

Invisible Victims:

Mapping and Understanding
Children Born in Captivity in
Northern Uganda



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The Justice and Reconciliation Project was established in 2005 to understand and explain the interests, needs, concerns, and views of communities affected by conflict and to promote sustainable peace through the active involvement of war-affected communities in research and advocacy.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

According to Akello (2013), at least 10,000 girls and young women that were abducted by the Lord's Resistance Army during the Northern Ugandan War (1986-2006) returned home with a child born in captivity. The children were conceived under violent conditions of forced marriage, instilling a complex toll of trauma in mothers who rejoined their communities in the aftermath of the war. Nearly 20 years later, the children and their mothers continue to struggle with stigma, extreme poverty, and untreated physical and psychological wounds. With low educational attainment, limited access to land, and little family support, they have few opportunities for advancement. As children born in captivity begin to have children of their own, they risk passing these challenges onto the next generation.

According to the Ugandan National Transitional Justice Policy, one of the major barriers to implementing reparations to support the children born in captivity is the absence of reliable data. These concerns have also been raised by several civil society organizations and local government concerned about the plight of the children. Without information on the number, identities, and needs of these children, it's difficult to create targeted interventions. While some organizations have documented children born of war in Northern Uganda, no single database comprehensively maps all the children.

To help fill this gap, Justice and Reconciliation Project (JRP) has begun a process of systematically mapping children born in captivity. In this study, JRP has selected Kilak North of Amuru District as a case location to map and understand the situation of children born in captivity. JRP worked with local government and survivor mobilizers in these areas to gather names, family details, demographics, and challenges/needs of each child. The project objectives were to 1.) Contribute to the data gap 2.) Inform civil society and government interventions and 3.) Advocate for and inform ongoing conversations on reparations in Uganda.

Key Findings

- JRP documented 693 children born in captivity in Kilak North of Amuru District. Some children were not documented because they could not be reached or did not want to participate—pointing

to an important challenge that exists when undertaking mapping of this “invisible” population that continues to live in fear and isolation due to stigma.

- About one in ten of the children live outside their home village due to stigma and limited access to educational/livelihood opportunities (n=693)¹.
- Children born in captivity are now young adults, with ages ranging from approximately 12 to 38 years and an average age of 24 years, which demonstrates that interventions must consider treating them unlike children (n=685). About one third are married (n=688), and more than half have children of their own (n=416).
- Children born in captivity lack familial support structures. Just 16% have two parents that are known to be alive (n=689). The rest have at least one parent that is deceased or whose life status is unknown. The majority live with their mother or another relative (n=692).
- Only one third of the children have finished primary school (n=343) and just 9% are employed (n=639).
- The biggest challenges facing the children are livelihood, basic needs, education, land, and stigma.
- Skills training is the number one need, followed by education, livelihood support, and land.
- The children and their caretakers have urgent psychological and medical needs.
- Just 5% of the children received support from government or civil society (n=640). Few of the children participate in government programs due to lack of a national ID or resource requirements (such as a phone or transport), fear, and perceived stigma.
- Two thirds of the children do not have a national ID in spite of government efforts to have them registered (n=683).

Recommendations

- Advocate for and pass a law to implement national reparations that provides affirmative action for children born of war and their mothers.
- Recognize children born of war and their mothers as a special interest group and use affirmative action in government development programs. Take mandatory measures to incorporate this guideline into local government

¹ Sample sizes (n) differ because not all participants answered the question.

- policy. Consult with victims to reduce barriers to participation in government programs.
- Provide immediate support for urgent psychological and medical needs for the children and their caretakers.
 - Implement and support holistic, victim-centered interventions that emphasize collaboration between civil society and government.
 - Economic interventions should prioritize skills training, livelihood support, and education. These may include sponsoring academic (or combined) schooling, implementing adult literacy/numeracy programs, and providing livelihood support (such as skills training, income-generating activities, and savings group formation). Educational interventions should provide affirmative action for girls.
 - Psychosocial interventions should prioritize addressing mental wellbeing and stigma. These may include peer support groups, professional and community-based psychological support, community sensitizations, and family tracing.
 - Implement and support community-based interventions to promote acceptance of children born in captivity/their mothers and encourage land inheritance to the children.
 - Invest in job creation in Northern Ugandan to absorb children and mothers that receive skills training and livelihood support.
 - Consolidate data from previous initiatives that documented victims to inform reparations and interventions prior to new data collection.
 - Partner with JRP to provide support to the 693 children born in captivity documented in Kilak North of Amuru District.

Conclusion

Children born in captivity and their mothers continue to remain isolated due to stigma. As a result, they have struggled to meet their basic needs, let alone claim their rights. A series of barriers, such as lack of education and national IDs, affect their opportunities to live a better life. As such, children born in captivity (and other children born of war) and their mothers, should be recognized as an especially vulnerable population by government and civil society. They

require immediate support to care for themselves, their mothers, and their own children. Without intervention, three generations risk becoming lost to the legacies of war. Uplifting these families, which make up a notable number of Northern Uganda's population, is also critical to the development of a region impacted by two decades of war.

Note: This mapping is a first effort that JRP is taking to compile a comprehensive database on children born in captivity. We invite willing partners to join and support us in this process in order to illuminate the extent of this problem—providing a platform for more effective interventions for children born in captivity in Northern Uganda.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

CDO	Community Development Office
CRSV	Conflict-related Sexual Violence
GBV	Gender-based Violence
GoU	Government of Uganda
ICC	International Criminal Court
JLOS	Justice Law and Order Sector
JRP	Justice and Reconciliation Project
LC	Local Council
LRA	Lord's Resistance Army
NGO	Non-governmental Organization
NIRA	National Identification and Registration Authority
NTJP	National Transitional Justice Policy
NRA	National Resistance Army
OVC	Orphan/Vulnerable Child
UPDF	Uganda Peoples' Defense Forces
VI	Vulnerability Index
WAN	Women's Advocacy Network

1 BACKGROUND

During the Northern Ugandan War (1986-2006), an estimated 54,000 to 75,000 people were abducted by the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) and forced to become porters, combatants, and conjugal slaves.² Around half were children. Abducted girls and young women were often given to LRA soldiers as 'wives.' As a result, at least 10,000 female abductees had children born of conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV).³ These children are known as children born in captivity⁴. Children born in captivity are part of a broader group of victims referred to as children born of war, who are children with one parent in an army or peacekeeping force and another parent that is a citizen.⁵ In the Ugandan context, this includes children born of CRSV perpetrated by LRA soldiers, government soldiers, humanitarian aid workers, and other actors in the context of war. This project focuses exclusively on children born in captivity, who are the children of women abducted by the LRA.

Children born in captivity are among the most vulnerable and stigmatized victims of the Northern Ugandan War. Upon returning home, their association with the LRA has subjected them to severe stigma and rejection from their families and communities, leaving many with little support. As such, despite the horrors the children endured during conflict, many describe their post-war lives as more difficult.⁶ The stigma, combined with a lack of education, a wavering sense of belonging, and limited access to land, has left the children mired in poverty with few opportunities for advancement. As political scientist Patricia A. Weitsman put it, being born of CRSV "handicaps children for life."⁷

Children born in captivity and their mothers, who are victims of CRSV, have been largely excluded from transitional justice and reintegration processes in Northern Uganda. Nearly twenty years since the war's end, the children and their mothers continue to

face severe psychosocial and economic challenges. The lack of attention given to their plight and their covert identities due to stigma have rendered the children "invisible victims." Without critical interventions, these children risk becoming a lost generation and passing transgenerational harm onto their own children.

