

The June meeting of the Washington Network on Children in Armed Conflict focused on women and girls affected by war in Northern Uganda. The presenter shared the findings from phase II of the Survey of War Affected Youth.

10:00 – 10:10am: Self introduction of attendees

10:10 – 10:20am: Introduction of WNCAC and speaker

10:20 – 11:05am: Presentation on SWAY II: Women and Girls  
Findings from phase II of the Survey of War Affected Youth by Jeannie Annan

11:05 – 11:35am: Question and answer

11:35 – 11:50: Events announcement

### ***I. Presentation***

Phase II of the Survey of War Affected Youth focused on women and girls. This research was a team effort mainly funded by UNICEF.

Brief background of the situation in Northern Uganda:

- The conflict in Northern Uganda has raged on for over two decades. The Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) operated mainly in Northern Uganda (mostly in Acholi land;) however, in recent years it has spread to Southern Sudan, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), and Central African Republic (CAR).
- The main victims of the conflict are civilians.
- The main form of recruitment used by the LRA is abductions of youth. Twice as many males are abducted as females.

Official reintegration process:

- The majority of the youth in official reintegration programs were brought by the Ugandan Army. Once they are captured or surrendered, these youth are debriefed and sent to reintegration (reception) centers. There are about five or a few more such centers in Northern Uganda. The youth receive counseling and other basic services and the centers also help in retracing family members. Family retracing is especially difficult due to the displacement of populations. (Displacement is a huge issue; about 90% of the Acholi people are displaced. The majority of those displaced flee out of fear of the government's counter insurgency policy rather than fear of abduction). In recent years displaced persons are settling closer to their homes and have access to their lands for farming (post the ceasefire).
- The length of stay in reception/reintegration centers varies on the length of stay with the LRA. The longer the abductees stayed with LRA the longer they stay at the centers.

## Methodology of Survey:

- There is gap in the data collection. The data from males was collected in 2005 and 2006, while the data from females was collected in 2007 due to logistical issues.
- The focus of the survey was on youth not children.

## Findings:

- Education: Women had less education than males  
One in five women said they had no education at all  
There is no difference in enrollment at age 14 between boys and girls; however, as they grow older, the gap between the genders also grows (see graph in the power point)
- Vocational training is less common among women; most receive tailoring training (50%) and when asked if they have used their tailoring skills, most reply no. There is a lack of needs assessment.
- Impact of abduction on education is mild.  
In the early years of education (up to 12 years,) there is no difference between the youth who were abducted and those not abducted. The good news here is that when abductees return they are almost at the same level with those who have not been abducted, and their insertion in the education system does not create that much inequality. However, the impact is higher when youth stay in captivity for a long time.
- Livelihood (women)  
More than half of the female youth work fewer than 8 days a month  
Skilled laborers work more days. For example, brewing alcohol counts for 33% of the main occupation among women. Brewing is very lucrative and has quick turnover, it is also used to generate cash for other economic activities.  
Agriculture accounts for only 30% of the main occupation. Agriculture, however, needs to be at the center rather than the periphery.

## Health and Injuries

- A small percentage experience disabling symptoms of distress  
11% report being haunted by spirits  
Those who experience more violence report more symptoms of distress. The distress they experience is not related only to what happened to them or what they have witnessed but is also influenced by current stressors (e.g. situations in IDP camps, relationships with family and community and so on)  
The findings also show that stressors are not related to lack of education as those who are educated also report similar symptoms.

## Female abductions

- One in 6 female youth are abducted (1/2 the rate of males)  
More likely to come back within a month but if they stay longer than a month, they do not return for a long time

#### Reintegration with family

- 80% of those who returned report being accepted by family; while 20% were not accepted. Out of the 20%, 7% still report not being accepted.

#### Forced mothers

- Young girls returning to their communities as mothers (forced) are more likely to report symptoms of stress. Forced mothers stay longer in captivity as it is hard to escape with young children and as they stay longer with the LRA, they experience more violence.
- When these forced mothers return they become less open and are less likely to report family or community problems. As a result these problems are less likely to go away.

