

# Unprepared for peace

Education in northern Uganda in displacement and beyond



Case study on education and internal displacement

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## Executive Summary

“I lived in Pabbo camp during the war. I was staying with my parents in the camp. But in 2003 rebels came to attack the camp and killed my father. I had problems after that. I couldn't go to school, because without my father we had no money. We became orphans. The rebels attacked the camp and killed my brothers, the following day. My mother is still alive but is infected with HIV.”<sup>1</sup>

Connie F., 20-year-old returnee

All children have a right to education. This includes displaced children affected by conflict, since the right to education cannot be suspended in times of conflict or emergency. Furthermore, education during displacement and in the post-displacement phase is a vital component of successful recovery, because it gives people the tools they need to rebuild their communities. It is essential to enable sustainable solutions to displacement as former IDPs will otherwise struggle to enjoy an adequate standard of living.

Yet in northern Uganda, children grew up without an adequate education during the protracted conflict between the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) and the government, which started in 1986. Now that families are returning home, or seeking other solutions to displacement, they continue to face difficulties accessing quality education. Two generations of children – those who were displaced and those now growing up in return areas – have been left without an education and without the tools they might need to help rebuild their communities.

In the course of the conflict, an extremely high proportion of the population of northern Uganda was forced into so-called protected villages. At the height of the crisis, some 1.8 million people lived in these camps for internally displaced people (IDPs). There were insufficient numbers of schools, and those that did exist were overcrowded and charged levies despite the free primary education policy. Teachers fled the region, and education was otherwise compromised by attacks on schools by the LRA and abduction of children from school grounds or while they were on their way to or from school.

The quality of the education provided during this period did not meet minimum standards, with severe overcrowding impeding learning. Educational systems were not adapted to the needs of the displaced population. As a

consequence, a generation of children emerged from displacement inadequately prepared for the challenges ahead.

With the return of peace to northern Uganda, the provision of education has been slow. The government failed to plan for the rapid re-enrolment of returning children in local schools. Many schools had fallen into disrepair during the conflict years. Thus children who returned home found barely operational schools, often located many miles away from their homes. Without operational schools in home areas, some parents left children in the camps, often unsupervised, so that they could continue to access the minimal services there.

Children and youth in northern Uganda face enormous challenges, with much of the region indelibly altered by two decades of conflict. Many have spent years living in camps with little or no education, and their families may be struggling to rebuild livelihoods. They may be single parents or they may have been left to raise siblings, they may have been orphaned by conflict or by AIDS, or their families may have been torn apart by conflict and displacement. As northern Uganda emerges from conflict, education, from basic literacy and numeracy to more advanced skills, is vital to help them cope with these challenges.

Uganda is party to international human rights treaties, including the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the Convention on the Rights of the Child, that mandate the fulfillment of the right to education, and indicate that states should take particular steps to arrange for education in displacement and post-displacement phases.

International standards mandate free, universal primary education for all. The country has a national policy of universal primary education (UPE) which is to be applauded. The policy entitles four children per household to free access to primary education. Yet Uganda has left hundreds of thousands of children without the education to which they were entitled during displacement and which could give them the skills they now need.

Despite the UPE policy, in practice some obligatory levies for school meals, construction, and maintenance, as well as associated costs like uniforms and books, make it very hard for families to afford education for their children. Particularly vulnerable groups, including former

abductees, child-headed households and orphans, face additional barriers to realising the right to education.

The failure to fulfill the right to education in northern Uganda undermines the process of achieving durable solutions and the transition to a stable and peaceful society. A Ugandan expert in durable solutions with NRC commented: “There is a huge number of youth who are idle. This can be a bombshell here. Anyone can use or abuse them. Formal school changes the mind. Without that, their brains haven’t been trained to think rationally. Anyone can pick them and use them – it’s a risk for recovery.”<sup>2</sup>

The lack of education leaves the search for durable solutions in northern Uganda incomplete, and undermines efforts to build sustainable peace in the region. The government is to be commended for its policy of universal primary education; it is now of key importance to ensure the expansion and implementation of that policy throughout the northern region. Rebuilding and improving the education system in the north is a vital step towards giving children and youth the tools they need to contribute to the rebuilding of their communities and resume peaceful lives.

The provision of education – in displacement and beyond – is crucial in developing sustainable durable solutions. In Uganda, access to basic services including education could help cement the sustainability of return movements and other settlement options of IDPs. Northern Uganda faces enormous challenges, and major steps have been taken to rebuild communities. Educated children and youth can help address these challenges and contribute to durable solutions. The Ugandan government, in partnership with international agencies and donor communities, must devote more resources to rebuilding the educational system in northern Uganda. The educational system should be strengthened beyond its pre-conflict state, so that today’s children and youth can get a real education and contribute to creating sustainable peace in the region.