In recent years, there has been increased recognition of the special vulnerabilities facing children born in captivity and their mothers, though this has not led to concrete outcomes. For example, in response to a petition led by the Justice and Reconciliation Project (JRP) and the Women's Advocacy Network (WAN)⁸, the Parliament of Uganda passed a resolution to provide special reparations for children born of war and their mothers.⁹ Since the resolution in 2014, there has been no tangible progress made toward the provision. In 2019, the Government of Uganda (GoU) passed the National Transitional Justice Policy (NTJP) which set forth intentions to create a holistic reparations program for all war victims in Northern Uganda. In spite of the policy's reference that reparative measures for war-affected persons will be considered, the NTJP does not explicitly name children born of war and their mothers as a vulnerable group that requires special attention.¹⁰ The Transitional Justice Bill that would operationalize the policy is currently under review at the Ministry of Justice and Constitutional Affairs. More generally, there has been very few governmental policies or programs that specifically target this group, except for a recent program by the National Identification and Registration Authority (NIRA) to provide national IDs to the children. Notably, the International Criminal Court (ICC) case against LRA commander Dominic Ongwen, a complimentary transitional justice process, has recognized the experiences of children born of war and their mothers. The case's Order of Reparations classifies children born of CRSV as direct victims that warrant reparations.¹¹ However, eligibility for reparations is limited to

² Phuong N. Pham, Patrick Vinck, and Eric Stover, "Abducted: The Lord's Resistance Army and Forced Conscription in Northern Uganda," *Human Rights Quarterly* 30, no. 2 (2008): PDF page 22.

³ Grace Akello, "Experiences of Forced Mothers in Northern Uganda: The Legacy of War," *Intervention* 11, no. 3 (2013): 149–156.

⁴ Referred to as "the children" throughout this report.

⁵ Children Born of War Project, "CBOW Definition History," *CBOW Project*, Accessed November 19, 2024, <https://www.cbowproject.org/cbow-definition-history/>.

⁶ See Myriam S. Denov and Atima A. Lakor, "When War is Better than Peace: The Post-Conflict Realities of Children Born of Wartime Rape in Northern Uganda," *Child Abuse and Neglect* 65 (2017): 225–265.

⁷ Patricia A. Weitsman, "The Politics of Identity and Sexual Violence," *Human Rights Quarterly* 30, no. 3 (2008): 561.

⁸ Women's Advocacy Network (WAN) is a forum that brings together groups of conflict-affected women in Northern Uganda to engage in advocacy and economic empowerment. WAN was started by the JRP.

⁹ Justice and Reconciliation Project, "History," *Justice and Reconciliation*, Accessed November 19, 2024, <https://www.justiceandreconciliation.com/about/history/>.

¹⁰ Ministry of Internal Affairs, *National Transitional Justice Policy* (Kampala: Ministry of Internal Affairs, 2019).

¹¹ International Criminal Court, *Situation in Uganda in The Case of the Prosecutor V. Dominic Ongwen* (The Hague: ICC, 2024), <https://www.icc-pci.int/sites/default/files/CourtRecords/0902ebd18078e195.pdf>.

children born of war that fall under specific parameters (i.e., brigade, time frame), leaving out many children born of war.

1.1 The Need for Data

One of the biggest impediments to understanding macro-level impacts of conflict is the dearth of data available to support recovery efforts in post-conflict Africa. This challenge has been largely a result of poor emphasis, or lack of tools and resources available to track real-time occurrences and incidences of loss.¹² This fact has been alluded to in Uganda's NTJP—which cites the lack of data on victims of war as one of the major barriers to implementing holistic reparations.¹³ The policy cites the need for a mapping exercise to identify the names, locations, and needs of victims. In the nearly two decades following the war, the GoU has made no strides toward this effort. During a consultation process led by JRP with nearly 400 formerly abducted women and 60 local government leaders, more data was identified as a critical need to address the challenges of children born of war. Local leaders admitted the lack of data on children born of war has made it difficult to plan interventions to support them.¹⁴ Civil society has also expressed the need for data to create targeted programs.¹⁵ In addition, many children born in captivity and their mothers remain “hidden” for fear of stigma, making it difficult for civil society organizations to provide outreach to this population.

While there is now more qualitative research detailing the experiences of children born in captivity and their mothers in the academic and policy circles, numbers that quantify their experiences and demonstrate the scope of their issues is lacking. In fact, the exact

number of children born in captivity in Northern Uganda remains unknown, though a pilot study conducted by the Ugandan Justice Law and Order Sector (JLOS) estimates there are between 4,000 to 6,000 total children born of war (including children born in captivity).¹⁶ Other estimates suggest there are 8,000.¹⁷

1.2 Prior Initiatives

To date, there is not a single comprehensive database that documents each of the victims of the Northern Ugandan War (including children born in captivity). In 2005, the Berkley-Tulane Initiative launched a database project that combined the records of 22,759 returnees from eight of the nine reception centers in Northern Uganda.¹⁸ 897 children born in captivity were recorded among the returnees. Though the database generated critical insights on abductees, since most abductees did not return through reception centers¹⁹, the database is not a comprehensive list. In addition, since the data was collected almost 20 years ago, the current needs and whereabouts of the former abductees remain unknown.²⁰ Similarly, the data does not include the returnees and children born of war that have continued to trickle in following recent defections in the Democratic Republic of Congo and Central African Republic where the LRA is believed to be based in small groups.²¹ The Concerned Parents Association and other community groups²² have also documented victims of the Northern Ugandan War, though these efforts have tended to list victims of a specific incidence of violence or only victims within their networks.

¹² See Christopher Blattman, “Post-conflict Recovery in Africa: The Micro Level,” *Oxford Companion to the Economics in Africa* (2010).

¹³ Ministry of Internal Affairs, *National Transitional*.

¹⁴ Justice and Reconciliation Project, *Alone Like a Tree: Reintegration Challenges Facing Children Born of War and Their Mothers in Northern Uganda* (Gulu: Justice and Reconciliation Project, 2015), <http://justiceandreconciliation.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/Alone-Like-A-Tree-Reintegration-Challenges-Facing-Children-Born-of-War-and-Their-Mothers-in-Northern-Uganda1.pdf>.

¹⁵ REDRESS, Emerging Solutions Africa, and Uganda's Victim Fund, *Not Without Us: Strengthening Victim Participation in Transitional Justice Processes in Uganda* (London: REDRESS, 2020), <https://redress.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Not-Without-Us-Report-for-Web.pdf>; JRP Consultations with local government and CSOs, Spring 2024; Pham et al., “Abducted”; TRACFM, Women's International Peace Centre, and ICTJ, *Transitional Justice in Northern Uganda: Citizens' Perspectives* (Kampala: TRACFM/WIPC, 2020), https://wipc.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Transitional-Justice-In-Northern-Uganda-Citizens-Perspectives_.pdf.

¹⁶ “Gov't to Register Children Born During LRA War,” *New Vision*, May 12, 2019, <https://www.newvision.co.ug/news/1500173/govt-register-children-born-lra-war>.

¹⁷ International Center for Justice, “I Am Not Who They Think I Am: New ICTJ and MediaStorm Film Confronts Stigma Facing Children Born of War,” *ICTJ*, February 1, 2017, <https://www.ictj.org/news/not-who-they-think-i-am-stigma-uganda>.

¹⁸ Pham et al., “Abducted.”

¹⁹ Luke Falkenburg, “Youth Lost: Ugandan Child Soldiers in The Lord's Resistance Army,” *Small Wars Journal*, March 15, 2013, <https://smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/art/youth-lost-ugandan-child-soldiers-in-the-lord-s-resistance-army>.

²⁰ Pham et al., “Abducted.”

²¹ “Gov't Secures Rehabilitation Center for Ex-LRA Rebels in Gulu,” *The Independent*, December 16, 2023, <https://www.independent.co.ug/govt-secures-rehabilitation-center-for-ex-lra-rebels-in-gulu/>.

²² According to participants of the study, there are multiple initiatives aimed at documenting victims in the community. One example is a list of Atiak Massacre survivors collected by community leaders.

In 2020, UN Women, FIDA-Uganda, and War Victims and Children Networking documented 3,420 mothers and children born of war across Northern Uganda.²³ This database helped to inform the project by NIRA to provide national IDs to children born of war. Similarly, Watye Ki Gen, Youth as Peace Builders, and other partners documented 1,175 children born of war and their details throughout Acholi subregion.²⁴ These two initiatives made significant contributions to data on children born in captivity, though their aim was not to carry out a comprehensive mapping exercise but rather to undertake a sampling exercise across the region.

