

“Survey of War Affected Youth (SWAY): Youth, Violence and Protection in Uganda”  
*Meeting Notes, February 22, 2007*

**Please note: The opinions expressed in WNCAC meetings and reflected in these notes are those of the individual participants and are not endorsed by the WNCAC, which provides an open forum for exchange among those concerned with children affected by armed conflict.**

The Washington Network held its Bi-monthly meeting on February 22, 2007 on the Phase I findings of the Survey of War Affected Youth (SWAY) in Uganda. The survey is interdisciplinary research collaboration between Academics and non-governmental organizations to investigate the causes and conduct of child soldiering, the impacts of war and war violence on youth, and the appropriate programmatic response. The survey targets bringing new information, tools, and analysis to programmatic responses geared at the protection, assistance, and reintegration of youth in Northern Uganda. The meeting discussed the survey's recommendations for "significant changes" in protection services and humanitarian aid, as well as its potential applicability to similar protection and humanitarian responses in other conflicting regions. The full details of the SWAY survey can be located at <http://www.sway-uganda.org/>

The conversation was framed by *Chris Blattman* Co-Director of the Survey of War Affected Youth (SWAY). Chris is currently completing a PhD in Economics at UC Berkeley and holds a Masters in Public Administration and International Development from Harvard University. He has conducted survey-based research in India, Kenya, and Uganda. Currently Chris is also working with the World Bank to experimentally evaluate the effectiveness of post-conflict youth programs in Kosovo and Ingushetia. He is working to promote formal evaluations of youth programs in East Africa as well.

**Presentation:**

*SITUATION IN NORTHERN UGANDA:*

- 20 years war between Lords Resistance Army (LRA) led by Joseph Kony and the Ugandan government, mainly in the north of the country, extending into Sudan.
- Conflict is characterized as low scale guerilla warfare, increasingly aimed at civilians. Since the beginning the LRA was unpopular even amongst the Acholi who clashed with the movement, which translated into violent reprisals carried out by the LRA in the early 1990's through invasions of rural homesteads. By the mid 1990's the LRA was enabled by Sudan and carried out mass abductions; whereby it is estimated that 66,000 youth have been abducted for at least one day in the last fifteen years.
- Most abductions occur in homes at night, typically carried out by twelve to fifteen fighters in one village. The abducted youth are forced to carry the looted goods to temporary hideouts. Some are released or escape, but males typically between the ages of eleven to twenty-five are kept.

**CHALLENGES:**

- Evidence base is thin in some aspects
- Little data available
- Psychological and public health focus
- Impacts of armed conflict are difficult to identify
- Relevant comparison of groups are seldom available
- Program design often improvisational
- Unavoidability of crude targeting mechanisms like children, vulnerable categories, traumatization, and psychosocial care

**PURPOSE OF SWAY:**

- Bring new quantitative and qualitative evidence to unanswered questions.
- To promote evidence-based post conflict data and analysis to improve program targeting and design

***Current emphasis lies in:***

*Trauma  
Broad based  
psychosocial care  
Small amount of  
vocational training  
Child centered  
Former combatant*

***Evidence argues for a shift, focus on:***

*Interrupted human capital  
Targeted  
Specialized interventions  
Broad based education,  
economic support  
Child and youth centered  
Needs based*

**SURVEY DESIGN:**

- Based on in depth interviews of households, abductees, youth, and communities; in random samples of over 1000 households in eight sub counties.
- The survey identified all male youth living in households in 1996, the base year for the survey. 40% had been abducted of which 70% were under the age of 18 and 10% of these were between the age of 12 and 15; 16% died or had not returned; 41% had migrated. The average length of abduction is of 8.1 months.
- While comparing between the abducted and non-abducted children and youth, age was the only indicator, a finding that confirms the information provided by rebel leaders during interviews.

**KEY FINDINGS:**

- While the formerly abducted experience more violence, all youth are affected. As for the consequences of abduction, based on the 19 symptoms of psychological distress there was a 15% higher-level presence of these symptoms amongst the abducted. The majority presented mild anxiety while 5% presented serious anxiety. No real difference was noted in emotional distress, asocial behavior, and aggression.
- Furthermore there are high levels of reported community acceptance.

