A UNICEF representative explained, "The LRA came to Congo with no mission

and no mandate. No political or economic mandate - they just came to massacre communities." A religious leader described the LRA as follows:

*The mandate of the LRA is difficult to define. Because the LRA for me isn't a person because a person has an objective. It's not even an animal. Because an animal kills either to eat or to defend themselves. Not even a spirit, because a spirit does always what it knows. Maybe the LRA are people who have taken drugs or are possessed by spirits. They act without conscience or any objective. That's a definition of the nature of the LRA according to me. But because of their acts there is another definition - the LRA should be called terrorists - or mercenaries in this region.*

Respondents struggled to explain why the group had entered their country and began targeting them. Again and again, interviewees noted that the LRA, generally, was a Ugandan armed group, but could not explain their presence or objectives in Congo. The chief of a sub-group in the village of Duru said that the LRA used to pass through the area on the way to Sudan, then inexplicably started to become violent. He noted that in 2008 they started to capture people in Duru and force them to carry things and then came back and burned houses and abducted 62 children from the primary school. He continued, "After that, there was a little peace and then the LRA came again to attack." He then asked, "I only have one question: 'Is there any way to put an end to LRA violence so we can continue with our lives instead of waiting for help?'"

The vice president of civil society in Faradje echoed this narrative of escalating violence from what used to be an unknown rebel group. He explained, "The LRA ...entered Garamba Park. In 2006, Ndoa<sup>6</sup> village was the first attacked, a father was killed. Then the LRA killed another person seven kilometers away. Then the LRA went to Dungu and began massacres. In 2008, Dec. 25th, the LRA came to Faradje and committed Christmas massacres. They continued executing people all over (Nagero)<sup>7</sup>."

<sup>6</sup> A village near Faradje in Haut-Uele

<sup>7</sup> A village on the border of Garamba National Park in Haut-Uele

Despite the atrocities committed by the LRA, respondents overwhelmingly said they would be willing to accept amnesty for these combatants, if it meant a return to peace and normalcy. As a leader in the displacement camp noted, "As a Christian, to forgive is not a problem, but really we want the LRA to leave us alone so we can return to life the way it used to be." Even former LRA abductees who suffered directly at the hands of the LRA endorsed this view. A girl who had been abducted said, "I would accept forgiving the LRA - as long as the LRA comes out of the bush so people can get on with their lives." Two respondents, however, disagreed with this view. A religious leader qualified his acceptance of amnesty by saying, "The LRA is an injustice. I can't accept the total amnesty for everyone...If it's a way to end the crisis we can accept it but they should immediately pay back the damage to the people. Because all that the people are suffering now is because of Joseph Kony." A local NGO worker in Limai simply said, "I can't accept amnesty - it would be bad to do that. It's not acceptable based on what we have seen here."

## THE LORD'S RESISTANCE ARMY FROM THE INSIDE:

*"THEY DON'T MIND IF THEY BEAT YOU, KILL YOU"*

### Life in the LRA

In this section, experiences of those who have lived within the LRA will be examined to gain insight into the group's daily functioning and impact on children abducted into their ranks. Life in the LRA is characterized by strict structures of control. The process of indoctrination is highly systematized and there are rigid timelines and methods to test the loyalty of children as they become integrated into the group.

A number of factors are used to control new abductees in the LRA. Children note they are forced to speak Acholi, the local language spoken in Northern Uganda, and not a language native to DRC. To enforce this, children are beaten if they are caught speaking their own languages, which include Pazande and Lingala. The LRA also prevents new abductees from talking to each other, for fear they would form attachments amongst themselves or plan to escape. A 17-year-old male former LRA abductee from Dungu said, "When I was kidnapped since I didn't know their language - they were forcing us and beating us to learn their language... When they abduct you they ask your name and then if it's too difficult they give you a new name." A boy of the same age from Faradje described, "We couldn't talk to other abducted kids. We just sat and slept the three days I was with the LRA [before escaping]."

Children who stayed with the group for longer said they learned Acholi in order to be able to function within the group. A female former LRA abductee noted, "If they see you talk with one person frequently, they think you want to run away and they will beat you up." Another female former LRA abductee reinforced this, saying, "When they kidnap you, you just move without any rest and you can't talk with each other especially those who were abducted. And if you do, they will say you are planning to run away and they will beat you."

Life in the LRA is highly transient. Former LRA abductees describe a life of moving from place to place - emphasizing why the LRA makes use of children as porters

and carriers. As a female former LRA abductee said, "We didn't stay in one place we always stayed in different places. Men and women were separated." A male former LRA abductee described how, in his group, "We started looting people and killing people, abducting children from the village and bringing them to the camp. Those who were older, we would kill them and those who were smaller, we would leave them alone. Also they were looting villages and bringing food back..."

Social structures in the LRA are rigidly controlled and existence was subsistence-level and characterized by the quest for resources and food. As one former LRA abductee stated, "What I was seeing was that, when there is no food, we would go to houses and look for food and when they go to the house they kill the owner of the house. We stay in the bush until food is finished and when it's finished we go again to loot for food." New recruits are likely to be assigned to an LRA combatant, who may already have an existing "family structure" (one or multiple women who are forced to act as a "wife"). As one male former LRA abductee said, "There was somebody - the one who abducted me also would give me some food - I was the one carrying his food and his wife's goods." In this "family" structure, you are subordinated to those who have been in the family longer and may be susceptible to beating and other abuse. In this environment of social isolation and fear, new abductees are then given roles within the armed group, primarily based on gender.

### Girls in the LRA

There was a general consensus amongst interviewees that girls and boys are equally vulnerable to being abducted by the LRA, although some interviewees disagreed and said either girls or boys were more likely



to be taken. Once abducted, gender roles are rigidly defined, and deviation from one's defined role can result in beating or death.

Girls who look too young for sexual activity and all boys begin their time in the LRA as transporters or supply carriers. If a girl is judged to be sexually mature - in some cases people said fifteen years was the cut-off point - she will be given to an LRA commander as a "wife." A 16-year-old female former LRA abductee described her experience:

*When they abduct kids, especially girls, they distribute them to the commanders - they say 'You - this is your husband, this is your husband.' Those who are not mature will give to other commanders and say 'You keep this kid until they are old enough to be your wife.' I don't know the age as such [before they allow you to be a wife] but they just see the height and if you are too small they don't give you as a wife.*

Being a "wife" entails not only sexual slavery, but also being responsible for cooking and washing for the "husband." A 14-year old female former LRA abduct-



**LIMAI** This child's community has been attacked by the LRA so many times that, "it is impossible to count," said a community leader. The unpredictable and chaotic pattern of the LRA has entrapped communities in a constant state of fear.

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ee said, "When they abduct girls, 15 years and older, they give them to husbands." An 18-year-old female former LRA abductee said, "Girls are abducted, they are given to other LRA as wives if they are older than 15-years-old. If younger than 15, they will keep them until they are old enough. [Girls] carry babies, wash clothes and cook." A female former LRA abductee with a baby from the LRA said, "Girls are given to a husband and you have to take care of that husband." She went on to say that her "husband" beat her.

These practices are so consistent and well known that even members of the community who have not been abducted know the LRA's practices. The President of the displacement camp said, "Children start as carriers during looting missions. Those who are girls are given to commanders after one year. If you are older than 15 [and a boy], you are given a gun." During this project there were no accounts of Congolese girls being active combatants in the LRA. This is consistent with the descriptions of rigid gender roles and the treatment of females as helpers and servers to men, rather than combatants themselves in this context. It is worth noting, however, that there were reports of young female combatants with the LRA in Northern Uganda.

The practice of giving girls to only one husband might have been developed by the LRA in order to maintain a strict social structure, as well as an attempt to curb the spread of sexually transmitted infections (STIs) including HIV. In the following sections, the impact of HIV on LRA-affected communities will be examined. However, while girls and women were distributed to only one man, an LRA commander could have multiple wives. Only men who had earned a certain rank could have wives, and being given more than one wife was an indication of status. A 16-year-old female former LRA abductee explained, "My job was basically to carry kids, cooking and carrying things when we were moving. The guy who they gave me to died - he was shot during the war. They didn't give me to another guy. He had other wives. They were Ugandan. They were not nice to me - the Ugandan wives."