2 THE MAPPING EXERCISE

To contribute to the gap in data on children born in captivity in Northern Uganda, JRP started a project in January 2024 to systematically document children born in captivity. The aim of the project is to create a preliminary database for stakeholders, especially government and partnering institutions, with the names, locations, and specific needs of all children born in captivity across Northern Uganda. Due to funding limitations, JRP has constrained the study to an initial case location: Kilak North Constituency of Amuru District.

The purpose of the study is to inform policy and programming to support children born in captivity (and other children born of war) and their mothers using quantitative data to demonstrate the scope of need and demographic details that make interventions tailored/targeted. We anticipate this study will also contribute to ongoing discourse on children born of war at national and international levels. The project's key objectives are listed below:

- I. To expand the data on the names, locations, and specific needs of children born in captivity in Northern Uganda
- II. To inform targeted civil society and government interventions for children born in captivity in Northern Uganda
- III. To advocate for and inform the implementation of government reparations and other policies that benefit children born in captivity and their mothers

3 METHODS

The actual field study started in February 2024 and ended in September 2024. Through collaboration with local government, community leaders, civil society, and survivors, JRP documented the children born in captivity in Kilak North of Amuru District. The project included three key processes: Consultation, Mobilization, and Data Collection. JRP collaborated with survivors throughout these processes to ensure victim-centeredness.

3.1 Consultation

To promote understanding, garner support, and obtain feedback on the proposed project, JRP engaged critical stakeholders throughout the project. First, JRP held a project inception meeting in March with 41 local government and community leaders, civil society members, and survivors of war. JRP presented the proposed project and received input from stakeholders on methodology (e.g., the type of data needed to help inform interventions). Following the meeting, JRP consulted with organizations that previously collected data on children born in captivity to identify lessons learned and to understand the scope of previous data collection to avoid overlap. Survivor groups provided feedback on proposed methods and the data collection tool to ensure they were sensitive to survivor experiences. JLOS was also consulted to ensure the project aligned with national transitional justice efforts. Finally, 37 stakeholders attended the report validation meeting which gathered community input on the study's findings,

²³"Parliament Receives Database on Former LRA Abductees," *The Independent*, December 12, 2020, <https://www.independent.co.ug/parliament-receives-database-on-former-lra-abductees/>.

²⁴"Documentation," *Watye Ki Gen*, Accessed September 24, 2024, <https://watyekigen.org/index.php/documentation/>.

provided updates on the project for the community, and promoted the report's dissemination. For a complete list of all organizations engaged throughout the study, see Appendix A. These consultations helped to inform the case location selection and study group.

3.1.1 Case Location

Based on these consultations, JRP selected Amuru District for the study. Amuru District is in Acholi subregion of Northern Uganda and was previously part of Gulu District. According to reception center data made available by the Berkley-Tulane Initiative, Gulu District received the largest number of LRA returnees.²⁵ However, stakeholders noted that residents in Amuru District have less access to resources and civil society services since they are further from Gulu City than residents of present-day Gulu District, suggesting children born in captivity in Amuru may be less likely to have received support. Amuru also has remote and rural homesteads that can be hard for civil society organizations to reach. In addition, since Amuru District is closer to Gulu City than other rural districts that were previously part of Gulu District, the lower transport costs fit the project's available budget. Organizations that previously collected data in the region also noted there is a lack of data on children born in captivity in Amuru District.

Amuru District is divided into Kilak North and Kilak South constituencies. The case location, Kilak North, is outlined in blue in the map of Amuru District below.

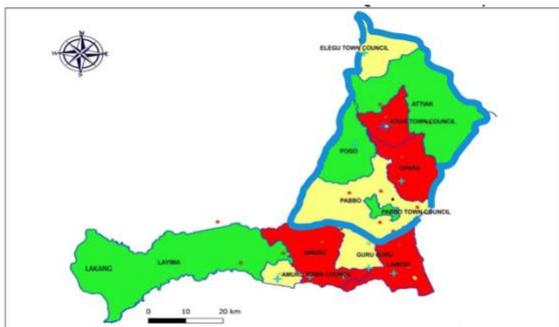


Figure 1. Map Showing Administrative Boundaries of Amuru District. Courtesy of Amuru District Local Government.

3.1.2 Study Group

Study participants were children born captivity above age 18 and/or their caretakers/relatives. For children below age 18, only the caretaker/relative participated in the study.

Only children born in captivity, rather than all children born of war, were included in the mapping exercise to narrow the scope and ensure comprehensiveness. However, during the inception meeting for this study, we recognized that there are many children born of other forms of conflict-related sexual violence, including those perpetrated by government soldiers, humanitarian workers, or within displacement camps. JRP's previous fieldwork and the present study indicate that the challenges of these children are similar to those of children born in captivity. Thus, the recommendations produced by this study address all children born of war. Future mappings should also reach all children born of war.

For this study, a child born in captivity is defined as a person that is born to a mother abducted by the LRA. This includes the children of abducted mothers who gave birth or conceived a child in captivity. It also includes children of abducted mothers who experienced CRSV by the government army the Uganda People's Defense Forces (UPDF) or the National Resistance Army (NRA) in the context of captivity, either when the mother was trying to escape or when she returned home. Children born in captivity qualified for the study if they were a.) currently living in Kilak North or b.) not living in Kilak North but considered the area as home and have a relative staying there who registered the child on their behalf. Children born in captivity who are from Kilak North but were not documented in this study because they do not have relatives in the area will be captured in future mappings in other locations.

3.2 Mobilization

To attempt to reach all children born in captivity, JRP mobilized participants at the parish/ward level. JRP worked with local leaders, community mobilizers, and victims' networks to identify children born in captivity above age 18 and/or their caretakers/relatives. Participants were asked to meet at a specified venue

²⁵ Pham et al., "Abducted."

in their parish on a certain date. For large parishes, JRP held meetings at the village level to reduce travel distance. In each parish, there was at least one local government/community mobilizer and one victim mobilizer. Local leaders included Rwodi Kweri (sub-village chiefs) and Local Councilors (LCs 1 to 3). There were six survivor mobilizers that carried out mobilization throughout the project, three of which were part of WAN. Members of both formal victim networks, such as WAN or the Atiak Massacre Survivors Association, and informal networks also helped to mobilize participants. Mobilizers informed participants through word-of-mouth, phone calls, home visits, and public announcements. Snowballing was also used throughout the study. Each study participant was asked whether they knew another child born in captivity who did not participate in the study. If the participant could provide contact information, the mobilizer reached out to them. If not, the study participant was asked to inform their peer of the next time JRP would be in their parish for data collection. By working with victim mobilizers who knew one another from time spent in captivity, we could verify that participants were survivors.

3.3 Data Collection

Once participants arrived at the meeting venue, they were briefed on the purpose of the study, the use of their data, and the voluntary nature of the study. The group was then prompted to ask any questions they had about the study. Common questions included whether they could register a child that passed or a child that now lived outside of Kilak North. After the briefing session, the caretaker and/or child answered qualifying questions from a victim mobilizer that spent multiple years in captivity to verify that the child was born in captivity. Questions included the years the mother was in captivity, the year the child was born, and the mother's military brigade. If the child was known by another victim that was verified or by the mobilizer, they were not asked these questions. After being verified, the participant(s) moved to private seating with an enumerator. For mothers or children who had mental challenges/hearing issues/memory issues, the victim mobilizer helped in the interview. If the child was answering the questions and didn't know some

information (e.g., the date their mother was taken to captivity), the enumerator spoke to a caretaker on the phone.

The survey utilized mixed methods with both qualitative and quantitative questions. Participants were asked about the following information: child's name, parents' names, living status of parents, primary caretaker, marital status, spouse name, gender, origin, country of birth, birth year, current location, years spent in captivity, circumstance of birth, occupation/livelihood, educational level, number of children, possession of a national ID or birth certificate, challenges, needs, aid received, previous experience with documentation, and contact information.