*This case study is part of a series by IDMC on access to education for displaced children. The series has previously looked at the right to education in displacement, and at access to education of children in situations of protracted displacement in Turkey.*



# Recommendations

## To the Government of Uganda, including the Ministry of Education and Sports:

- Ensure that Uganda's obligations under the Convention on the Rights of the Child are met by implementation of the Universal Primary Education (UPE) policy throughout communities affected by displacement and return.
- Instruct all primary schools to admit children without fees and additional levies.
- Ensure there are adequate numbers of schools within safe walking distance of returnee communities or other communities with people affected by displacement.
- Relax or waive uniform requirements so that the neediest children can attend school.
- Implement and follow up on measures to ensure adequate numbers of qualified teachers in schools in the north, for example through recruitment incentives, construction of housing near remote schools, and thorough checks on absenteeism.
- Initiate incentive schemes such as school feeding and uniform waivers to promote the attendance and retention of vulnerable students, including members of child-headed households, orphans, former abductees and girls.
- Invest in rebuilding physical educational infrastructure such as school buildings and latrines and appointing staff such as qualified teachers and administrators in northern Uganda to ensure that students there are able to receive the same level of education as students elsewhere in the country.
- Implement interim measures, including the provision of temporary classrooms and extra staff, to relieve overcrowding in schools in return areas.
- Provide both formal and non-formal education programming which is relevant to the diverse needs of different categories of learners (including children and youth who missed out on education as a result of the conflict).

## To community leaders and local administrators:

- Prioritise education to the extent possible, by ensuring that children's labour does not affect their school attendance or achievement. Promote opportunities for learning and earning.
- Ensure support for vulnerable children in your communities, including orphans, children in child-headed-households and former abductees, so that they may

attend and succeed in school (for example through uniform waivers and school feeding).

## To UNICEF, NGOs and education partners:

- Ensure all NGO-supported schools and services support Ministry of Education plans and projections.
- Support current bridging, non-formal and accelerated learning programmes, and establish new ones, to assist those who have missed out on years of schooling.

## To donors:

- Continue to support education in Uganda, particularly in the north, acknowledging that full recovery requires long-term investment.
- Develop stronger bridges between humanitarian and development funding, so that educational systems can be built which provide the basis for the sustainable recovery of northern Uganda.



# 1

## Background: Protracted displacement and access to education in northern Uganda

Children in northern Uganda have been long affected by an insurgency by the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) and the government's response to it. The insurgency began in 1987 and was brought to a tentative end in 2006, though a final peace agreement has yet to be concluded.<sup>3</sup> During this period, millions of people were displaced both internally and outside Uganda, with some 1.8 million people moved by the government into camps in the region. Many camps had limited or no access to education, and children lost access to education, either temporarily or permanently. Consequently a generation of children grew up without formal schooling.

In the five years since the signing of a Cessation of Hostilities Agreement between the Government of Uganda and the LRA, the vast majority of the people displaced by the conflict have returned to their villages. Since 2008, return has taken place at a particularly rapid rate, and hundreds of thousands of people are now in need of services in their home areas. As of March 2011, there were still an estimated 73,000 internally displaced people (IDPs) in northern Uganda,<sup>4</sup> among them orphans, former child abductees, and child-headed-households.<sup>5</sup> Many of these people have ongoing protection and assistance needs.

Returns have outpaced recovery planning and implementation. Most IDPs have returned to areas offering few basic services such as water, health care and education facilities. Despite ongoing and planned efforts, there is

general agreement that it will take many years to rehabilitate northern Uganda – an area which was traditionally neglected even prior to the conflict. In the meantime, hundreds of thousands of children will remain without an education, in a country in which half the population is 15 years old or younger.

### Patterns of displacement and access to schools

Though displacement in northern Uganda started at the same time as the beginning of the LRA insurgency in the late 1980s, large-scale displacement only followed the government's policy from 1996 to force civilians into camps which it described as "protected villages."<sup>6</sup> Two large-scale army offensives against the LRA, Operation "Iron Fist 1" in October 2002 and "Iron Fist 2" in March 2004, caused further large-scale displacement. Around the time of "Iron First 1" the area affected by displacement expanded as the LRA moved eastwards into Lango and Teso sub-regions of northern Uganda. By the end of 2005, a total of about 1.8 million people had been moved into IDP camps.<sup>7</sup>

Life in displacement was characterised by difficult conditions. The camps offered far less space for planting than traditional villages, and so IDPs faced a large-scale loss of livelihood. Even people whose land was nearby could not



Children playing in a return village in Gulu District (Photo: IDMC/Alice Farmer, January 2011).

access their land due to restrictions on their freedom of movement. Children in camps found themselves without adequate access to education, health care, or nutrition. At various points in the conflict, security in the areas around the camps declined significantly. Humanitarian aid providers, including organisations supporting educational programmes, had very limited access to the camps for long periods of high insecurity.

Education in camps was quite limited, with very few secondary facilities and highly compromised primary facilities. Primary schools in camps were extremely overcrowded, with as many as 200 pupils per teacher. Essentially, schools from villages were moved to the camps and grouped together as “learning centres,” with around seven schools sharing one school building. The teachers were not necessarily from the displaced communities; many qualified teachers from their communities did not remain in the camps but moved to towns for work. Levies were charged at many camp schools, despite the mandate for universal, free primary education in Uganda, meaning that children from impoverished families (as many internally displaced families were) were excluded from education.