There are clear health consequences of being a "wife" in the LRA. Girls are likely to become pregnant while living with the group in the forest. Constantly on the move and under-nourished, these girls must carry a pregnancy with no antenatal care. In some cases, girls escape the group while pregnant. A doctor at the general hospital in Dungu who is in charge of the obstetrics unit says he sees many such cases. Speaking about how these girls are affected by their time in the LRA, he stated, "Girls come back sick and starving. Eighty-percent of the girls returning from LRA are HIV positive." He noted female abductees often have STIs like gonorrhea and syphilis in addition to HIV and are vulnerable to miscarriages and spontaneous abortions of their pregnancies. He said the cases of rape that he has seen started with the advent of LRA attacks in 2008.

In one case, according to a civil society leader in Faradje, a formerly abducted Congolese girl who had become pregnant in the LRA was released from the LRA in order to deliver the baby at a health clinic in Faradje but was told she had to return to the LRA once the child was born. "So she came out of the LRA to give birth and gave birth but the baby died so she didn't return to the bush," said the civil society leader. "Then the LRA came and found her and killed her." When LRA combatants found her, they murdered her publicly. This incident is unusual in that the girl was released with the assumption she would voluntarily return and then the LRA subsequently sought her out to personally punish her for disobeying orders. This is a tragic example of the kind of senseless brutality that the LRA has perpetrated specifically against young girls.

The multifaceted issues that girls face upon returning from the LRA will be further examined in the next section on reintegration.

## Boys in the LRA

While women and girls in the LRA are relegated to keeping within the "family" of wives and children of their "husband," boys also have strictly defined roles, but in a different arena. A key challenge for LRA leadership is to know when to begin to trust the boys they have abducted to stay within the ranks of the LRA and not attempt escape. When the LRA operated in Uganda, they were able to abduct children at very young ages and keep them for decades. In DRC, the combination of the language barrier, military pressure on the LRA and the current subsistence existence the LRA is conducting seems to make it more difficult for the LRA to indoctrinate Congolese children and turn them into combatants. Of those who have escaped from the LRA, a number said none of the LRA soldiers were Congolese or from the (Congolese) Zande tribe. Others said they saw only a very few "true" LRA soldiers who were Congolese, and that Sudanese or Central Africans were more likely to be "true" LRA soldiers fighting alongside Ugandan LRA combatants. A 17-year-old male former LRA abductee said, "I didn't see Congolese becoming true LRA. I saw children from South Sudan and Central African Republic who became true LRA." Another male former LRA abductee from Limai said, "What I do know is that [in my group] there were three Zande children who had guns."

A central issue within any armed group that abducts children and recruits them by force is to know how and when to trust abductees to stay and follow commands. This has led to what seems to be a tightly controlled system of "graduation." While the details may differ from subgroup to subgroup, the statements of former LRA abductees, especially boys who were part of these processes, suggests roughly three levels of trust. Boys start as porters or carriers of goods. After a certain amount of time in the LRA (estimates ranged from one to three years), boys could be considered eligible to graduate to a level where they can be given a weapon. As one man from the displacement camp said, "LRA abducts children and they can be with them for a

year or longer. The LRA doesn't want the children to run away with the guns they were given so they have them become combatants. But first they make them porters."

To reach this second level, former abductees describe how the LRA might assign you small tasks, or give you an opportunity to run away. If you complete the tasks, and do not take opportunities to escape, you progressively gain trust. A male former LRA abductee from Limai said, "Other children have guns - those who have spent longer in the LRA than myself." An 18-year-old female former LRA abductee from Duru said, "Boys will be taken, if they don't want to go back home, they will be trained as fighters. They will ask a boy questions to see if he is trustworthy, then they will send him to fetch water, if he keeps coming back, they will train him [as an LRA soldier]."

A 17-year-old male former LRA abductee from Dungu who spent time with the LRA noted there was a difference between the newer recruits and those whom he distinguished as the "LRA from Uganda" - which seemed to signify the older LRA soldiers. He described how the "LRA from Uganda" could kill or beat you without compunction but the newer soldiers might still be sympathetic:

*The difference is that the LRA from Uganda, they don't mind if they beat you, kill you, there is no problem. The other kids you know, they think - they are more compassionate with you - sometimes they don't behave really like LRA. Normally when they apply the witchcraft [rite of passage to become a soldier not a porter], you stay for a while and they choose to give you a wife - it's when they abduct women they will give you a wife. The top commanders choose who gets a wife.*

## Witchcraft

Witchcraft, or "gris gris" as it is called locally plays an important role in the rites of passage within the

LRA. People believe the LRA's "gris gris" has the power to change people into soldiers, and indeed, rituals involving witchcraft are used to mark important milestones in the group. Magical practices may vary from one group to another, and rituals that involve "gris gris" may be very secret or only experienced by a few people. Despite the secretiveness surrounding this topic, abductees and community members alike spoke about the issue of witchcraft in the LRA.

Some abductees said that they received witchcraft, in the form of being cut or having oil applied to their bodies, when they were first abducted. A male former LRA abductee from Faradje said, "The LRA put the 'gris gris' on our ankles and knees and on our heads. It was oil in a small bottle. When they abduct children they put this oil on them." A female former LRA abductee from Dungu echoed this experience, saying, "Only when they abducted us I saw that first they apply witchcraft on the knees and on the ankles but I don't know why they applied it but they applied it. They applied it on me. It was like an oil. Only that first time - it never happened again. I don't know why." In a similar vein, the father of a boy who was abducted from Limai said, "My son told me they took a razor and cut his right leg, left leg and forehead when he was abducted. This was a form of 'gris gris.'" One could hypothesize that the application of "magic" to children's legs might be intended to address their desire to run away from the group, but none of the respondents knew the purpose of the "gris gris" that was applied to them.

While some people noted that magic was applied immediately after abduction, it was more common to hear of "gris gris" as a way to signal the transition from an abductee to a true soldier. A 17-year-old male former LRA abductee from Dungu explained:

*Mostly the chief of the [LRA] group is in charge of the witchcraft and when someone stays with the LRA for more than one year, they will choose who gets the witchcraft and take them away from the group and apply it on them...When they choose who gets the witch-*

*craft, normally they take them far away and we don't know what they do to them or how they choose them... The behavior [of the recipients] changes when they get witchcraft - they cooperate amongst themselves, they become very aggressive.*

He went on to describe the process, saying, "Most of the time when the kids get the witchcraft and are given the gun, they are low rank and can't go first to become a high commander. Boys in the LRA are transporters, then they give the 'gris gris' and they become LRA."

Even within this transition from porter to combatant, some interviewees continued to make distinctions between those who had merely received the magic, and those who were true, veteran LRA combatants. As one 17-year-old male former LRA abductee in Dungu said, "[The soldier in charge of me] had been given the witchcraft. He had a rank - the ranking is complicated in LRA..." He then made the distinction between the "LRA themselves" and "those kids who had witchcraft on them" and described how this affected one's behavior, and one's ability to be compassionate:

*Children were mostly killed by LRA themselves and those kids who had witchcraft on them. We participated in killing but not all kids participated. Only kids with the witchcraft would kill people.*

When asked to explain the difference between the "true LRA" and the children with witchcraft, the same 17-year-old male former abductee in Dungu said, "The difference is that the LRA are worse - they just kill and don't even think. Someone who has witchcraft can think sometimes and help [you]."