The questions are based on priorities determined through the literature and stakeholder consultations with the GoU and civil society. The survey includes questions that provides the data called for by the NTJP. It also includes many of the same datapoints collected during the initial registration of victims for reparations in the ICC case against Dominic Ongwen case. These include age, location, gender, vulnerabilities, current needs, and whether they received support before.²⁶ The survey also asks questions similar to those in previous data initiatives to make future efforts to join the data more seamless.



Enumerator interviewing the mother of a child born in captivity with support from a survivor mobilizer. Photo by JRP.

3.4 Ethics and Data Protection

To reduce the risk of re-traumatization, JRP ensured ethical research standards were upheld throughout

²⁶ The Registry, *The Registry Report on the Mapping Exercise* (International Criminal Court, 2021), https://www.icc-cpi.int/sites/default/files/RelatedRecords/CR2021_11313.PDF.

this project, using guidance from the Murad Code²⁷ for research on children born of war. Best practices included informed consent, confidentiality, voluntary participation, do no harm, and referral mechanisms. JRP also emphasized victim-centeredness and co-collaboration throughout the project. The database with the identifying details of children born in captivity is encrypted and password protected. Stakeholders can submit a formal request for access to the data for a specific intervention that benefits the children. Participants consented to the sharing of their data for this purpose.

3.5 Limitations

Based on consultations with mobilizers and local government, JRP estimates that the study documented the vast majority of children born in captivity in Kilak North. However, there were some limitations in reaching all the children. For example, some children and caretakers in very remote locations or farms could not reach the meeting points at the specified time. Poor phone network in remote locations also made it difficult for mobilizers to reach the children and caretakers. The team scheduled follow up meetings to reach such participants, even moving to the village level and setting up individual meetings with specific people, but a few still couldn't be accessed.

Some chose not to participate in the exercise due to distrust and frustrations with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that collect information without any follow-up action. Other participants mentioned that they did not want to relive their experience if no support was imminent. In addition, even though participants were informed that they would not receive anything from participating in the study, they may have responded in a way they perceived to be favorable for receiving support in the future (e.g., saying they have not been registered before or have not benefitted from an NGO/government program). Data points are missing for participants that did not answer the question or didn't know the answer. This occurred, for example, when a caretaker registered a child that no longer lived with them. They didn't know the year the child's mother was taken to captivity or the name of the child's current spouse. For critical information, we called the child's current caretaker or

the child themselves. In addition, some of the data may lack accuracy due to respondents experiencing difficulties remembering specific details. This is particularly true for children whose parents died or are unknown to the child. Data that is inconsistent or ambiguous was excluded from the analysis. A few questions have significantly lower respondents as new questions were added later in the study to clarify trends. When the data is not representative of the entire study group, the sample size (n) is provided.

4 FINDINGS

4.1 The Number of Children Born in Captivity in Kilak North

JRP held 51 meetings across all seven subcounties and 29 parishes/wards of Kilak North in Amuru District. A total of 693 children born in captivity were registered. The number in each subcounty is as follows: 162 in Atiak Subcounty, 45 in Atiak Town Council, 40 in Elegu Town Council, and 28 in Opara Subcounty. There are 284 in Pabbo Subcounty, 97 in Pogo Subcounty, and 37 in Pabbo Town Council.

Pabbo Subcounty	284
Atiak Subcounty	162
Pogo Subcounty	97
Atiak Town Council	45
Elegu Town Council	40
Pabbo Town Council	37
Opara Subcounty	28
Total	693

Figure 2. Number of Children Born in Captivity in Kilak North

The parish/ward with the greatest number of children born in captivity is Labala Parish in Pabbo Subcounty with 130 children. The following three Parishes have the next largest numbers of children born in captivity: Pacilo Parish (68) in Atiak Subcounty, Parubanga Parish (53) in Pabbo Subcounty, and Gaya Parish (53) in Pabbo Subcounty.

While most of the children (91%)²⁸ currently stay in the area where they were surveyed, nearly a tenth (9%) stay in other locations to find better opportunities for work/school, or to stay with another relative. Some children are staying with another

²⁷"The Draft Murad Code of June 2020," *Murad Code*, Accessed October 9, 2024, <https://www.muradcode.com/draft-murad-code>.

²⁸ Percentages are rounded to the nearest whole number, so the total may not add up to 100%.

relative due to lack of care/support in their ancestral home, stigma, and/or the mother’s new husband does not accept them. Over a quarter (26%) of those living outside of Kilak North stay in another subcounty in Amuru District. The other children live in Gulu District (31%), South Sudan (8%), Gulu City (7%), Nwoya District (7%), Adjumani District (5%), Kampala (3%), Lira District (3%), Kitgum District (2%), Omoro District (2%), Pader District (2%), Wakiso District (2%), and Agago District (2%). The whereabouts of the remaining 2% are unknown. When planning interventions, local government and civil society should take into consideration the population of children born in captivity that are currently living in the community and those tied to it socioeconomically.

4.2 Demographics of Children Born in Captivity

JRP recorded 375 (54%) male and 318 (46%) female children born in captivity. Based on an approximation using the child’s birth year (n=685), the youngest child is around 12 years old (born in 2012) and the oldest is 38 years old (born in 1986), with an average age of 24. It is worth noting that it is unlikely that a child born in captivity was born in 1986 at the very start of the war. Discrepancies in age were often due to the participant or their caretaker being unaware of the child’s exact birth year. Most of the children (94%) are 18 years or older, and over 50% are youths between the ages 21 and 26. Since most of the children are young adults, proposed interventions should suit the realities of their present lifestyles. As seen in the age distribution (See Figure 3), children born in captivity constitute part of the productive working age population in the North. Therefore, they could be considered for development options and productive activities that young people of their age group are capable of undertaking, such as agricultural activities.

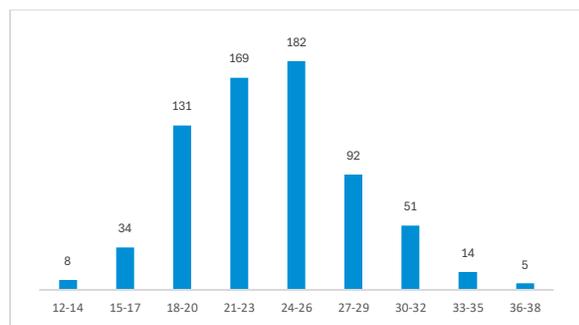


Figure 3. Age Distribution of Children Born in Captivity (n=685)

Most of the children are born out of a forced marriage between their mothers and LRA soldiers. A small percentage (1.3%, n=689) of the children have fathers from the government army. While most of the children spent at least a few months in captivity, nearly a quarter of the children (24%, n=664) were conceived while the mother was in captivity and were born after returning. Another quarter (26%) spent one year or less in captivity. For those that spent more than a year, the median time spent in captivity is three years and the highest is 15 years. Children that spent more time in captivity may be more likely to have been exposed to violence and traumatic events and could require additional support. Most of the children (67%, n=676) were born in Uganda, while 32% were born in South Sudan, and 1% in the Democratic Republic of Congo (See Figure 4). The sizable fraction of children born outside of Uganda highlights the challenge of obtaining a Ugandan national ID and the risk of statelessness among the children.

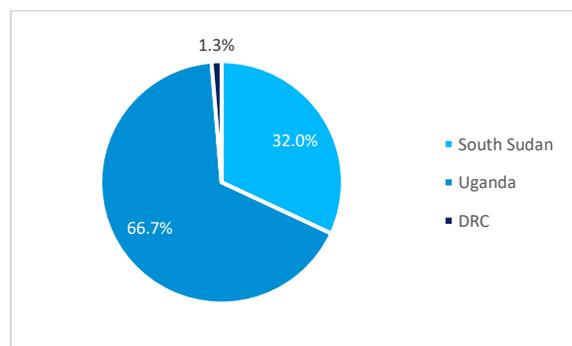


Figure 4. Country of Birth for Children Born in Captivity (n=676)

4.3 Family Support

Among the children (n=689), 22% have two deceased parents or parents whose life status is unknown. This includes 12 children that are below the age of 18. While most of the children born in captivity that don’t have any parents are no longer children, they were likely an Orphan/Vulnerable Child (OVC) at some point and still may require extra support. The majority (62%) of the children have one parent that is alive, and the other is deceased/has unknown life status. Typically (57% of the time) the child’s mother is alive, and the father is deceased/unknown. According to respondents, the father’s absence places additional strain on the mother to provide as a single parent, hurts the child’s sense of belonging, and prevents the child from accessing land (since land is passed down through the paternal line in Acholi culture). Just 16%

of respondents have parents that are both known alive.