#### *Attacks on schools and the use of children in armed forces*

LRA activity in northern Uganda was characterised by the abduction of large numbers of children, including from school premises. The LRA used children in combat and to carry out raids, kill and mutilate other child soldiers and civilians, and loot and burn houses, while abducted girls were routinely raped and forced to bear children. Though thousands of children escaped or returned after the end of hostilities, large numbers remain unaccounted for. Some are believed to have died (in battle, killed by abductors, or from injury or illness), while others are still thought to be with the LRA in the east of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) or in Sudan.<sup>8</sup>

About 25,000 children were abducted by the LRA during the conflict, according to the Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers.<sup>9</sup> Abductions peaked in 2002 and 2003, with an estimated 10,000 children abducted between May 2002 and May 2003. Some children also reportedly served in government forces: the government stated in March 2005 that the Uganda People's Defence Force (UPDF) never knowingly recruited a child, but admitted that age verification was difficult and sometimes children under 18 had been recruited. In addition, children below the age of 15 served in local defence units (LDUs) established in the 1990s to provide protection, under UPDF command, for IDP camps and roads in northern Uganda.

The LRA was known to attack schools and abduct children from school premises or while children were travel-

ling to and from school. International humanitarian law dictates that schools, as civilian objects, must not be the subject of armed attack or reprisals.<sup>10</sup> Schools should be free from attack and children should be free from recruitment throughout displacement and in return. In Uganda, however, schools for internally displaced children were often all too close to conflict areas. Attacks on schools and recruitment were factors both causing displacement and affecting children's rights in displacement.<sup>11</sup> The connection between children and armed conflict and attacks on schools further undermined education for hundreds of thousands of displaced children.

### Outstanding issues affecting children

In 2011 there are still IDPs in camps in Acholi and Teso sub-regions. Many of them are categorised as “extremely vulnerable individuals” (EVIs); these include elderly people and the grandchildren they care for, orphans, and former abductees. Some families decided to leave children in camps, alone or in the care of older relatives, as there was no access to school in their return villages. UNHCR intends to maintain a presence in northern Uganda through 2011, and focus on the EVIs still in camps.

Despite the progress in the return process, many outstanding issues continue to affect children and youth in northern Uganda.<sup>12</sup> Access to basic services including education has remained elusive for the majority of people in return areas.<sup>13</sup> Many return areas lack health centres or access to clean water. Likewise, many return areas do not have functioning schools. Many school buildings were damaged or fell into disrepair during the conflict, and some but not all have been refurbished. Most rural schools in the region still lack adequate numbers of teaching staff, and some lack desks, books, and other basic equipment and teaching materials.

### National and international responses

Even though the large-scale movement of IDPs from the camps did not gain momentum until 2008, two years after the cessation of hostilities, the planning and implementation of activities to provide educational facilities failed to keep pace with returns before and after 2008.<sup>14</sup> Recovery and development programmes failed to take the place of humanitarian assistance programmes as they were being phased out. Confusion about funding between the government and development partners has persisted, and there has been a lack of coordination between the government, the donors and the UN.

In October 2007, the government launched the Peace, Recovery and Development Plan (PRDP) for Northern

Uganda. The PRDP was intended as a three-year framework to enable development and restore law and order in areas affected by conflict, in line with national standards. It had four strategic objectives: consolidation of state authority; rebuilding and empowering communities; revitalising the economy; and peace building and reconciliation. However, lack of funding and oversight mechanisms delayed the implementation of the PRDP until the fiscal year beginning in July 2009. By late 2010, the design of monitoring mechanisms was being completed, and the PRDP was expected to run until at least mid-2012 with a total budget of approximately \$600 million.<sup>15</sup> Education is one of the priority sectors of the PRDP, and money has been allocated to the renovation and reconstruction of school buildings, and construction of housing for teachers.

The government and its international partners did not start to implement recovery programmes until 2008. In December 2010, the Consolidated Appeal for humanitarian support during the year had been only 49 per cent funded. The Consolidated Appeal noted that: "For the 1.8 million affected, the situation on the ground can be characterised neither as an end of displacement nor the achievement of lasting Durable Solutions... Returning populations face significant challenges in transit locations and villages of origin, including the absence, or inadequacy, of basic services such as water, sanitation, health and education." There is increasing awareness that peacebuilding and reconciliation activities need to feature more prominently in recovery efforts.

# 2

## The legal framework protecting the right to education in displacement

A generation of children in northern Uganda have grown up with severely curtailed education. Displaced children's education cannot wait until solutions to displacement are found. All people have the right to education, including internally displaced people in emergency settings, protracted displacement, or in the course of finding durable solutions.

The right to education continues in conflict and emergencies,<sup>16</sup> and no specific restriction upon, or derogation from, the right to education is found in international law.<sup>17</sup> IDPs are entitled to education with the fewest possible interruptions, regardless of forced displacement.<sup>18</sup> Education is not only a basic human right during displacement, it is a right that provides children with the tools such as literacy and numeracy that they need to achieve durable solutions to their displacement and contribute to the rebuilding of their community. In northern Uganda a generation of children has been unable to exercise this right.