#### Targeting of service

- Abductees are more likely to receive aid (abduction has become a strong indicator of receiving services)
- Unfortunately, acute needs are not associated with receiving of aid
- Targeting of aid should be based on identifiable needs rather than categories (such as abductees)

#### Implication of programming

##### Education

- Increase female primary dropout
- Dramatic increase in secondary scholarship
- Accelerated adult education
- Child care for the children of young women  
(There is already one such school that is for women only and provides child care opportunities)

##### Livelihoods

- Provide diverse livelihood trainings for women (do not limit to tailoring training)

##### Health

- Specialized care for the most affected youth

Psychosocial issues

- Family based intervention and targeted conflict resolution is important for family and community healing

Gender-based violence

- Strengthening traditional and legal institutions and encouraging dialogue
- Need for program evaluations: there are a lot of programs but no lack systematic evaluations

## *II. Discussion*

Question: is there animosity in the community between those receiving aid and not receiving?

There is a large acceptance of those who comeback...aid is often given discreetly. The only open aid was the amnesty insertion program, which was done poorly; the targeting and the poor execution created animosity.

Question: Other studies have cited a higher number of forced mothers than yours; how is that?

Not aware of the studies refereed, but is confident about the representation of own study.

Question: Insight in the future technical capacity in northern Uganda?

- Longer programs that are giving skills and trainings that are also nationally recognized (certificate programs)

Comments from participants:

- Most of the projects in Northern Uganda focused on a lot of planning and thinking about the now rather than the future
- Education in emergencies: (clustering of education into four years)

Question: comment on rituals and ceremonies

Welcoming ceremony are used to welcome those coming form the LRA  
The results from using rituals and ceremonies are mixed. The results defer depending on how much the youth and the families believe in the rituals.

Question: What is being done to have comparative studies to share, and learn from the different programs?

- The issues is having research feeding into practice

- There is need for sharing measures and indicators
- The challenge for donors, NGOs, and institutions is the different standards that each one is held to (e.g. academic institutes have issues of ethics that under go reviews by Institutional Review Boards (IRBS) etc.)

Question: Form the different studies and findings, how do you compare or contrast your findings?

- LRA takes youth from the same area and makes comparison (is almost exclusively made up of youth)
- Comparing those who joined LRA and those who did not; the finding indicates that former child soldiers have distress but their main issues is education and livelihood...

Question: How do you figure the night commuters phenomena into your study?

- Our data collection started in 2005; by this time the phenomena was already fading and NGOs were already thinking of dismantling the centers so it is not factored in the study.

Question: what roles did the women play in the conflict?

- Most women played supportive roles in the bush as they would do at home. Some have, however, participated in combat. As a result of their experiences, the returning women have become more ` resilience.

Question: Is there a chance for your study to be longitudinal?

- The hope is to follow up on them, the issue will be funding

Example from Sierra Leone:

There is a longitudinal study being done in Sierra Leone. Following up on the originally interviewed children about over 500 of them.

There is a gap between research and programming. Collaborating with NGOs and donors is important and also to disseminating findings with communities, local, national and international authorities. Dialogue between donors is also necessary.

Question: Was there an attempt to communicate with the LRA?

There are on going attempts at negotiations. UNICEF tries to put the focus on the children. The LRA is made up of children and is not open and transparent about the involvement of children.

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### *III. Program sharing*

- **Psychology Beyond Borders:**  
A report on Children Associated with Fighting Forces at <http://www.psychologybeyondborders.com/>
- **Child Soldiers Initiative**  
The toolkit created by the Child Soldiers Initiative will be finalized and will be circulated soon. The toolkit will be tested in Cote d'Ivoire. For more information please go to <http://www.childsoldiersinitiative.org/>
- **Center for Peacebuilding International**  
The Center for Peacebuilding International will be releasing a report on youth on the Thai- Burma border. For more information: <http://www.cpbinternational.org/>