- While the psychosocial impact of abduction is relatively mild, the main impact is material: education employment and health
- The main reason for all these differences points to the time spent away, not traumatization or stigmatization.
- Youth abducted loose on average nine months of education, which leads to the doubling of illiteracy due to the age at which they are abducted, usually missing grades 6-7 in Uganda where literacy is taught. The younger and longer they are kept the larger the gap.
- While there is no difference noted in the quantity of employment, a significant difference in the quality of employment is noted. Furthermore, a tenth have an injury that hinders their ability to work.

#### *STIGMATIZATION VS CONFLICT RESOLUTION:*

- Instances of insults and conflicts take common forms and patterns, such as from parents of unreturned abductees or from individuals with specific grievances.
- These findings support a strong need for conflict resolution as opposed to sensitization, which would address the root cause.

#### *CHILDREN VS. YOUTH*

- Currently children are at the center of attention, to which youth are often an addendum.
- Yet by most measures the young adults are doing as poorly as the adolescents.
- In regards to literacy young adults are doing worse. In regards to earnings those abducted as adults are at least as adversely affected, sometimes more so.
- There should be age appropriate interventions. For young adults a stronger focus on accelerated educational programs, support for secondary schooling, access to credit and land should be placed.

#### *IGAs VS. LAND*

- While IGAs are an important tool and provide a needed income supplement, they are not sufficient.
- It is not clear that the economy can support more tailors and carpenters without increases in demand.
- There needs to be an agricultural or industrial based economy to accompany this service sector.
- The only real economic strategy is one that returns youth to the land. This implies increasing access to land and livestock

#### *CAVEATS:*

- Knowledge gaps
  1. Limited evidence based
  2. Unintended consequences
  3. Stigmatization
  4. Kin responsibilities
  5. Unproductive skills

- Stigmatization:
  1. Targeting has generated ill will and possible stigmatization
  2. Categories upon which targeting is based are not necessarily meaningful
  3. Targeting is unavoidable such as: illiteracy, war wounds, severe psychosocial manifestations and absence of caregivers.

*BEYOND UGANDA:*

- Finding similarity to other post conflict studies such as Sierra Leone where similar economical and political impact occurred, or US veterans: similar impact, same channel. Furthermore there may be some relevance to other areas where interruptions of school or work may occur.

*NEXT STEPS:*

- Women and girls survey

**Discussion Points:**

There were a range of questions and points raised by the participants in the meeting, These included:

*What will it take to for a shift in aid policy?*

- Despite the quantitative analysis now providing evidence to what had already been mentioned in qualitative analysis, it is hard to tell if that will be enough to affect change.
- Funders seek indicators for success.

*What is the expected outcome of the research on the women and girls?*

- Females insinuate different impact and experiences; the questions of motherhood, marriage and adulthood are very different than their male counterparts.

*Does the research take into account the cultural context of the Acholi and others?*

- This aspect reflects more in the final report and better reflects Jeannie Annan's area of expertise. Yet, culture plays an important part of what the definition of youth is, their resilience, the role of secondary education, and gender perspectives, which are idiosyncratic to the situation.

*The research indicates that the only criteria by which rebels abduct children and youth are based on their age. Yet age is so difficult to assess, is there a control for age variation?*

- Indeed it is difficult to assess the real age, so in reality they are guesstimates

*Why count the abductions, which have lasted only one day?*

- It serves as a means to avoid overstating or understating the average impact of abduction.

*When asking for greater focus on secondary school, does that imply not focusing on primary?*

- Both are extremely important, while there should be a maintained focus on primary education, secondary education is the most problematic.

### **Resources and Program Sharing**

- Graca Machel Impact of Armed Conflict on Children

In 1994, Graça Machel's reputation as an educator and children's champion led *United Nations* Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali to name her the Expert in charge of producing a ground-breaking report on the *impact of armed conflict on children*. The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child and the General Assembly requested the report in late 1993. Ms. Machel served as Mozambique's first post-independence Minister for Education and within 10 years, school enrolment had doubled to over 80 per cent of school-age children. She continues to be active in reconstruction and development initiatives in Mozambique. She is President of the Foundation of Community Development and Chairperson of the National Organization of Children of Mozambique. She has worked closely with many UN organizations and was awarded the 1995 Nansen Medal in recognition of her outstanding contributions on behalf of refugee children. She is the widow of the country's first President, Samora Machel, killed in an airplane crash in 1986.

- Call for papers on children rights law, for conference in New York, summer 2007.
- The full details of the SWAY survey can be located at [www.sway-uganda.org](http://www.sway-uganda.org)
- For further questions contact Chris Blattman at: [blattman@gmail.com](mailto:blattman@gmail.com)

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