About half (49%, n=692) of the children live with a parent, usually with their mother (39%). A small group (10%) live with their father and 2% live with both parents. It is common for the children to live with another relative (34%), usually an aunt, uncle, sibling, or grandparent. Although not explicitly investigated in the study, participants said the child lives with someone else because the parent(s) is deceased or unable to care for the child, or the stepparent (typically the stepfather) refuses to live with the child. Other children live with their spouse (12%), a stepparent (1%), another caretaker (<1%), or alone (<1%). A few of the caretakers said the child joined a group of “young gangs” referred to among the Acholi as *aguu* which has become a common phenomenon with young people in many communities across the post conflict region of Northern Uganda more generally. Of those asked (n=415), 7% live with a caretaker that is elderly and 4% live with a caretaker that is disabled, which increases the household’s vulnerability according to the Vulnerability Index (VI).²⁹

In the absence of other family, marriage can provide additional support to the children born in captivity. 64% (n=688) of the children born in captivity have never been married, 31% are married, 5% are divorced/separated, and <1% are widowed. Three participants said they were married “early”, and one said she was forced into marriage, revealing the vulnerability of children born in captivity to gender-based violence (GBV). Some participants also reported experiencing stigma in their marriages, such as being told they have “bush mentality”. At times, these challenges led to separation or divorce. According to respondents, 54% (n=416) have children of their own. Of those with children, the average number of children is 2.14. None of the children born in captivity that are mothers are under age 18, but one participant shared she used to be a child mother. The children born in captivity expressed concern about caring for their children, especially those that are not married. For some, their mothers or other relatives are caring for the child.

²⁹ Ministry of Gender Labour and Social Development, *Uganda OVC Vulnerability Index Tool* (Kampala, Uganda: Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development, n.d.), <http://ovcmis.mglsd.go.ug/docs/UgandaOVCVulnerabilityToolFINAL.pdf>.

³⁰ Determined by dividing the number of employed people over the working age population.

4.4 Livelihood and Educational Attainment

When asked about their current occupation, 41% of the children (n=686) said they are farming (primarily subsistence farming), 27% are doing nothing/staying at home, 23% are students, 7% are casual laborers, <1% have a formal job, <1% have a small business, and <1% are informally learning a skill. Lack of income, reliance on subsistence farming, and casual labor (such as motorcycle driving, hairdressing, or tailoring which does not provide a consistent income) increases the vulnerability of the child’s household according to the VI. The Employment to Population Ratio³⁰ of the study’s population (n=639) is 9%, which is drastically lower than the national rate of 43%.³¹ The regional ratio is likely lower, but current statistics are not available. Nonetheless, the low employment rate highlights the precarious livelihood situation of children born in captivity, which contributes to poor economic growth in the region.

According to respondents, the primary breadwinner of the family is the parent, i.e. father or mother (47%, n=414), another relative (23%), a spouse (16%), a grandparent (7%), the child (7%), or other (<1%). Households with a grandparent or other relative as the primary income earner, about a third of the children in the study, are considered more vulnerable. Among the children born in captivity that act as their household’s primary breadwinner, none are below the age of 18. However, it is possible that they were the main income earner when they were younger. Although a minority of children born in captivity are considered the primary breadwinner, the children born in captivity are widely viewed as a critical potential source of income to support the family. Overall, none of the children below age 18 are engaged in casual or formal labor, though some are farming.

Among the participants currently in school (n=153), 48% are in primary school, 45% are in secondary school, and 7% are in tertiary level. Interestingly, 79% (n=154) of those in school are above traditional school age, suggesting the child stayed home for multiple terms throughout their schooling.³² Among school-aged children in the study (n=62), around half

³¹ “Uganda General Information,” *Uganda Bureau of Statistics (UBOS)*, Accessed October 9, 2024, <https://www.ubos.org/uganda-profile/>.

³² A similar observation was found in Boniface Ojok, “Every Child is Special...”: Perspectives on the Integration of Children Born of War and Their War-Affected Peers at a Local School in Northern Uganda, “*Frontiers in Political Science*, 4 (2022).

(53%) are currently in school, which is lower than the national rate (61%).³³ Of those who are not currently students (n=523), 7% have not attended any school or attended just nursery school, 70% completed some or all of primary school, 20% completed some or all of secondary school³⁴, and 2% completed some or all of tertiary level education (e.g., vocational training, university) (See Figure 5 below).

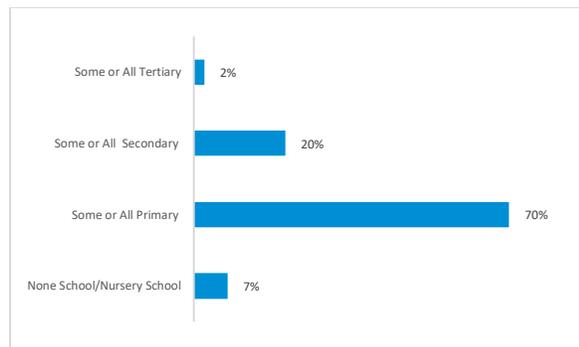


Figure 5. Educational Attainment Among Children Born in Captivity Out of School (n=523)

The survey was altered later in the survey to derive more detail about the children’s educational attainment. It was found that 66% of the children that are no longer in school (n=343) stopped during the primary level. This is markedly higher than the national level of 52%.³⁵ Just 29% (n=343) of the children completed primary school. To attend formal technical school, completion of primary education is required, leaving two thirds of the children ineligible for gaining another opportunity for livelihoods. The rate is about 23% for women and 33% for men, indicating a wide gender disparity that should prompt affirmative action for girls in educational interventions. The average rate for those that completed secondary school is drastically lower at just 2% (n=341) (See Figure 6 below).

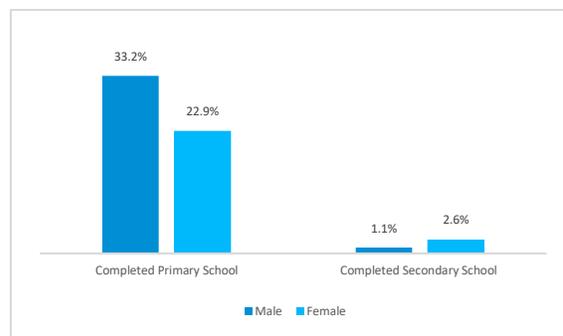


Figure 6. Primary and Secondary School Completion Among Children Born in Captivity Out of School (Primary: n=343, Secondary: n=341)

4.5 Challenges

Children born in captivity and their caretakers were asked what they perceived as the current challenges the child experiences due to the circumstances of their birth. Since participants were asked to self-report their challenges, it is possible the child has other challenges not mentioned.

Caretakers and children gave diverse responses (see Figure 7), but a handful of challenges affect the majority. These include the interrelated economic challenges of livelihood (79%, n=691), basic needs (76%), and education (64%). According to participants, the children lack employment opportunities and income-generating activities. Their livelihood challenges, combined with that of their caretakers, prevents the children from meeting their basic needs (e.g., food, clothing, shelter) and from going to school. Although public primary and secondary school are officially tuition-free in Uganda, the high costs of school-related expenses (e.g., scholastic materials, feeding programs, miscellaneous school fees) prove to be a major barrier to attending school. Many of the children said they dropped out of school due to school fees but would like to return. Without education, the children have few livelihood prospects for the future. The lack of access to land also limits their ability to make an income, grow food for consumption, or have a place to stay. Even when the mother marries a new husband who can pass land down to the child, the husband often refuses because he does not consider the child his own, revealing one way that stigma can negatively affect the child’s

³³FHI350 and Education Policy and Data Center, *Uganda: National Education Profile Update 2018* (Washington, DC: EPDC, 2018), https://www.epdc.org/sites/default/files/documents/EPDC_NEP_2018_Uganda.pdf.