In this way, the description of witchcraft seems to be a method for describing the process of indoctrination that children may undergo in the LRA, and shorthand for the extent to which children then become part of the group. One abductee noted, "They choose those

who are a bit weak, [who are] not thinking to go back home, are chosen for the witchcraft." A local NGO worker in Limai explained:

*Normally the LRA makes some kind of witchcraft and puts it on the kids - witchcraft from Uganda - we don't know how to undo this witchcraft. If it was done here maybe we could undo it but it was done in Uganda so we don't know how to undo it... The children bring bad things from the bush... once they are brought to the bush with the LRA and given witchcraft training or something, he comes back different and brings bad things from the bush.*

Being forced to kill someone can be a rite of passage into the LRA. This is often also associated with "gris gris" and an accompanying psychological transition. As a father of a boy formerly abducted by the LRA in Limai said, "My son was a porter in the group. My son didn't kill anyone, but when they want to kill someone, they take this person away. One of the children who has the witchcraft and has been trained to kill does it." Another parent also took comfort in the fact that his daughter hadn't been mentally changed by the LRA, since she was free of the witchcraft, saying, "They use drugs and 'gris gris' in the LRA to change attitudes but she [my daughter] didn't take the magic because she was hurt during her capture and so was being healed rather than being indoctrinated." A 17-year-old male former LRA abductee had a similar sentiment; "It is since the LRA didn't apply their potion on me that I am ok and my mind is ok." Conversely, those who do take "gris gris" may be perceived as more troubled and may face more distrust in the community. Understanding and taking into account these issues has implications for reintegration programming. One teacher from Limai noted, "When children come back [from the LRA], they are troubled, mean. They don't play with others. They have 'gris gris' that torments them."

## Mutilation and torture

The LRA is notorious for conducting brutal acts of

mutilation and torture. In Northern Uganda, the LRA was synonymous with the cutting off of lips and ears of their victims.<sup>8</sup> Although this practice has not been as widespread in northeastern DRC, there are continuing instances of mutilation being documented. In Duru, a young boy who had recently escaped from the LRA in January, 2012, returned with scars on his feet and burn marks. "They are evil, they tortured him," said the local administrator in Duru.

A doctor at the General Hospital in Dungu said that he has personally seen five women and two men between 2009-2010 who were severely mutilated by the LRA. He explained that the LRA uses razors to cut off victims' lips and ears, slice their Achilles tendons in half, and also uses machetes to cut deep wounds into victims arms, feet and hands.

## Escaping from the LRA

Faced with the brutal realities of life in the LRA – near starvation, constant movement over long distances and the fear of torture, indoctrination and death - abducted children do try to escape. However, the punishment for attempting to escape from the LRA is simple and final - execution. If a child is caught attempting to leave, a brutal practice is employed in order to deter subsequent attempts at escape; other abducted children are forced to perform the execution. And in some cases, the LRA specifically chooses those from the same tribe to do the killing. An 18-year-old female former LRA abductee said, "It is difficult to leave the LRA because they scare children and say if you try to escape, they will chase you and kill you. They found two boys from the Zande tribe who tried to escape and they pulled other Zande boys from the group and forced them to beat those who tried to escape with sticks until they died."

However, former LRA abductees note; "Children escape from the LRA. People do come out - mostly when the LRA is under attack by another army, people escape and escape at night when they are sleeping." This narrative, of escaping while the LRA is on a raid

or under attack, especially at night, is common. A 14-year-old female former LRA abductee said, "It's extremely difficult to escape from the LRA. If you are under attack that's when you can escape - if God is on your side."

Children say they wait until there is a sense of chaos and they are able to slip further into the forest. They then walk until they come to a road or village, or meet soldiers from a formal army (the FARDC or UPDF) that can help them access reintegration services. The story of this boy from Limai shows the remarkably difficult journeys many children undertake to return home:

*We were under attack by the UPDF so we got scattered and I ran in one direction alone and spent the night there alone. When the morning came I found a path and met the UPDF on the path and they shot at me. I ran and fell down and they caught me. They brought me to their camp and gave me groundnuts fried with salt. Then we started following the LRA - we followed for one day, then on the second day we exchanged fire with the LRA. The LRA ran away so we spent the night there. The next day we started following the LRA again and found where they spent the night then continued to follow them and got lost. So UPDF put up their communication gadget - other UPDF came with their plane and got them and then we bombed the LRA. The next morning we came across another UPDF in the bush. The next morning we had to catch a helicopter and it came and carried other UPDF and myself to Nzara, South Sudan. From Nzara I took another plane to somewhere I don't know, then landed in Bangadi. Then we spent a few weeks there in Bangadi. They gave us maize flour and beans and then took us on a plane to Dungu. Information was sent to my village and my father came to get me.*

<sup>8</sup> Human Rights Watch, "DR Congo: New Round of LRA Killing Campaign." May 21, 2010. Accessed on April 5, 2012



**KILIWA** A recent report released on May 25, 2012 by the UN Secretary General on the situation of children affected by the LRA documented six violations against children by the LRA: recruitment and use, killing and maiming, sexual violence, abductions, attacks on schools and hospitals as well as the denial of humanitarian access.

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## REINTEGRATING FORMERLY ABDUCTED CHILDREN:

*"IT IS AS IF SOMEONE DEAD HAS COME TO LIFE"*

### Reintegration of LRA abductees

Those children who are able to escape from the LRA are in many ways at the very beginning of another arduous process. Both abductees and the communities they return to face the challenges resulting from the reintegration process. Former abductees have complex physical and psychological needs, however they are often returning to host families and communities that may not have the knowledge or capacity to deal with these needs and who may have experienced trauma themselves. The exact numbers of children who have been abducted by the LRA in northeastern DRC are unknown, but to give context, since 2008, the Italian NGO COOPI<sup>9</sup> has reunified 1,853 LRA-abducted children with their families. The total number of abducted children is obviously higher, placing this situation as a top priority for humanitarian assistance. A number of reunification services are available to children trying to return to their communities - for instance, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) provides repatriation and reunification services across international borders while organizations like UNICEF and COOPI provide reunification and reintegration services within DRC.

As described in the section on escaping from the LRA, often the first contact for children escaping from the LRA are members of other armed groups, commonly the UPDF or the FARDC. The FARDC is in charge of the first step of the reintegration process. If a child is found by the UPDF, he or she will be taken to the FARDC. Once the FARDC takes charge of a formerly abducted child, soldiers will inform their officers and then notify the nearest child protection offices at MONUSCO and UNICEF within 48 hours, according to a UNICEF representative. Once the UN takes charge of the child, he or she is then brought to a partner NGO who will then facilitate the child's rehabilitation, reunification and reintegration process.

Once the child returns to his or her village, most participants described how communities celebrate the event: "Even neighbors come welcome the child who has returned," said a leader at the displacement camp. He explained further, the "family is happy - they cook food, call the neighbors to celebrate, sit and eat with the

<sup>9</sup> Cooperazione Internazionale is an humanitarian, non confessional and independent organization operating in northeastern DRC.

child and eat together." The sub-group chief in Duru said, "Children are welcomed back - it's as if someone dead has come to life." A UNICEF representative said, "When they return there is pity [for the child] - the community cries with joy when they see their child come back and has a party for them." There is recognition amongst the community that the children are innocent and that it was not their fault that they were abducted. The camp leader said, "they are innocent... they were abducted." Former abductees echo this feeling of welcome: "My family was so happy to see me and was giving thanks to God for helping me come out of the LRA."

However, after the initial reunification with the family and community, family members of former LRA abductees as well as others in the community note that children may exhibit different and troubling behaviors as a result of their experience with the LRA. These include: heightened aggressiveness, disobedience and a propensity toward violence. These behaviors, combined with the child's own struggle to understand and recover from their experiences can result in stigmatizing attitudes within the community and exacerbate the challenges of successful reintegration. The following sections will examine: the psychological challenges that former LRA abductees face, including a specific look at the unique challenges of girls returning from the LRA; community responses - both positive and negative - to abductees; and what respondents think should happen to facilitate a "return to normality."