The primary responsibility to enable durable solutions for IDPs rests with national authorities, while international partners may play a complementary role. For example, in cases of protracted displacement, they may promote IDPs' acquisition of new skills to help them access labour markets.<sup>19</sup> All interventions to promote durable solutions must be designed so as to further the realisation of human rights; human rights standards, including those on education, must guide activities.<sup>20</sup>

### The substance of the right to education

Uganda, as party to international human rights treaties including the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), has an obligation to provide for the right to education. This obligation continues in situations of displacement and crisis: the national authorities are responsible for realising the right to education for IDPs, as part of their duty to secure the rights of those in their jurisdiction described in Guiding Principle 3.<sup>21</sup> Both the ICESCR and CRC provide for the right to education and contribute to international law dictating that the right to education continues in displacement and emergencies.

In 1999, the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the body charged with monitoring the implementation of the ICESCR, described four essential features of the right to education: availability, accessibility,

acceptability, and adaptability.<sup>22</sup> This "Four As" framework may be applied to northern Uganda.

#### 1. Availability

Free and compulsory quality primary education should be available to all internally displaced children in northern Uganda, in camps or elsewhere.<sup>23</sup> At the primary level there should be no fees or associated levies (additional, sometimes informal fees), or related costs such as uniforms barring children attending school. Schools should be economically accessible, without fees, and child labour should not function as a barrier to internally displaced children attending and succeeding in school. Sufficient numbers of school buildings should be available with sanitation facilities for both sexes.<sup>24</sup> Alternative facilities may be appropriate for short-term periods in displacement settings.<sup>25</sup> There should be enough trained teachers (receiving appropriate salaries) and learning materials.<sup>26</sup>

#### 2. Accessibility

Education must be free and physically accessible to all, without discrimination, and schools must be protected against attacks. Physical access to education requires that schools are within safe reach of the IDP settlement or return site.<sup>27</sup> Returnee or internally displaced children should be able to walk to schools without risking being attacked or threatened.<sup>28</sup> Education must be accessible to all in a non-discriminatory manner; discrimination against IDPs or a section of the internally displaced population is prohibited.<sup>29</sup>

#### 3. Acceptability

The form and content of education must be of good quality, and linguistically and culturally appropriate for the child.<sup>30</sup> The CRC emphasises that a child's education shall be directed to the development of "his or her own cultural identity, language and values."<sup>31</sup>

#### 4. Adaptability

Education systems should be flexible and take into account the best interest of the child.<sup>32</sup> Education should be able to help children adapt to their current surroundings, as well as prepare them for the life which may follow a durable solution to their displacement, including through re-entering regular education structures.<sup>33</sup> International humanitarian organisations "and other appropriate actors" may be called upon to help provide education in emergency situations, and states should ensure that these actors have humanitarian access to the affected populations.<sup>34</sup>



Returnee boys in an unrenovated school in Gulu District (Photo: IDMC/Alice Farmer, January 2011).

## Ugandan law and policy on the right to education

Uganda has a policy of universal, free primary education, in keeping with its obligations under international law: to fulfill the right to education, schools should be free and should not charge associated fees, especially at primary level. The Constitution of the Republic of Uganda, adopted in 1995, provides in Article 30 for the right to education for all persons, and establishes in Article 167 an Education Service Commission to make appointments to and otherwise govern the education service nationwide.

Nonetheless, government schools in Uganda, including primary schools, routinely charge levies (including for school meals, school construction, etc).<sup>35</sup> In addition, children may be effectively barred from school by their inability to pay for uniforms or books.

When the government established universal primary education (UPE) in 1997 in keeping with its obligations under international human rights law, it had not yet realised free primary education.<sup>36</sup> UPE, designed to work toward that goal, proposed free primary education for four children in each family.<sup>37</sup> It attempted to accommodate girls in equal numbers to boys, and to provide for the needs of orphans, disabled children, and other vulnerable groups.

Since UPE was launched, the government has increased its spending on education,<sup>38</sup> and more than doubled primary enrolment.<sup>39</sup> Nonetheless, levies are still charged in many primary schools, including in impoverished areas.<sup>40</sup> Northern Uganda, which has traditionally been neglected in service provision, continues to have some of the worst-performing school districts in terms of enrolment and

exam results in the country. Thus displaced, formerly-displaced and non-displaced children there may find it harder than children elsewhere in the country to access free primary education.

# 3

## Education during the conflict years

During displacement, virtually no aspects of the right to education were adequately fulfilled for the vast majority of displaced children. The government failed to ensure the availability, accessibility, acceptability or adaptability of their education. Consequently a generation of children has grown up without basic literacy, numeracy or other skills they need.

### Availability: Lack of free primary education and inadequate infrastructure

Availability is one of the four essential features of the right to education, and yet lack of availability could be seen during displacement in the inadequate numbers of teachers and school buildings, and by the charging of levies for schools including at the primary level. These primary schools were major barriers to learning. One representative of an NGO stated, "In totality there was hardly any learning in displacement."<sup>41</sup> Because education was largely unavailable during displacement, children who grew up in displacement were not taught basic skills that would help them contribute to rebuilding lives at the end of the conflict.

#### 1. Lack of human and physical resources

One major problem which was identified by expert interviewees as well as children and young adults was the insufficiency of teaching staff during displacement. A

Gulu government education official noted: "During the war, the learning was not effective because the teachers were not enough."<sup>42</sup>

Teachers fled the conflict area, particularly those who were not from the local community, and also female teachers: "Female teachers felt very insecure; they pulled out, and this impacted the number of staff but also meant that girls were vulnerable on protection issues and there were no role models for the girl child."<sup>43</sup>

In addition, there were insufficient physical resources in the camps. Communities lacked school buildings, desks, and learning materials. The Gulu government official noted, "We didn't have books, classrooms, or latrines."<sup>44</sup>

An 18-year-old who grew up in the camps observed that: "To make schools better, you need to ... give us playing materials, like balls. We had nothing."<sup>45</sup> Without sufficient resources, schools were not available to thousands of displaced children.