³⁴ This includes all levels of secondary school, including Senior 6.

³⁵ The World Bank measured educational attainment among those aged 25-38. Our sample includes ages 18-38; Martin Luther Oketch, “Uganda’s Secondary School Enrollment Continues to Lag Behind Primary - World Bank,” *Monitor*, February 7, 2024, <https://www.monitor.co.ug/uganda/news/education/uganda-s-secondary-school-enrollment-continues-to-lag-behind-primary-world-bank-4517264>.

economic prospects.³⁶ The female children born in captivity that marry can access land through their husband’s family, but 43% of the married female children born in captivity (n=99) still cited land as a challenge. The overwhelming number of children born in captivity struggling to meet their basic needs without the means to address those needs (i.e., through livelihood, education, and land) underscores the dire urgency of providing them with economic support.

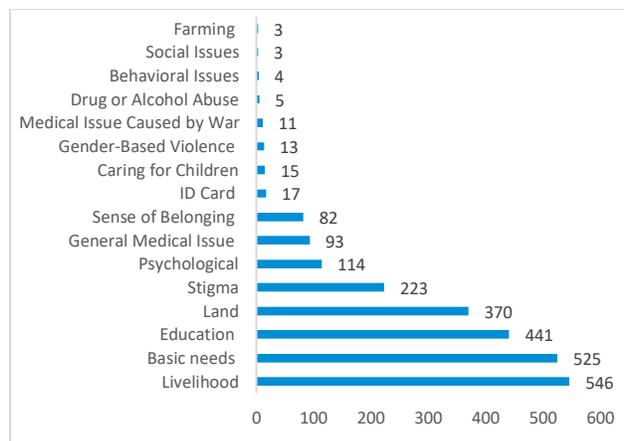


Figure 7. Reported Challenges Faced by Children Born in Captivity (n=691)

Caretakers and children reported that the children are also experiencing psychosocial challenges. According to respondents, 32% experience stigma, 16% have psychological challenges, and 12% struggle with identity/sense of belonging. Stigmatization often comes from relatives and community members. For example, we have learnt from other studies that gender cultural norms, expectations, and practices tend to impact these children—viewing the returning children as ‘outside the culture’ due to the circumstances of their birth, which are viewed as illegitimate. This has often made them experience severe challenges in their bid to be accepted members of their maternal clans due to the stigma and rejection by relatives.³⁷ The children said stigma also comes from their spouse or mother’s new husband. In addition to not providing land, the stepfather may pay the school fees of his other children but not the child born in captivity. Stigmatization from the community is also present. One participant left school due to stigmatization from their peers, and another said the stigmatization from

the community was so severe, he was considering suicide, revealing the impact of stigma on the child’s wellbeing. Several of the participants shared that people in the community do not know the child was born in captivity and two caretakers said that the child does not know either, which is one way in which the caretaker may try to protect the child from stigma. While 27% of the children (n=678) stated they do not mind being called *latin ma kinywalo ki ilum* (child born in the bush), the majority (73%) do not like it. Those who do not mind the label reported getting used to it over time or learning to be okay with it after informal counselling from relatives and community members. Those that don’t like the label said it makes them feel “very bad”. This is likely due to the stigma surrounding the term and the child’s identity. There is no word used to describe children born in captivity in Acholi that is considered neutral. To address this issue, one village made an informal rule not to call anyone *lutino ma kinwalo ilum* or *olum olum*—children born in the bush.

Psychological challenges include trauma, nightmares, shouting in their sleep, and developmental disabilities, among others. Some caretakers said that their child is “running mad” or “possessed by demons” and needs to return to a rehabilitation center. Two children had urgent psychological needs, expressing feelings of suicide. The psychological wellbeing of the child appears to connect to challenges with stigma and identity/sense of belonging. For example, two children remarked that they feel lonely because they are constantly reminded about their parents from peers. In Acholi culture, identity and sense of belonging is deeply tied to the child’s paternal family and clan. Without knowing their fathers, the children lack a place to belong. Finally, a few participants reported that the children can have behavioral issues, such as being “rude” or engaging in risky behaviors, which is likely related to psychological wellbeing.

15% of the children have unaddressed or untreated health challenges. 13% face medical issues unrelated to war, including infectious diseases (e.g., typhoid, malaria), chronic health conditions (e.g., HIV, sickle cell anemia, epilepsy), and physical disabilities (e.g., deafness). For several, lack of income prevents them from receiving medical care. 11 of the children have

³⁶ Also see Teddy Atim, Dyan Mazurana, and Anastasia Marshak, “Women Survivors and Their Children Born of Wartime Sexual Violence in Northern Uganda,” *Disasters* 42, no. 1 (2017): 61-78.

³⁷ See for example, Kiconco Allen, “Children Born of Rebel Captivity: Politics and Practices of Integration in Uganda,” *Frontiers of Political Science* 4 (2022); Apio Eunice, “Kinship, Marriage and the Politics of Post-conflict Reintegration in Lango,” PhD Thesis, (University of Birmingham, 2016).

untreated medical issues caused by war, including bomb and bullet fragments in their bodies, persistent chest pains caused by beatings and carrying heavy luggage, and hearing loss due to bombings. War-related injuries and urgent medical needs should be addressed immediately.

2% of the children reported lacking a national ID as a challenge. The absence of birth certificates and national IDs for children born in captivity was established by the JLOS pilot study³⁸, though the present study demonstrates the scale of the issue. Less than a third (30%) of the children (n=683) have national IDs and of those without national IDs, just 6% have a birth certificate. A few participants said they used to have a national ID, but it was lost or broken during the war. The lack of national IDs among children born in captivity presents a critical issue as the ID is required to participate in government development programs, removing another potential source of support for children born in captivity. Many of the children were born outside of Uganda and don't know their family history, which makes obtaining a national ID even more difficult. However, NIRA is currently developing new guidelines to accommodate the special circumstance of children born of war, and has embarked on a process to register the children.³⁹ However, the project will take place in just one district, at least initially.⁴⁰ The other challenges among the children include caring for their kids (2%), gender-based violence (2%), drug/alcohol abuse (<1%), social issues (<1%), and challenges with farming (<1%). Many of these challenges are interconnected, which emphasizes the need for interventions that address economic, psychosocial, and other needs holistically.

4.6 Needs

To avoid assumptions on how best children born in captivity and their caretakers can address their challenges, participants were asked what they believed the children need. Participants were also asked to identify which need is most urgent. Figure 8 (below) shows the perceived needs and urgent needs of the children born in captivity.

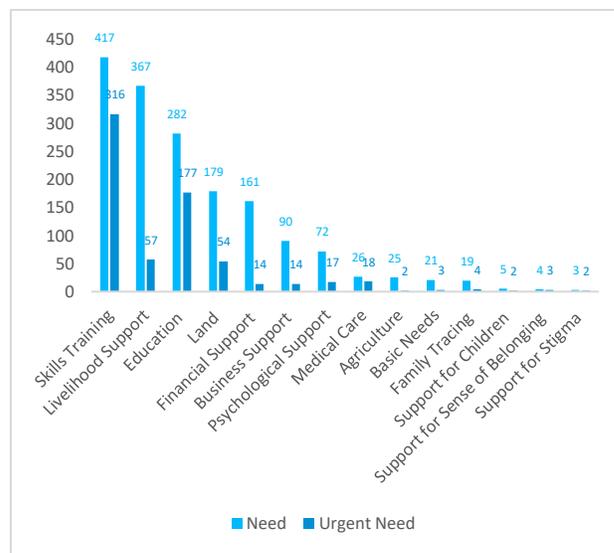


Figure 8. Perceived Needs of Children Born in Captivity (Need: n=679, Urgent Need: n=645)

The study reveals that there is still a gap between challenges and perceived needs. Participants did not always mention needs that address their challenges. For example, 16% of participants (n=679) cite psychosocial support as a need but 22% (n=691) cite psychological difficulties as a challenge OR need. Similarly, 71% participants mentioned education as a challenge OR need whereas just 42% cite education as a need. We believe this gap is more due to enumerator error and participant confusion rather than the participant not viewing education also as a need. If the participant cited school fees as a challenge, they likely assumed they didn't need to say it as a need. This report proposes that it's important to look at both challenges and needs because the participants do not always provide needs that directly address their challenges.