### Behavior of LRA abductees and trauma

When children return from the LRA, communities describe how they display certain expressions of trauma, including changes in behavior, flashbacks, fear of future violence and abduction by the LRA, heightened aggression and somatic difficulties. A mother whose daughter was abducted by the LRA noticed that every morning her daughter would take all of her belongings and place them next to her, almost as if ready to travel for the day, as she would have been forced to do when with the LRA. The mother also said the girl refused to eat cooked food and would subsist on a

diet of raw foods, as she had in the forest. As noted previously, people draw a link between "gris gris" and psychological trauma. "Children come back with bad spirits," said the sub-group chief in Duru. He went on to explain that children need something to "clean their minds" and "remove the LRA."

Respondents described how children returning from the LRA have nightmares and flashbacks. A 14-year-old female former LRA abductee explained, "Some thinking of the LRA has gone away - but the commands of the LRA are still in my head. If I think about the LRA and my life in the bush, it goes in my head and starts playing like a film... I am scared of LRA attacks." Participants explained that expressions of trauma may be subtle but that trauma is present nonetheless. "They carry trauma in their heart," said a woman's association leader in Dungu. A UNICEF representative said the children come back to their communities with psychological problems, and that they are mentally troubled. A representative from the NGO COOPI said that aggression is high and that the children have sleeping difficulties. "I worry a lot when I hear about LRA. It's because of the way they abduct and kill," said a 17-year-old male former LRA abductee. A local NGO worker described a case he had seen:

*When children come back they are very, very traumatized - there is an example of one who escaped recently - we went to meet with him and he started crying and crying and then became unresponsive. After that we did our best and he is a bit better, but children are so traumatized.*

Children may have learned certain behaviors during their time in the LRA - like being aggressive - that helped them survive in the armed group but now makes it difficult for them to integrate back into civilian life. For instance, people noted that former abductees can become isolated or detached and may exhibit increased aggressiveness towards other children during play and/or remove themselves socially and become increasingly isolated. A mother of a

formerly abducted girl explained her experience:

*My relations with my [abducted] daughter are good, loving, but sometimes my daughter still has anger problems. If my daughter does something and is reprimanded, she will cry become angry, [she] will hit children younger than her.*

Parents of children who had returned from the LRA expressed confusion over their child's behavior. "Children who have escaped LRA act different and parents can't help them," said a father of a formerly abducted girl. These behaviors exacerbate stigma towards both girls and boys who return from the LRA.

Abuse of drugs and alcohol did not emerge as a dominant problem during the interviews. However, some communities did describe this as a problem. Most often, it is not children returning from the LRA who are at risk of alcohol abuse but adult community members. The curate of the parish in Faradje explained:

*Some are very affected by the LRA. They have lost goods, loved ones, they act differently and lose themselves in drink ("se vivre dans les boissons"). They are in charge of their family, but don't care. They neglect their family. Those who drink are mostly men. Women are more likely to not drink because they are more responsible. Some young people take drugs, but I don't know what kind. I don't know to what extent the drinking and drugs are linked to the LRA. It existed before, but it has probably made the problem worse.*

People noted that former LRA abductees were not allowed to drink in the LRA, so they were less likely to turn to alcohol after returning to their communi-



ties. However, as these children continue to face the challenges of rebuilding their lives, programmers should be aware of the role alcohol and drugs might play for community members, former abductees and their families.

### Girls returning from the LRA

Girls returning from the LRA face exponential challenges due to the sexual violence they often experienced after being given as a "wife" to an LRA commander. Many girls return home pregnant or with a young child. If a girl returns with a child born from rape, she can face a complex response from the community in which she faces expressions of both acceptance and stigma. Not only does the young mother have to deal with her own experiences and feelings towards the pregnancy or child, but she must face her family and community's responses to her situation. The curate of the parish in Faradje explained this difficult atmosphere as follows:

*Some girls have pregnancies/babies from the LRA. Having a baby you didn't want from a criminal that the whole community rejects - it hurts (is a sorrow) "ca peine". Also, the girl has to care for the unwanted child when living in poverty. The community doesn't reject these*

*children outright, but there is a negative prejudice. We tolerate the child, but don't carry them in our heart. It is sure that these children are put aside. It is harder for girls with a baby than for those without.*

A young girl abducted by the LRA in Duru who returned with a baby was told by people in the community that the child would "grow up to be LRA" and might try to kill her and that she should kill the child now to avoid being harmed later. She responded to this stigma by saying, "Other people said this child should be killed. I felt scared and it makes me feel pity for the child. For me, this is my child, I like my child, and didn't want my child to be killed."

In a remarkable display of protection and acceptance, this same girl's father played a significant role in diminishing community stigma toward the child. The girl described, "My father got angry and said to stop saying those things and so everyone stopped. Now people stopped saying it. Still, not everybody likes the child." Even though the community has stopped the public stigmatization, this same girl said she has to hide the child and doesn't leave the house often for fear that someone will harm her baby with witchcraft. In this case, although the community exhibited stigma, both the immediate family and the mother herself took an active stance to defend the child. The young girl explained, "My family loves me because I came out of the LRA pregnant and they helped me to give birth and help me care for the child."

A staff member of a local NGO described community sentiments towards children born from sexual violence in the LRA this way; "The child is innocent. But people are still scared. They don't know what is going on in the head of the child or the girl." In addition to the perception of negative stigma toward the child born as a result of sexual violence, the young girls themselves face stigma. A local NGO leader described how people will call girls who come back from the group "wife of LRA" or "left-overs of the LRA" and that "they are easily...shunned." In Limai, the NGO worker went on to say, "At the beginning people are

very happy when the girl comes back from LRA. But after some time people still get scared - especially men. They think this girl slept with LRA so they don't want to go to her and stigma comes."

Some respondents said that it was impossible for girls who had been with the LRA to get married upon their return to the community. Others, however, said this might be possible though challenging. A primary school teacher in Limai said, "There are girls who were raped by the LRA. There is a girl in Dungu like this, people said, 'how can a baby not know who its parents are?' - the father isn't known. There is a place that cares for raped girls [in Dungu]. There is a female abductee who got care and is now married back in her community." He went on to note that his son is in fact married to a girl from Dungu who was abducted and had a baby from the LRA that died. Some respondents said that with time, a woman who was abducted could reintegrate and possibly get married in her community.

Several participants stressed the need for girls returning from the LRA to receive complete medical examinations including pregnancy, HIV/AIDS and STI tests as a precursor to acceptance, even asking in one case if NGOs could come to their community to do the testing since they can't afford to send the girls to Dungu for the tests. This dynamic is similar to that seen in the conflict in the Kivus region of eastern DRC, where there seems to be a direct association with a girl's probability of being accepted with the community's perception of her STI status.<sup>10</sup>

There appeared to be a disconnect between what community leaders expressed as the reality of stigma in the community and what the girls themselves said. Interestingly, the sub-group chief in Duru said, "The girls don't have difficulties when they return. It's forbidden by the community to reject the girls. You can't say 'oh it's an LRA wife' you will be punished. So the girls are welcomed back." However, the young girl who felt the need to hide her child in order to protect him from harm lives in this same community. Even with this challenge, it is notable that community leaders talk about the problem of stigma openly and

<sup>10</sup> Kelly, Kabanga, Cragin, Alcayna-Stevens, Haider, and Vanrooyen, "If your husband doesn't humiliate you, other people won't: Gendered attitudes towards sexual violence in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo", in *Global Public Health: An International Journal for Research, Policy and Practice*, 9 June 2011.

participate in actively combatting the issue. Leaders described how they ask community members to recognize the children as their own and not reject them. Instances like this are positive examples of organic community solutions that reflect social cohesion and a commitment to overcoming the challenges of reintegration and negative stigma.

### Supporting each other and interactions between former LRA abductees

There are instances of small groups of former LRA abductees spontaneously gathering in groups to support one another in the aftermath of life after the LRA.