#### 2. Fees or levies for primary and secondary school

Despite government obligations to provide universal primary education even in conflict, internally displaced children were regularly excluded from government schools because their families were unable to pay levies or buy required materials such as uniforms and books. The majority of children and young adults who IDMC interviewed

Children in Pabo IDP camp in Amuru District (Photo: IDMC/ Katinka Ridderbos, November 2007).



said that fees and other costs were major obstacles to getting an education while displaced.

Bozzi O., a 20-year-old, said: "I was displaced for seven years... When we went to the camp there was no education. We tried, I searched for a school. But we couldn't afford the school fees."<sup>46</sup> Mary A. was displaced to the Pabbo camp, where she "wasn't able to go to school in the camps, because of other problems – school fees, uniforms, and other requirements."<sup>47</sup>

Lillian G.A., a single mother who has returned to school with support from a scholarship programme, explained her experience in displacement: "I was displaced to the Gulu district. We left because the rebels killed my parents. My uncle lived in Unyama, came and got me and I came here then. I scored a 21 on the PLE [Primary Leaving Exam]. I stopped school in 1995 when I came to Unyama – there was no-one to pay my school fees."<sup>48</sup>

Deaths in the family and consequent loss of income affected families' ability to find money for these levies. The increased poverty of internally displaced families, and their resulting inability to pay school levies, left a generation of children without an education.

### **Accessibility: Schools under attack and children recruited from schools**

Education was not accessible for internally displaced children in northern Uganda during the conflict, another factor that contributed to creating a generation of children who are unprepared for the challenges of life beyond displacement. Accessibility – the second of the four essential features of the right to education – requires that schools be physically accessible and safe from attack. Many children could not attend school without risking recruitment or threats to their safety.<sup>49</sup>

The number of schools dropped dramatically during the conflict: for instance, Human Rights Watch reports that during 1996, the number of functioning schools in Gulu fell from 199 to 64.<sup>50</sup> At a later point in the conflict, some of the remaining schools reduced their hours of instruction so that children could travel to and from school at times when they were less likely to be abducted.<sup>51</sup>

Throughout the conflict, families became increasingly reluctant to send their children to school for fear of their abduction and recruitment into the LRA.<sup>52</sup> Some children were abducted from the schools, as the LRA saw this as an efficient way to attack many children at once,<sup>53</sup> and others while travelling to and from school.<sup>54</sup> Attacks on schools prevented some of our interviewees from continuing school.

Joyce A. explains what happened at her school: "In Pakwelo [camp], during the war, children were abducted from a water well near the school – a mixture of boys and girls were abducted. This was in 1996, in the presence of teachers. School stopped for a while, for a few months, until soldiers could guard the school. A few who were abducted never returned."<sup>55</sup>

Daniel P., a young adult in a vocational training programme, stated that as a child he didn't attend school "because of the abductions – rebels would abduct children from school. That was in our minds always, so we wouldn't go too far from the camp."<sup>56</sup>

Children who were abducted received no education in captivity. Jonathan B., a young adult, stated: "During the insurgency I was abducted, and didn't have time to go to school. I was in the bush for five years."<sup>57</sup> Allie A.'s first experience of any kind of education was in a young adult programme: "I hadn't been to school before because I was abducted by the rebels. That was when I was 12 years old. I left when I was 16 years old."<sup>58</sup> One official with GUSCO, a rehabilitation programme for former abductees, commented: "The problem with being abducted is that you lose time in the bush. When you come back, formal class doesn't suit you any more. Someone might have had a great deal of potential but that is lost."<sup>59</sup>

Children who missed out on school because of attacks or other insecurities are now less prepared for contributing to life beyond displacement. Likewise, children who have returned from abduction can experience difficulties readapting to normal life, and without an education can struggle to find livelihoods outside of armed forces.

### **Acceptability: Overcrowding a major impediment to effective learning**

For the right to education to be fulfilled, the education provided must be of an acceptable quality. Yet in northern Uganda, overcrowding in schools severely compromised the quality of education offered to internally displaced children, again damaging the communities' ability to prepare for a sustainable end to displacement.

When villages and communities were displaced, school officials were instructed to group schools together in "learning centres." Schools were identified to host up to ten displaced schools from the same sub-county.<sup>60</sup> This left classrooms severely overcrowded, as one educational expert explained: "With seven schools in one, there's a seven-fold increase in learners, and there was no systematic preparation for the increase. This affected books, desks, even staffing."<sup>61</sup> While some extra materials were made available as displacement continued, "over-

crowding was still a problem.”<sup>62</sup> As one father pointed out, “with too many children in a class, they don’t understand anything.”<sup>63</sup>

### **Adaptability: Incomplete planning to adapt education to displacement**

The right to education requires adaptability: that is, education systems should be flexible, and states should adapt education to the needs of displaced and other vulnerable populations. The Ugandan government took some steps to adapt educational systems to the realities of displacement, but encountered numerous obstacles including lack of security. Ultimately, the government and its partners made additional efforts to adapt the educational system to the needs of displaced children, including through emergency planning, increased humanitarian access, and additional allocation of resources to education in the north.