The number one need among the children is skills training (61%). It is also considered the most urgent need. While skills training may not be conventionally considered an urgent need, it illustrates the children's priorities and what they believe to be the best way to address their multiple challenges as soon as possible. Livelihood interventions such as skills training can help the child meet multiple needs, such as basic needs, education, land, and caring for their children. Given the age of the children, skills training as opposed to formal education, may better suit their

³⁸ "How To Bring Justice for Thousands of Children Born of War," *University of Portsmouth*, December 8, 2020, <https://www.port.ac.uk/news-events-and-blogs/blogs/building-an-inclusive-and-growth-led-economy-and-society/how-to-bring-justice-for-thousands-of-children-born-of-war>.

³⁹ Korir Issa, "Uganda's Children Born in Captivity Want to Belong," *Journalists for Justice*, May 16, 2024, <https://jforjustice.net/ugandas-children-born-of-war-want-to-belong/>.

⁴⁰ According to a CSO that has been engaged in the process.

current needs and lifestyles. To inform skills training and livelihood support, participants were asked the child's job interest (n=402). Tailoring (26%), mechanics (17%), and healthcare (11%) are the top three interests, followed by hairdressing (8%), driving (6%), construction (5%), business (5%), and teaching (5%).

The second most common need is livelihood support (54%). This included income-generating activities (IGAs), materials for IGAs, a job, forming groups, etc. Financial support (24%), support for their small business (13%), and agricultural support (e.g., farm tools, animals, inputs) (4%) are also needs that can support the children's livelihood. The third greatest need is educational support (42%), which is considered the second most urgent need. Current students must be supported to prevent an increase in the number of dropouts. Among those already out of school, many still want to return, despite being above school age. As previously mentioned, primary education is required to attend formal technical school, and basic literacy is critical for improving livelihoods. A two-pronged approach whereby the child learns both traditional academics and vocational training, such as at the former Laroo School for War-Affected Children, can help address both traditional education and livelihood needs. Lifelong education programs can complement informal vocational training programs for older or stigmatized children who don't want to attend formal school. A few participants also need sponsorship to complete their higher education programs. Some scholars have begun examining the implications of providing special or targeted opportunities such as education to children born of war but have argued that such provisions must be carefully delivered in order to bridge the gaps in policy and responses towards all children (regardless of their backgrounds) in post conflict regions.⁴¹

The fourth most common need is land (26%), which is also the third most urgent need. Other residents in Amuru District have issues of land ownership, so the government must find a way to mitigate these land conflicts while supporting the children to own land. This may include community sensitizations that help promote land inheritance among the child's other relatives or those that address community stigma that

may negatively impact the child's livelihood prospects and thus, their ability to buy land.

Psychological (11%) and medical support (4%) are less common than economic-related needs, though children requesting this type of support require prompt attention, especially those with urgent cases. According to participants, psychological needs include counselling, a check-up, or being admitted to a rehabilitation/mental health center. While some children experience trauma and war-related psychological issues, others have developmental challenges that the caretaker is unable to support. For those with less severe cases or perhaps as a broad-based intervention for all the children, informal/community-based counselling or peer support groups may be helpful. Psychological support can also help to address other challenges and needs, such as issues with stigma and sense of belonging, behavioral challenges, substance abuse, and/or support for victims of GBV. Medical needs include treatment for both general medical conditions and health issues caused by war. Multiple participants requested hearing aids or to attend school for the deaf. Medical care is notably the fourth most common urgent need. While improving livelihoods can help address some of these medical needs, others require medical guidance and treatment.

For the children who requested support in addressing stigma and issues with sense of belonging, community sensitizations and family tracing were offered by participants as potential solutions. Although 3% of the children named family tracing as a need, when asked explicitly, 34% (n=418) said they are interested in receiving support to find their paternal family. Connecting with their paternal family could offer an opportunity for land, economic support, and improved sense of belonging. A few children shared they already tried to trace their paternal family but failed to locate them or were rejected. Overall, all respondents have unmet needs, and many express a lack of support and sentiments of helplessness. One child captured this pervasive feeling, "There is no one to help me achieve something good in life."

⁴¹ Ojok Boniface, "Education After Conflict: An Examination of Schooling Attitudes, Practices and Policies Towards Children Born of War in The Post-

Conflict Settings of Northern Uganda," PhD Thesis, (University of Birmingham, 2021).

4.7 Support Received

According to the survey, 95% of the children (n=640) have not received support from an NGO or government. Of the 32 children that received support, 9% said the government provided the support and 81% said it was an NGO. One child said a cultural institution provided support and three children said they didn't know who provided it. These figures reveal that most suggest children born in captivity and their mothers are not benefitting from broad-based government development programs. Children born in captivity may not participate in government programs because they don't have a national ID. Other deterrents include fear of government, fear of their identity becoming known to relatives/ the community if they are seen participating in the program, shame, and logistical barriers (e.g., not having a phone or transport to government offices). One mother also reported that local government discriminates against the children and their mothers, while others said the government embezzles funds meant for victims. Local government must consult with victims to mitigate these challenges and encourage their participation. Targeted interventions and affirmative action within broad-based government programs can remove the onus of seeking support off the victims and help to reach them directly.

Of the children that were provided with support, nine received school fees, nine received skills training, six received psychosocial support, four received livelihood support, and 4 received medical support. Other support includes financial support (1), business support (1), general support (2), and/or reconciliation (1). (72%, n=25) are "somewhat satisfied" or "satisfied" with the amount of support they received. Interestingly, 15 of the children that received support still have the challenge or need the intervention was aiming to address. For example, some who received skills training still cite skills training as a need. One participant noted that while an NGO supported them to have medical scans, there was no follow up for treatment. This suggests that the interventions were not effective, not long-term, and/or not adequately explained to victims.

To mitigate these issues, interventions should use a holistic approach that emphasizes victim participation and sustainability. Since many of the challenges the

children face are related to one another, it is important to address their diverse needs simultaneously. For example, a livelihood intervention project should also seek to address the psychosocial needs of the children to improve their participation in the project and to address stigmatization in the community that may reduce the success of the livelihood project. Civil society and government actors should coordinate their efforts to increase their capacity to support the holistic development of the children, expand their reach, and reduce duplication. Throughout the project design, implementation, and follow-up, victims should be included.

Working with victims' networks is a useful tool to consult with and identify victims. WAN members know each other and indeed a diverse number of other victims not in their groups. The implication is that some returnees tend to form up groups—which the study shows is an indication of their remarkable abilities to support each other in peer formations and networks.⁴² WAN members have lived experiences which is critical for victim inclusion in interventions. We found that some of the female children and their male counterparts were involved in WAN programs. However, we acknowledge that many of the mothers and children are not part of these networks, especially those found in rural areas and those who would prefer to remain anonymous in their process of reintegration. Thus, mapping tools such as JRP's database and collaboration with local leaders should also be used to reduce the chances of leaving victims behind.

4.8 Challenges of Caretakers of Children Born in Captivity

While the focus of this study is children born in captivity, it is imperative to recognize that at least half (51%) of the caretakers of children born in captivity are abducted mothers, fathers, or both. Even some caretakers that are the aunts or uncles of the children are former abductees, and most are direct or indirect victims of war. Former abductees struggle with many of the same challenges as their children born in captivity and the majority have also not received support. This raises the concern previously mentioned of other victims and members of conflict-affected communities feeling excluded if targeted interventions are provided to children born of war.

⁴² Ibid.