"Escapees don't organize in a structured way but they just mix occasionally. They don't want to be stigmatized more so they don't organize formally. They don't want to be called 'this is a group of escapees,'" said the leader of a woman's association in Dungu. However, this spontaneous gathering is a unique form of resilience. "I go and we meet with other escapees and we talk and sometimes eat together," said a 17-year-old male former LRA abductee from Dungu. He said further, "There is one who was in the bush with me and sometimes I go and we discuss what happened in the bush. This makes me feel better."

However, when it comes to helping each other financially, formerly abducted children said they don't have the means. When asked what advice formerly abducted children would give to children like them, common responses included urging positive behavior, going to school and contributing positively to society. "The only thing I can tell kids who were abducted by the LRA is that they should not behave the way they were behaving in the bush - that they should change their behavior," said a 16-year-old female former LRA abductee.

"Advice I would give is that they should be peaceful and not disturb other people because then they will be scared of us," said a girl who was abducted by the LRA in Duru.

### Community attitudes towards former LRA abductees

*When you come back from the LRA, the community says you are someone from LRA. They say it's you who was killing their brothers and sisters. We respond and just say 'but they kidnapped us!'*

- 14-year-old girl abducted by the LRA

Communities in the throes of coping with continued insecurity, the disruption of their economic, health and agriculture systems now face the additional challenge of reintegrating formerly abducted children who possess a variety of emotional, physical and psychological challenges. The combined experiences of facing stigma, commonly expressed through name-calling, or being ostracized or judged by others, contributes to former LRA abductees feeling misunderstood and unwelcomed. This in turn can heighten a child's sense of being unjustly accused or blamed for what has happened to them and can exacerbate negative coping mechanisms among former abductees leading to an increase in frustration and anger. In response, children may lash out physically or verbally against the perpetrators of the stigma (often other village children and sometimes other adults), or internalize feelings of shame or inferiority. In her paper "Trajectories of Internalizing Symptoms in War-Affected Sierra Leonean Youth: Examining Conflict and Post Conflict Factors," Theresa Betancourt notes, "In particular, stigma at the community level and abuse by family members is likely to lead to heightened social isolation, which easily gives way to feelings of hopelessness."

There have been no examples to date in DRC of children voluntarily joining the LRA, so it is especially confusing for children when they are stigmatized for something that was not their fault. Respondents did seem to express a general understanding that the abduction was not the child's fault, however this understanding did not seem to prevent the name-calling. A 17-year-old male former LRA abductee describes the name-calling:

<sup>11</sup> Betancourt et al "Trajectories of Internalizing Symptoms in War-Affected Sierra Leonean Youth: Examining Conflict and Post Conflict Factors" pg 22



*Those calling me 'LRA' were adults and some children. I got angry. I said if they continue to call me this I will accuse them to COOPI.<sup>12</sup> It was disturbing me too much because I didn't go to the bush willingly.*

Formerly abducted children said they think the community fears them, associating them with the violence perpetrated by the LRA. "The community was scared of me at first and thought I would take wood and kill somebody. At the beginning people said these things," explained a young formerly abducted girl in Duru. The leader of a woman's association in Dungu confirmed this sentiment by saying, "We were afraid of them. We heard they had taken witchcraft in LRA."

Misconceptions about what the children had actually experienced while in the LRA and who they are when they return leads to continued apprehension towards the children. A religious leader described community perceptions of formerly abducted children as follows:

*But later on, the effects of trauma begin in the children. The child does not behave as he used to - maybe he does not even talk - sometimes he doesn't eat, indifferent, he is*

*suspicious of everyone. And that is when the stigma begins after he behaves like that. The community isn't prepared to welcome the child or handle the child.*

Respondents from three different towns recounted a particular story to illustrate why former abductees are feared. They said they had heard of a formerly abducted child who murdered a member of his own family after he returned from the LRA. Though it seemed this did not actually occur in any of the sites visited, the tale has spread as an oral narrative and persuades communities that the children returning from the LRA are dangerous.

An NGO worker from Limai shares the story:

*When boys return from the LRA - it's a bit complicated for them. People are watchful and just observe him - watch his behavior, watch what he says. People withdraw themselves. There is a story of one who came out of the LRA. The boy went with his stepmother to the field to get cassava roots. As they were coming home the stepmother said she wanted to rest so the boy said ok let me give you a rest forever and killed the mother. When he reached home the father asked, 'where is your stepmother?' And the boy said, 'she is resting - you can even go and see she is resting.' When the father went he saw the mother was killed and came back and killed the boy.*

Interviewees explained that in the LRA children are not allowed to rest (i.e. to stop marching with the group) and that if a child complains of tiredness they will be killed, which explains the child's behavior recounted in the story.

cussed in the section on programming needs.

## Returning to normal and suggestions for fixing the crisis

When participants were asked what a "return to normal" would look like for formerly abducted children, they cited the importance of giving children back a sense of belonging and a role in the society. A "return to normal" for formerly abducted children and their families, as defined by community members, includes helping children once again find their place in the community; a reality where children are able to function well in society and contribute positively to the community. Respondents emphasized, however, that they needed peace and security to be re-established before any of these positive changes could be realized.

When children described what a normal life would be like, they explained going to school, studying, being able to go freely to the field, participating actively in communal life. A leader of the displacement camp described normality as follows:

*Make these children normal like they used to be before. Remove the thinking of the LRA - also help them understand what they did was not a sin so they can just behave like normal children. If they continue like that, they'll have bad health, bad grades - it will affect them.*

A 16-year-old female former LRA abductee said that for her, "Normal life for me is first you should have your own field where you can grow your own crops, eat, pay school fees, if you are sick you sell your crops to get money to buy the medicines. For that I would be OK and have a normal life." This very simple and basic desire to be able to provide for themselves, help their families and plan for a future is something that has been made almost impossible by continuing insecurity and lack of resources. The mother of an 18-year-old female former LRA abductee said, "We want security so we can return to normal."

Although instances of negative stigma exist in communities visited, complete rejection or ostracization was not seen. "The families don't reject physically but it's an emotional rejection. Not emotionally attaching to the kids," noted a local NGO leader. This differs from instances in Northern Uganda where young girls returning from the LRA were so ruthlessly rejected that there were high levels of suicidality among this group.<sup>13</sup>

In fact, in the communities visited for this project, stigmatizing behaviors were mentioned in conjunction with a number of positive community responses as well. This duality highlights the challenges of dealing with the complex process of reintegration, in which changing and sometimes contradictory behaviors and attitudes come into play. As noted earlier, the return of a child from the LRA was often greeted with joyful celebration - feasts, visiting and a feeling that the child had come back to where they belong. Formerly abducted children described their feelings of acceptance as they are visited by friends, invited to play or eat with others, or greeted on the road or in the village. One 14-year-old female former LRA abductee in Duru said, "People accept me and don't run away from me."

In contrast, in one community, formerly abducted children felt singled out and stigmatized by being called names like "children of the LRA" or "leftovers of the LRA," which led to further instances of aggression or isolation by other children. At the same time, however, children said they felt welcomed by their own parents. Stigma also seemed to reduce over time as people realized that the children were not going to kill them or harm them and that they were in many ways the same individual as before the abduction. The vice president of civil society in Faradje put it eloquently, "The community understood that those who came back from the LRA are the same as they were before and they were accepted." And further explained, "The children remembered that they were brothers." However, even with relative acceptance, there are a variety of services needed to foster a successful reintegration that supports family and community level resilience and support mechanisms. This will be further dis-

<sup>12</sup> International organization working in child protection in northeastern DRC.

<sup>13</sup> As seen during Lindsay Branham's training at Food for the Hungry's New Life Center in Kitgum, Uganda which was a center for rehabilitation for girls returning from the LRA with children born from rape.



**KILIWA** Children and parents part of a DTJ and Queens University, Belfast psychosocial intervention for children and families affected by LRA violence wait for the session to begin in Kiliwa, DRC. The intervention aims to reduce psychological distress.