Attempts to enhance the capacity of the learning centres was hindered by a number of factors. First, security concerns hampered the provision of education, because the IDP camps were often within the conflict area.<sup>64</sup> Second, the lack of humanitarian support during much of the conflict period compromised educational interventions in the camps.

An education expert at the NGO Echo Bravo felt that the local government needed more support: “INGO / NGO capacity to respond to educational needs was insufficient. The absence of the humanitarian community meant that education departments in the Acholi region were at a loss; they had no experience in emergencies. They needed expertise to help deal with the overwhelming emergency.”<sup>65</sup>

Thus for decades, displaced populations in northern Uganda were not provided with an adequate education. All four aspects of the right to education were compromised:

- Education was largely not available, because of insufficient numbers of buildings, teachers, and materials and through the imposition of fees and additional levies.
- Schools were not accessible, because of abductions and attacks on schools
- The quality of education was not acceptable, because of severe overcrowding
- Education was not adapted to the specific needs of the displaced population.

As a consequence, a generation of children in a region that was traditionally neglected grew up with an even less adequate education than they might have received in their home settings. Their families were often thrust deeper

into poverty because of their displacement, and traditional livelihoods and lifestyles disappeared in camps. A safe education of acceptable quality could have helped children cope with the stresses of displacement and could have given them necessary skills to rebuild communities after displacement came to an end. Yet education was neglected for decades, and northern Uganda entered the post-displacement phase with a large number of children and youth lacking the skills they needed.



# 4

## Education in northern Uganda today: Support for populations recovering from displacement

There are still in 2011 major obstacles to the right to education in northern Uganda, even though the vast majority of IDPs have now left the camps. Even prior to the conflict, the educational infrastructure has traditionally been less well developed than in other parts of Uganda, even prior to the conflict; large-scale displacement compounded these problems. Now, the Ugandan government has the opportunity to rebuild a better educational system, by committing resources to provide children in the region the education they need to help develop their communities. However, many of the post-conflict movements have been to places without social services, with families returning to villages long before schools are set up for their children.

Since return movements started, some school buildings have been rehabilitated by the government and international organisations, but numerous schools still lack teachers, desks, books, and other resources. Meanwhile, the increased poverty that accompanies displacement has left families and particularly the many orphans in returnee communities struggling to find the resources to pay additional school levies.

Some parents and guardians chose to leave children behind in camps, in the care of an adult or alone, so that they could benefit from the comparatively functional schools in camps. However, without adequate supervision, the children missed school more often, and many found themselves at risk of violence and exploitation.

IDMC conducted seven focus group discussions in returnee communities in northern Uganda to ascertain the main obstacles to the restoration of education in their areas. The biggest concern identified by participants was school fees; for many, even the relatively low fees required for government schools were out of reach. The next most listed concerns were the distances to schools, the quality of teachers, and access to water in or near school buildings.

The “Four As” framework developed by the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights is useful to distinguish the particular barriers to fulfillment of the right to education in post-displacement settings. The vast majority of the concerns of focus group participants were to do with availability, with free primary education the biggest among them. The accessibility of schools, and in particular the distance to schools, was also a major issue for focus group participants.

### Availability: Fees and levies, lack of teachers, and child labour

For education to be available, schools must be free and compulsory, schools should be economically accessible, without fees or additional levies, and child labour should not function as a barrier to school. There should be enough trained teachers. These conditions have been lacking in northern Uganda for populations emerging from displacement.

#### 1. Fees and additional levies

The additional levies required to attend schools, including state-run primary schools which are ostensibly covered under universal free primary education,<sup>66</sup> operate as a major barrier to school attendance in returnee communities.

The levies vary: one community reported the levy for the local school was 9,000 Ugandan shillings (\$3.90) per year, while another school's levy was 30,000 Ugandan shillings (\$12.90) per year.<sup>67</sup>

All seven focus groups selected these costs as one of their major concerns; five of the seven listed it as their top concern, and no group ranked it below number three. Even the relatively low levies required by government primary schools were out of reach of returnee families, many of whom were from very poor communities originally, who had lost livelihood assets including land and livestock, and found their resources stretched even further by changes in agricultural markets, the death of family members with income, and responsibilities for orphaned children.

Children and adults alike recognised the problem of affording school costs. One girl said, “Money is the most important problem – we want to study and we can't.”<sup>68</sup> One father emphasised that, since the family's return, they had not had the opportunity to rebuild sources of income: “For us, we don't have the chance to get money. We haven't been cultivating long, and we don't have a chance to pay the school fees.”<sup>69</sup> Several children emphasised that, as orphans, they were even less able to find money for school. One girl said: “Some of us are orphans. I lost my father in 1998 and now there's no-one to pay for me.”<sup>70</sup>

The consequences of non-payment include the humiliation of children as well as a return to labour. Focus group participants in multiple communities emphasised that students were chased from school if the fees were not

Children in a return village in Gulu District (Photo: IDMC/Alice Farmer, January 2011).



paid. One father pointed out that then the child must return to working in the fields: “Once you fail to pay, your children come back to the same situation [of relying on agriculture], because they get thrown out of school.”<sup>71</sup>

## 2. Teachers

Teacher quality and quantity is an issue that falls under availability in the right to education: schools must have sufficient numbers of teachers paid an appropriate salary for the right to education to be realised. Yet experts in northern Uganda and focus group participants pointed to the lack of teachers and their lack of quality as the second biggest issue they faced in their schools.