Targeted interventions can also expose the identities of the children to the community.⁴³ Thus, the principle of equity⁴⁴, or including other members of the community (such as through joint programs⁴⁵ where other vulnerable children are also beneficiaries) can mitigate these concerns.

Although not asked about their challenges, caretakers often shared they too need support and detailed the issues they face. Among their reported challenges, caretakers expressed feeling overwhelmed caring for the children born in captivity as well as their other children. They want help from NGOs or government in supporting the children. In addition, 30 caretakers need medical attention for an injury or health issue sustained by the war (i.e., bullet in the body, bomb fragments, or injuries from torture). Others have medical issues unrelated to the war that prevent them from working and/or require medical treatment, including some mothers with HIV (at times due to CRSV). Eight caretakers mentioned needing psychosocial support (e.g., “feeling demons”) and one was suicidal. Many caretakers expressed financial challenges and difficulty supporting their families. Several want livelihood support, land, or skills training so they can support the child born in captivity and their family. Many of the mothers are single parents with no support, making it even more difficult to care for their family. A concern among the mothers was what would happen to the children after they died since the children do not have access to land or someone else to care for them. This study recognizes these challenges and reiterates the need for government and civil society support to these victims. JRP anticipates that by empowering children born in captivity, they will be able to contribute to the family and help support their caretakers.

When asked for comments, caretakers lamented that abductees also need to be mapped, even those without children from captivity. From this study, JRP has a list of returnees that have children born in captivity in Kilak North. Though the list is not comprehensive of all returnees in the area, it can provide a small contribution to mapping efforts. Caretakers also expressed the need for other

abductees and children born in captivity who are still in the “bush” to be brought home.

5 LESSONS LEARNED

Based on participant comments, respondents were pleased with the study because “people were still thinking of them.” While most understood the purpose of the study immediately, others maintained high expectations for support following the study. Enumerators re-explained the study to participants until they understood. In addition, several participants reported being tired of registering their names, despite only a few saying they were previously mapped. After further prompting, it was discovered that participants were registering their names to participate in certain NGO projects. After registering, and at times even paying, the projects never came. Other times, local groups and/or individuals were creating their own documentation of war victims, some of which also asked for money. It is also possible that participants have been surveyed as part of academic research and/or transitional justice consultations. Since participants often cannot distinguish these different initiatives, they become frustrated by surveys altogether. This is a real concern reported by others that have engaged in data collection with victims.⁴⁶ It is very possible that victims will stop engaging in these processes if they do not see tangible results.

While the mapping of victims is crucial to reparations, the process must be streamlined with coordination between actors to avoid repetition, research fatigue, frustration, high expectations, distrust, and confusion among victims. To pre-empt these issues, JRP consulted with JLOS and actors that have previously mapped children born of war in Northern Uganda. The data initiatives already conducted should be taken up by civil society and government prior to additional mapping.

⁴³ Suzan Soydaş, “A Study on the Psychosocial Programs Aimed at Children Who Were Born in Captivity, in Gulu District, Northern Uganda,” Thesis, (Wageningen University, 2017), p. 51.

⁴⁴ See, for example, International Labour Organization, *Socio-Economic Reintegration of Ex-Combatants* (Geneva: ILO, 2010), p 12, https://www.ilo.org/sites/default/files/wcmsp5/groups/public/@ed_emp/documents/instructionalmaterial/wcms_141276.pdf.

⁴⁵ See for example Brigitte Rohwerder, *Reintegration of Children Born of Wartime Rape* (Brighton: K4D, 2019), https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/pdf/628_reintegration_of_children_born_of_wartime_rape.pdf/.

⁴⁶ REDRESS, *Not Without US*.

6 RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 For the GoU

- Pass a law to implement the reparations of the NTJP that provides affirmative action for children born of war and their mothers. Reparations should be holistic and victim-centered, focusing on economic support (education, skills training, livelihood support, and land), psychosocial support (counselling, community sensitizations, family tracing), and medical support. Children and mothers with urgent needs and heightened vulnerabilities should be prioritized.
- Consolidate the data collected by JRP and other civil society organizations to begin the process of the comprehensive mapping of victims for reparations.
- Coordinate development partners to provide urgent support to children born of war and their mothers in the absence of reparations as a complimentary transitional justice mechanism.
- Invest in job creation in Northern Uganda to absorb children and mothers that receive skills training and livelihood support.
- Expand the NIRA program to provide national IDs to children born of war across Northern Uganda. NIRA could for instance consider collaborating with partners like JRP to register the 693 children in Amuru District.

6.2 For Civil Society

- Provide immediate support for urgent medical and psychological needs of children born of war and their caretakers.
- Implement comprehensive, victim-centered interventions that address the long-term economic and psychosocial needs of the children. Prioritize mothers and children that are more vulnerable.
 - Economic interventions should prioritize skills training, livelihood support, and education. These may include sponsoring academic (or combined) schooling, implementing adult literacy/numeracy programs, and providing livelihood support (such as skills training, income-generating activities, and savings group formation). Educational interventions should provide affirmative action for girls.

- Psychosocial interventions should prioritize addressing mental wellbeing and stigma. These may include peer support groups, professional and community-based psychological support, community sensitizations, and family tracing.
- Collaborate with other civil society and government actors to expand reach, avoid duplication, and ensure coordination between interventions.
- Utilize existing data to inform interventions and avoid new mapping exercises. For example, organizations can partner with JRP to provide support to the 693 children in Amuru District.
- Engage in national advocacy for reparations.

6.3 For Local Government

- Recognize children born of war and their mothers as a special interest group and use affirmative action when implementing government development programs. Take mandatory measures to incorporate this guideline into local government policy. Consult with victims to reduce barriers to participation in government programs.
- Coordinate and inform development partners to provide needs-based support for children born of war and their mothers.
- Support community structures such as community development offices (CDOs), community leaders, and LCs to implement community-based mechanisms to address stigma and land issues.
- Encourage NGOs to use already existing data on the children and their mothers.
- Engage in national advocacy for reparations.

6.4 For Community Leaders

- Promote social and cultural acceptance of children born of war and their mothers.
- Work with local government and CSOs to implement community-based mechanisms to address stigma and land issues in the community (such as through sensitizations that promote acceptance of the children/mothers and land inheritance).
- Engage in national advocacy for reparations.

7 CONCLUSION

As scholars have noted, children born in captivity and their mothers tend to relive their war experiences owing to the very little attention towards their plight. With high levels of needs and challenges such as poor educational attainment, lack of family support, few livelihood prospects, limited access to land, and unaddressed medical and psychological wounds, the children and their mothers face compounded barriers that make it nearly impossible to escape the region's post-conflict poverty trap. Given these circumstances, children born in captivity (and other children born of war) and their mothers, should be recognized as an especially vulnerable population by government and civil society. Children born in captivity require immediate support to care for themselves, their mothers, and their own children. Without intervention, three generations risk becoming lost to the legacies of war. Uplifting these families, which make up a notable number of Northern Uganda's population, is also critical to the development of a region impacted by two decades of war.

The aim of this study was to provide actionable data to generate tangible and timely outcomes for survivors. With the growing availability of data on children born in captivity, it is entirely possible to adequately address their challenges and improve their prospects for the future.

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APPENDIX A

List of Stakeholders Engaged

Acholi Religious Leaders Peace Initiative (ARLPI)
Acholi Ker Kwaro
African Center for Victims of Torture (ACVT)
Amuru District Local Government (Including technical and political officials from LC5, LC3, LC2, and LC1)
Amuru District Rwodi Kweri
Center for Torture Victims (CTV)
Children Born of War Project (CBOW Project)
Children of Peace Uganda (CPU)
Health Right International (HRI)
Foundation for Justice and Development Initiatives (FJDI)
Gulu Women's Economic Development - Globalization (GWED-G)
Justice Law and Order Secor (JLOS)
Refugee Law Project (RLP)
Thrive Uganda
Transpsychosocial Organization Gulu (TPO)
Vivo International Gulu
United Nations Women Gulu Office
Women's Advocacy Network
Youth Advocacy Network
Watye Ki Gen