© Lindsay Branham / DTJ

## PROGRAMMATIC NEEDS AND RESPONSES:

*"...SO THEY CAN HAVE SOMETHING TO SURVIVE"*

### Psychosocial assistance

Currently, services exist for children returning from the LRA at multiple stages: reunification with the family, immediate reintegration assistance and longer-term services. However, children interviewed described how assistance was insufficient to meet their current needs and stressed several categories of unmet need, including psychosocial assistance, educational/vocational opportunities and basic services.

Communities emphasized the importance of psychosocial assistance during the reintegration process. Respondents described how addressing trauma on an individual and societal level was vital, and saw the role of this kind of aid as helping children to "forget the LRA," to "cleanse their minds" and help them "return to normal." The sub-group chief in Duru said, "Psychosocial means that when a person is sick-minded, he is useless for the community but when he is normal the community can use him again." Thus there seemed to be a clear link between "usefulness" in society, being free of trauma, and being able to forget what happened in the LRA.

A religious leader described psychosocial assistance as, "Helping the child to come out of the state of trauma - to become normal." Psychosocial assistance can include medical, mental and socio-economic elements. But when children, parents and community members were asked what psychosocial assistance was and what they needed, people stressed the need to, "help them remove the idea of being in the bush," as said by a 16-year-old girl who was formerly abducted by the LRA. A leader at the displacement camp said that psychosocial assistance means:

*First, to make children normal and as they used to be. Change the thinking back from LRA, also help them understand they were forced to do things in LRA, if they don't start good mental health, affects other aspects of life. Give them support so they forget the LRA.*

In other contexts like Sierra Leone, Liberia and Northern Uganda, where armed groups forcibly abducted children, there have been examples of using traditional

ceremonies to "cleanse" children or symbolically bring them back into the community. The questionnaire asked questions related to whether there were any similar practices in northeastern DRC. While there was a general consensus that no such practices existed, a few respondents brought up going to Catholic confession as a way to remove past trauma - this was described as an opportunity for "cleansing" children from the "things of the LRA."

Participants stressed that psychosocial assistance should happen at the community level since, "the community is the base," said a local NGO worker in Limai, and that a significant challenge is that communities don't have the resources to address mental health needs of former abductees, their families, and others in the society. A vital part of improving the psychosocial response will be enhancing the capacity of family members and community stakeholders to understand and respond to the needs of children returning from the LRA. The curate of the parish in Faradje asked repeatedly for organizations to come and train parents to better care for their children and help them to understand and respond to the trauma that their children have faced. Similarly, people expressed enthusiasm to have capacity building for community leaders to enable them to play a more active role in caring for and assisting with the long-term reintegration of formerly abducted children.

### Educational and vocational opportunities

Context appropriate, long-term vocational training is needed to provide children with not just a skill set but ultimately a role and, as described in the previous section, a "value" in the community. If attending formal school is not a possibility either due to destruction of the educational infrastructure, the inability to pay the extra fees, displacement, or the fact that children are too old to re-engage in the school system, then vocational opportunities are critical to ensuring the child can gain a sense of self-worth and agency.

Participants said that if a child is lucky, he or she would be able to go to school, and some opportunities

to attend primary school existed in all the communities visited. There was, however, recognition that there are no vocational or employment opportunities in the communities where the research took place, except for Dungu and Faradje. Even in these sites, access to vocational training or employment was still highly limited. A UNICEF representative said that there are some short-term programs that last between two and nine months, which provide vocational training, but that the longer-term programs that could truly teach viable skills do not exist and are gravely needed. A religious leader explained the dire state of educational and vocational opportunities for children returning from the LRA: "In the remote areas there are no schools or jobs for the children. The children are left to themselves with no hope."

A 17-year-old male former LRA abductee in Dungu said, "What I am seeing is that there is no school or tuition for these kids [who have been with the LRA] - and for others they should at least give them a packet of cigarettes to sell so they can have something to survive." This quote emphasizes just how basic the level of subsistence is for these children - that a pack of cigarettes is viewed as "employment." However, reintegrating children requires more than just a pack of cigarettes to resell on the street. They need context specific sustainable interventions to help them build skills and gain income that will ideally last beyond the reintegration phase.

### Other basic services

The other basic services that were cited repeatedly as needs were food, health services, and basic necessities such as clothing. Service providers also discussed an emerging issue: the sexual exploitation and abuse of women by all of the armed actors in the region. At the hospital in Dungu, the doctor noted that he saw many more cases of rape and abuse of women and girls with the advent of the LRA. Often, this resulted in the transmission of disease, especially HIV/AIDS. While prostitution was not commonly mentioned as an issue in the rural communities, religious leaders and health care providers in Dungu noted that young girls were

turning to transactional sex as a way to earn money, especially among the displaced communities.

### Perception of international NGOs

Respondents expressed a complex relationship with the international NGOs (INGOs) operating in the region. On one hand, people discussed how particular NGOs provided needed assistance, like drilling a well and helping with reintegration. However, there was also deep frustration with some of the aid being given, which communities said was not always appropriate or dependable. Interviewees noted how some of the food being given to communities was not appropriate to the diet of the region, or NGOs who have distributed seeds months after the growing season, making the seeds useless. One of the main challenges respondents expressed toward international NGOs was a sense of fatigue from communities who said they were often visited when NGOs did needs-assessments but that they saw very little concrete aid as a result. "[The community] has symptoms of withdrawal because many organizations have given promises but don't deliver. Children and parents are angry," said a women's activist in Dungu.

INGOs also tended to cluster densely around a few towns, but did not reach the places that were desperately in need of aid. This is particularly true of Bas-Uele, where almost no aid is being given - even though it is gravely affected by LRA violence and malnutrition. "Here in Dungu there is the assistance of psychosocial help and NGOs are here helping that address this but in those remote areas there is no one helping with psychosocial assistance," said the religious leader. Finally, people described how the funding cycles were much too short to create sustainable or effective programs. "I am critical of INGOs. They have their own



reasons - they say they are emergency we don't do this or that, it's not for lasting and all that. But for me, it really makes me annoyed," said a local NGO leader. Others, including those within the INGO community, also expressed frustration with "emergency cycle" funding which is characterized by short project periods and often focuses on basic needs: "If you do a reintegration project it's maybe for 10 kids and then the money is gone. You can't just stop after 3-4 months - need long term programming," said an employee of an international NGO.

## MILITARY RESPONSES TO THE LORD'S RESISTANCE ARMY:

*"JUST MEN WITH GUNS"*

### Congolese Government Response and the FARDC: Protectors or Perpetrators?

National Congolese Governmental-level response to the insecurity in this region is complicated by the fact that Joseph Kabila, the current President of the DRC, refuses to officially recognize the fact that the LRA are present in the country and that the violence is not attributable to mere "banditry." While it is difficult to speculate on the reasons for this, the denial may be based in the fact that first, recognizing the problem would demand a more concerted national response, and second, that it could open the door to sustained military action on Congolese soil from other governments. Instead, as noted earlier in the report, the administration of Joseph Kabila has sent scattered troops to the region to address what they term as a problem with "banditry." Communities are fully cognizant of this fractured and disingenuous response, and note they could be punished for speaking out about the danger they live in. In Limai, one respondent said, "Right now, the government says there is not LRA, but the people are still suffering and get abused. There was a young man who left on his motorcycle and was killed just a few days ago. It is hard to know if it was bandits, LRA, UPDF, etc." Others in Dungu noted, "The government can retaliate for talking about the LRA."

This situation puts people in a position where they face not only life-threatening circumstances, but possible retaliation from their own government for talking about these threats. A final threat on top of all of this is that when troops are sent to the region, communities often find themselves preyed upon by those sent ostensibly to protect them. As a respondent from Dungu said, speaking about the FARDC, "They are the army - they are there. But it's men with guns, not soldiers - just take men and give them guns without any training or equipment, just guns. They are not well paid, not disciplined - they are not an army."