As an expert at the NGO Echo Bravo pointed out: “Schools need to be supported, it’s not just the building, it’s more essential than that – the right staffing, the right materials. The quality of teachers is low. The quality determines retention and completion.”<sup>72</sup>

Members of the focus groups described the problems with teachers slightly differently. One father listed the main issues: “Some teachers come from a far distance. Some miss school. Some are drunk. Children don’t get enough teaching.”<sup>73</sup> Other parents raised concerns that teachers needed housing nearer the schools, though even when housing exists, families still have concerns: “Teachers’ demands for housing are being fulfilled – but parents and children’s demands for safety aren’t met.”<sup>74</sup>

Interviews with expert stakeholders confirm these problems and concurrent shortcomings in policy. A UNICEF education official in Kampala pointed out that it is difficult to recruit and retain teachers for rural areas in the north: “Some had got used to town life, and didn’t want

to go back to the villages... even in displacement teachers would move from the camps, go to cities and towns. They’re qualified.”<sup>75</sup> Another UNICEF member of staff in Gulu highlighted issues with absenteeism: “The government’s been trying to do more spot checks to check that the teachers are actually there. Even when kids have a teacher, it might not be good quality teaching.”<sup>76</sup>

## 3. Books and uniforms

Both parents and children considered access to books and uniforms a major barrier to education in return, and a problem that had increased with their displacement. The focus groups listed these issues as fourth and fifth in priority respectively. Yet participants observed that uniforms and books were necessary for learning, and in some cases the lack of these materials led to exclusion of the child from school. A boy said: “We need uniforms for identification. Without it, we’re chased away.”<sup>77</sup> Another boy remarked: “Even without shoes I can go to school. But without a uniform I am not a pupil, the teachers chase you away.”<sup>78</sup> Children discussed the importance of the uniform. One girl said: “The uniform is the most important thing – it shows where you study and where you go. It’s hard to get the uniform. Our parents don’t have the money to buy the uniform.”<sup>79</sup>

Returnee families have very few available resources for buying books and other school materials. As one child pointed out: “Books make going to school hard because they’re expensive.”<sup>80</sup> One girl argued that for her, lack of books was a particular obstacle to learning: “Books are more important than the uniform. Without books, you can’t write. But without a uniform you can plead to the administration, and maybe they allow you to be in the class.”<sup>81</sup>

Ultimately, the costs of uniforms and books drive children away from school. As a child rights expert in Kampala observed: “Hidden costs play a role in the continued lack of attendance.”<sup>82</sup>

#### **4. Child labour as a barrier to school**

In three of the seven focus groups, the need for children to help with substantial domestic chores or with cultivation was seen as an obstacle to education, more so in return than during displacement. Some participants felt that this was a barrier, but others felt that the labour required of children was manageable and did not impede their ability to attend school.

Child labour has increasingly been a concern since return. A fourteen-year-old girl participating in the focus groups observed: “During the camps the schools were near. But now the schools are far and our guardians have us stay home to work in the fields.”<sup>83</sup>

Bozzi O., a young man interviewed separately from the focus groups, explained that his labour burden increased on return, and that affected his education: “When we came home, there was nothing. Our father fell sick. There was no way out, I had to work to get money for my parents, I was digging in the fields.”<sup>84</sup> An official of the Norwegian Refugee Council in Gulu indicates that this was not unusual: “Families need money – the social safety net of the community structure was destroyed during the war. Most people lost property and income, so they can’t help relatives.”<sup>85</sup>

According to UNICEF, “restrictions on movement meant no labour in the camps,” but “during return – there’s been an increase in child labour. Digging farm lands, attending to animals. There are children who work as domestic labour. They’re girls from about 12 to 15 or 16. They work for another family, and the salary goes back to their family. Boys are sent to town to sell eggs, etc.” This labour affects attendance in seasonal patterns: “Children might be out of school for between six weeks and three months for field work.”<sup>86</sup> Rebuilding economic infrastructure and reducing school costs can help address these issues and ensure that child labour does not function as a barrier to education.

### **Accessibility: Long distances to school, and safety for all students**

The right to education requires that schooling be accessible. Schools should be within safe physical reach of children’s homes, and children should be able to walk to school without risk. Schools should be safe and accessible to all, including for girls, in a non-discriminatory manner.

#### **1. Distance**

The most important accessibility-related concern raised in the focus groups was distance. The right to education requires that schools be within safe physical reach. Yet in many communities, the closest school is several kilometres away. All of our focus groups took place in communities with a school more than two kilometres away or with young adults who had no access to school at all.