In the more remote sites, interviewees talked about how the population faces extortion from national soldiers. One man noted, "They are here of course and they don't work normally," going on to say that the population has little confidence in the FARDC and that the soldiers steal from the people. In one community we will not identify due to the sensitive nature of the following content, a respondent said:

*Sometimes when people see the traces that LRA has been there - they tell the FARDC and they say they don't have the means to do anything about it. The FARDC mistreats the community - asks for food, money - they beat up one guy here who refused to give his bicycle to FARDC... if they need anything they just come and ask for it and say they will give you money back but never do. They took medicine worth 100 dollars and never brought it back. Took over 600 dollars worth of goods from local traders and never gave it back. They really trouble people here. And if you don't get it they will keep coming and coming until you give it and it makes it hard to get our own trade going or medicine for ourselves. There have been cases of FARDC raping women, and small girls under 18 were forced to be raped in the community.*

A number of respondents also talked about how the advent of the FARDC in their communities meant that local Congolese self-defense groups were dismantled. The leadership of the displacement camp came from different villages but all told a similar story - that their village had created a self-defense group to defend itself against LRA attacks. When the FARDC arrived, they put a stop to the groups and often punished those who had been in the defense group. A camp representative said,



*I came from Bangadi. Before, there was no FARDC there. Self-defense group used to kill the LRA. Then FARDC came and arrested them and said 'You can't kill LRA.' Even while LRA is killing people in the community! I think its politics that want to allow for us all to be killed off so others can take the land.*

Another camp leader noted,

*In Ngilima, at the beginning of LRA attacks they had self-defense. But once FARDC came, they would make the self-defense groups to show them where the LRA was, but then [the FARDC] didn't kill them and after beat up the self-defense group and took their guns away, so the self-defense groups ran away.*

In addition, people noted they might even be punished for reporting sightings of the LRA or reporting LRA activity. We heard from multiple respondents that if the FARDC received a report of the LRA, they might waste time before going to investigate, or might purposefully avoid finding the enemy force to avoid bloodshed: "If the FARDC hears about an LRA attack it takes them like three hours before they do anything." In some

cases, those who report sighting the LRA are then punished for "giving false information." As one man described, "It's good to tell the FARDC but sometimes if they go and look for the LRA and don't find anything they will find you and be angry, even though the LRA is always on the move." A local NGO leader explained, "To the Congo Government I say, pay attention to us - this is a phenomenon that exists. They say it is local bandits - this isn't true. The presence of the LRA exists. They should recognize and accept that the LRA exists here. In Haut-Uele and Bas-Uele."

## UPDF

People had mixed perceptions of the UPDF's efficacy and mission. A number of people said they had no direct knowledge of the UPDF's actions. Community leaders in Faradje and Duru had positive perceptions of the group: "UPDF is very important for us. They are an army fighting against the LRA. I don't understand what happened between the DRC government and Ugandan government that told them to leave." A local NGO worker in Limai noted they were helpful when first deployed but then began to exhibit violent tendencies: "At the beginning [the UPDF] were ok, fighting against the LRA, but afterwards they started behaving like LRA and killing some of our brothers and not behaving well and their mission is not even clear."

Others, mostly in Dungu, were more skeptical. The leaders of the displacement camp stated that the UPDF was, "not doing the job it came for" and went on to say: "Some former LRA are in the UPDF. Maybe they meet in the bush but they are friends, same country. Sometimes the UPDF and the LRA fights and sometimes they communicate with each other. They have the gadgets to communicate. They speak the same language - Acholi." A local NGO leader echoed the concern with seeing former LRA in the UPDF, describing how:

*When they came at the beginning they were good guys - we used to want them, but now I don't think their mandate is clear. Especially when the UPDF started including ex-LRA com-*

*batants in their group - kids who had seen LRA in the bush and then you see the same people in UPDF, they are more traumatized and you can't explain it to them. And to me it is really an insult to Congolese. Someone who has done such bad things to you, instead of taking him out of the country to de-traumatize him, you take him into the army and back to same community. You can't trust this. We think they're just coming here to steal our things. So people don't trust UPDF at all. We don't trust them at all because of their behavior - especially when we started seeing them kill Congolese - and there is no real will for them to fight LRA.*

## US Advisors

Respondents were generally enthusiastic about the fact that the United States has sent military advisors to the region to provide technical support in the hunt to capture Joseph Kony and other senior LRA leaders. There was a general sense that this measure would help put an end to the LRA threat. The vice president of civil society in Faradje echoed this, saying, "We are happy because we think it will help the situation." A religious leader noted, "It is a good initiative to send advisors - it is a measure to help peace and security to have the US involved in finding Kony. We want them to come fast because we are tired. They have financial, military, logistical means to help."

A number of respondents, however, remained skeptical about the efficacy of this intervention and called for modifications to, or expansions of, the U.S. effort. A local NGO leader noted:

*I was first to criticize Obama's decision. It's a good decision to send 100 advisors but it lacks many, many things and it's already failed for me. Why? First, there is no clear plan and structure - when are they coming, for what mission, and there is no timeline. They are coming like UPDF came. Second, there is no structured plan for protection of civilians,*

*because we know when you strike hard on the LRA, the LRA strikes back on civilians... I was one of the first to say it's good to bring publicity of LRA issue but... [this is] not a well prepared plan. They should meet us here on the ground to see what we can do.*

In Limai, a man echoed some of these criticisms:

*We heard they sent advisors but there is no proof, no tangible proof. The information came and passed - there is no proof he sent advisors...The population thought that these soldiers would come with some technical equipment and detect the LRA very fast, take them from the bush and take them back to Uganda and peace would come to this area. But nothing has been done, nothing...My message to Barack Obama and the international community is this: send equipment to detect where LRA is and bring them out of the bush and bring them out so we can have peace. Even arrest Joseph Kony so we can have peace. We have been suffering for more than four years, and we just want peace.*

## RECOMMENDATIONS



The LRA is a highly organized group that conducts military missions in northeastern DRC with ruthless efficacy. Narratives from former LRA abductees highlight the intensely controlled nature of the group; this discipline allows them to terrorize communities throughout a vast geographic area that includes three different countries. Violence is only one of the devastating consequences of the LRA. The instability resulting from communities' expectations of abuse and predation has both immediate and long-term implications, including: widespread food insecurity; a destruction of the economic infrastructure; massive displacement; critical health threats, and psychological distress. There is a perfect storm of health issues as HIV, hunger, malaria, and water-borne disease interact to create a situation where people face multiple life-threatening issues in a place with almost no healthcare infrastructure. While information is difficult to gather in this area, service providers are sounding an alarm the international community should immediately respond to: HIV/AIDS has become a significant and increasing threat in these communities. Without better testing, treatment, and prevention of mother to child transmission, HIV/AIDS will spread unchecked. In addition, the complex issue of reintegrating children formerly abducted by the LRA continues to be a pressing need. These children's unique challenges need to be addressed in the context of their existing family and community systems. Skills need to be developed within these structures to actively reduce trauma and stigma and encourage long-term successful reintegration, which will influence society-wide cohesion in the future. A "return to normal" for formerly abducted children and their families, as defined by community members, includes helping children once again find their place in the community; a reality where children are able to function well in society and contribute positively to the community.

Respondents emphasized that they needed peace and security to be re-established before any of these positive changes could be realized and that peace must be a foundation for other development. Communities had functioning economic and social support systems before the LRA came to the area. Respondents underscore that the most important intervention will be to restore security so they can rebuild their own lives. In addition to this, however, the international community can assist with essential services, including: ensuring food security; delivering life-saving health services; improving water and sanitation and providing psychosocial and educational interventions to formerly abducted children and adults.

This study highlights the need for more evidence around how to meet the needs of communities affected by the LRA. Often, assumptions about what aid should be provided do not meet the most pressing needs of those affected. There are striking

differences between the way the LRA operates in DRC compared to Northern Uganda and this challenges many of the set notions about the type of assistance that is needed and how best to provide it. All of this points to the need to create an evidence base of best practices for programming in current LRA-affected areas including northeastern DRC, Central African Republic and South Sudan to more effectively evaluate impact and effectiveness of current services.

And while communities are facing emergency-level challenges now, they need solutions that will last into the future. Emergency-phase funding must be complemented with sustainable long-term solutions. People do not experience problems on three to four month cycles and service providers should not expect to address issues in this way. Integrated solutions are needed to respond to multi-level problems - continuing to work with communities to build on current protection and resilience strategies, while strengthening the national and international response, will be critical to addressing the continued LRA threat.

### To the Congolese Government:

- Recognize and acknowledge the threat of the LRA publicly;
- Provide an adequate military response that puts civilian protection as a top priority;
- Participate fully in the African Union's Regional Cooperation Initiative on the LRA (RCI-LRA) to solve the crisis;
- Ensure the national army is a protective, not predatory, force;
- Train FARDC troops to respond to reports of LRA activity immediately and work with local communities to respond to security threats. Under no circumstances should soldiers extort money or goods from civilians nor perpetrate violence against those they are charged to protect;
- Provide steady pay to soldiers based in northeastern DRC to remove the temptation to prey on local communities for money and goods;
- Sign a set of standard operating procedures (SOP) between the FARDC and UNICEF similar to what

the UPDF has agreed upon with UNICEF (SOP signed May 15th, 2011) to ensure time limits of military possession of minors who have escaped from the LRA;

- Invest in infrastructure development in the region including road rehabilitation and construction;
- Ensure access to quality primary education by providing steady pay to primary school teachers, equipment for primary schools and structure rehabilitation to education facilities destroyed by the LRA;
- Strengthen local governance institutions including supporting operations of civil society networks.

### To the International Community:

#### Humanitarian Assistance:

- Improve funding to ensure that projects respond to communities' most pressing needs, rather than "poignant" issues;
- Provide holistic instead of "siloed" responses;
- Increase humanitarian aid to remote and difficult-to-access areas that are affected by LRA violence including Bas-Uele;
- Increase assistance in the food security sector, adapting to harvesting cycles and cash crops;
- Increase sensitization efforts around safety and security issues that equip communities with basic emergency contingency plans;

#### Early Recovery and Development:

- Ensure funding cycles are long enough to ensure programs are effective and address not only immediate but long-term needs;

#### Health:

- Focus on the significant and alarming spread of HIV in the region. This includes improving voluntary counseling and testing; ensuring steady and widespread provision of ARVs; and immediately beginning services to prevent mother to child transmission of HIV/AIDS;
- Increase clean water and sanitation access for remote communities;

#### Psychosocial Assistance:

- Equip family and community members to respond to the trauma and psychosocial needs of community members affected by the LRA;
- Invest in existing civil society structures to build their capacity to respond to psychosocial needs of community members and understand referral pathways;

#### Reintegration Assistance for Children:

- Increase services specifically targeted to children orphaned from LRA violence who remain a particularly neglected demographic;
- Bolster vocational and educational opportunities not only for children returning from the LRA but other vulnerable children as well;
- Increase education and sensitization efforts to actively reduce community-level stigma;
- Include parents in interventions with formerly abducted children in order to strengthen the entire family system;
- Invest in longer-term reintegration programming for formerly abducted children that emphasizes long-term successful reintegration and is not limited to short-term reunification;

#### Reintegration Assistance for Adults:

- Increase reunification and reintegration assistance for adults formerly abducted by the LRA. Currently these services are severely lacking;

#### Security:

- Hold the UPDF accountable to adhere to the Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) signed with UNICEF in 2011 if the UPDF returns to DRC, to ensure protection of formerly abducted children.



### To the Lord's Resistance Army:

- Cease all violent activities in the tri-region of northeastern DRC, CAR and South Sudan;
- Surrender and disarm peacefully;
- Participate in the UN's DDR process (Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration).

## Photography Captions

<b>COVER PHOTO</b>	A 17 year old girl who was abducted by the LRA and forced to become a "wife" to an LRA commander. She had a baby as a result of this forced marriage and since her escape has faced stigma from her community. However her father has defended her and demanded that the community treat her equally.	<b>PHOTO PAGE 47</b>	This 14-year-old boy was abducted by the LRA and escaped eight months later, but not before sustaining gunshot wounds to his arm. A village chief said that, "unless you pray every night the child will have bad dreams and in the morning the child will think very bad things."
<b>PHOTO PAGE 7</b>	A young woman who survived an LRA slaughter in NE DRC. She witnessed her community members being mutilated and murdered and the children in her community abducted and taken away. A village chief in Duru says, "we need peace only."	<b>PHOTO PAGE 50</b>	This 15-year-old girl was in her village in NE DRC when the LRA attacked. Dozens of children were abducted and dozens more were killed. She managed to avoid abduction but sustained major gunshot wounds to the inside of her legs. She lives with constant pain.
<b>PHOTO PAGE 14</b>	Community members are scared to go too far from village centers due to recent LRA attacks. Gathering water alone can place a young woman at risk of abduction, due to the long distance she may have to travel.	<b>PHOTO PAGE 52</b>	Children and parents part of a DTJ and Queens University, Belfast psychosocial intervention for children and families affected by LRA violence wait for the session to begin in Kiliwa, DRC. The intervention aims to reduce psychological distress.
<b>PHOTO PAGE 16</b>	Homes destroyed in an LRA attack. The LRA often loots goods from houses, forces newly abducted civilians to carry the loot into the bush and then burns the houses down in an attack, leaving survivors destitute.	<b>PHOTO PAGE 55</b>	A leader of a local health clinic sifts through the various cases, expressing frustration at the lack of materials and equipment at the clinic. Access to health services has become increasingly constricted.
<b>PHOTO PAGE 22</b>	A 14-year-old boy who was abducted by the LRA and his family. He returned home several months ago but has had a hard time readjusting. He says, "I saw scary things in the LRA."	<b>PHOTO PAGE 57</b>	A young girl stares out over an empty field in Limai, DRC. Young girls are often targeted for abduction by the LRA and forced to become "wives" to LRA commanders.
<b>PHOTO PAGE 24</b>	Haut-Uele province, in northeastern DRC. The difficult landscape has become the grounds for the LRA to eek out an existence sustained by looting communities. The LRA is currently active in South Sudan, Central African Republic and northeastern DRC.	<b>PHOTO PAGE 60</b>	Constant insecurity created by the LRA has increased poverty rates and restricted access to health services. This is a home of a family whose son was abducted by the LRA and now struggles to provide for his needs
<b>PHOTO PAGE 28</b>	A 9-year-old girl who is part of a psychosocial intervention for children affected by LRA violence in Kiliwa, DRC. According to a recent quantitative study by DTJ and Queens University, Belfast, over 80% of children interviewed reported that the worst event of their lives was related to LRA violence, including personal abduction by the LRA, the loss of a family member to the LRA, or the witness of massacres.	<b>PHOTO PAGE 63</b>	The impact of the LRA in northeastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) goes far beyond direct violence and touches every aspect of life, both for formerly abducted children and their communities.
<b>PHOTO PAGE 31</b>	Driving back to Dungu, Haut-Uele, DRC. Communities have limited access to humanitarian aid but a variety of international and national NGOs are working diligently to access remote areas.		
<b>PHOTO PAGE 32</b>	A map of Dungu Territory - Haut-Uele, Oriental Province, where the research for this project was carried out.		
<b>PHOTO PAGE 37</b>	A 13-year-old boy who was abducted by the LRA was forced to be a porter, carrying large amounts of goods for extremely long distances at a time. A woman's association leader in Dungu says that children abducted by the LRA and escape, "carry trauma in their heart."		
<b>PHOTO PAGE 38</b>	This child's community has been attacked by the LRA so many times that, "it is impossible to count," said a community leader. The unpredictable and chaotic pattern of the LRA has entrapped communities in a constant state of fear.		
<b>PHOTO PAGE 44</b>	A recent report released on May 25, 2012 by the UN Secretary General on the situation of children affected by the LRA documented six violations against children: recruitment and use, killing and maiming, sexual violence, abductions, attacks on schools and hospitals as well as the denial of humanitarian access.		

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