Some interviewees observed that the distance to schools had increased since displacement, where camp residents had at least some access to nearby schools. Patrick, a focus group participant in a young adult group, pointed out: “Since people are going back home there are long distances from the sites to the schools.” His colleague David agreed: “Now that people are going to original sites, the distance to the school is great. The government has rebuilt nothing.”<sup>87</sup> Children who travel long distances to school may not be able to return home for lunch and will go the whole school day without eating.

Focus group parents worried about their children’s safety and about deteriorating road conditions on long walks to school. One parent noted that children had to walk along a highway and so children risked being injured, while another parent agreed, pointing out that “there is a river here, kids can’t be able to cross the river, and the road is bad.”<sup>88</sup> One father pointed out that “the bad roads are hard with the distance. Bushes grow up, and the infant classes can’t pass through to go to school,” and a mother agreed, pointing out that “water and rivers can flood the roads.”<sup>89</sup>

Young children noted that the walk was long and difficult without shoes on the hot surface, and made them late and tired. One girl said: “Distance can be important. We come late to school when it is too long,” but one of her peers replied, “If I wake up early I can go to school.”<sup>90</sup> All the focus groups involving children mentioned shoes as an issue. For instance, one girl observed that: “Shoes are important because the murrum roads [made from dirt and gravel] are very hard to walk on, they are very hot,”<sup>91</sup> while a boy in another community observed that: “Shoes are very important because of the heat of the sun on the road.”<sup>92</sup>

#### **2. Water, sanitation and health**

Water was a serious concern of focus group participants, adults and children alike. Provision of safe drinking water is a key part of the school infrastructure, making it possible for pupils to learn and remain healthy. Yet six of the seven focus groups identified lack of safe water as a barrier to school attendance.

One boy mentioned: “Water is important; our area doesn’t have water. If we go to school without water we’ll be thirsty.”<sup>93</sup> A young mother pointed out: “Without water it’s

not easy for a child to study.”<sup>94</sup> One father was concerned about health: “We’re taking water from a small stream. There are many germs in the water, and it can dry up. We need a better well near the school.”<sup>95</sup>

A few girls brought up latrines in the context of discussions on water, one saying, “Latrines are important: without latrines you have to use the bush and you can get hurt there.”<sup>96</sup> Provision of adequate sanitation facilities, an issue that can affect girls more than boys (especially when girls start menstruation) can be a key factor in raising girls’ attendance rates.

### **Adaptability: Needs of particular groups, including orphans**

Adaptability is the fourth key aspect of the right to education, and encompasses the notion that education systems should be flexible and take into account the best interests of the child. Yet the Ugandan education authorities have not taken significant steps, such as relaxing fees or providing support for families, to accommodate orphans in northern Ugandan communities, despite their high numbers among returnee communities. A mother in a focus group explained her concerns: “Many women are keeping orphans. I’m keeping five orphans – their father was killed by the rebels in 2004. They need help to have a bright future.”<sup>97</sup>

Some communities in our focus groups identified the number of orphans as an impediment to education for all, arguing that there were insufficient resources within the community to provide school costs for all the children. Both the insurgency and HIV /AIDS have led to high numbers of orphans in northern Uganda, and while relatives have taken in many children, the overall poverty makes provision of school costs hard, and orphans may not be prioritised within the family when allocation of money occurs. An orphaned boy said: “With orphans, sometimes our guardian doesn’t let us go to school.”<sup>98</sup>

### **Adaptability: Responding to the needs of returning IDPs**

The government failed to adapt the education system to the needs of returning IDPs, as returns outpaced recovery planning and implementation. Many IDPs left the camps to find a lack of functioning schools in their home areas. A durable solutions expert with NRC said: “In 2008 – 2009, people often kept two homes – one in the main camp, and one in a transit area. Children and the elderly were left in the main camp – children left on their own or with their grandparents – to have access to school, health care, and food distribution... Parents were in transit camps

and ‘under the mango tree’ during cultivation season.”<sup>99</sup> Likewise, there were no schools in the transit areas: “If the transit camp is near a school, kids can use it. But if it’s not, then there’s nothing.”<sup>100</sup>

When children were left in camps, their school attendance and safety became issues. The NRC expert noted that: “It was a security risk to have so many abandoned huts in the camps. It led to a lot of drop-out, especially for the girl child.” Schools in villages have slowly reopened, and the government has ordered school personnel to return to the villages. But “the government acted too fast, ordered all displaced schools to go back – but without enough support, and the teachers especially didn’t come back.”<sup>101</sup>

Some parents noted that the overcrowding has not been solved with the end of displacement. One mother observed: “What we have now is worse than the camp schools, because the [local primary school] is overcrowded now, so many kids.”<sup>102</sup>

Now, almost five years after the start of returns, there are school buildings in some villages – but without staff. It is the government’s responsibility to provide functioning educational systems, including securing teachers’ presence in schools. To fulfill the “adaptability” component of the right to education, planning for return movement should have included adequate steps to transfer schools back to home areas and increase their quality after transfer.

# 5

## Education in northern Uganda today: Lack of education for vulnerable groups

The right to education in displacement and return has been a particular problem for vulnerable groups, including children who are heads of households, child mothers, and orphans. Neglect of the educational needs of these groups further undermines the sustainability of returns.

Geraldine B., a teacher in a vocational education programme for young adults, emphasised the variety of issues children from vulnerable groups can face: “They have different problems – child-headed-households, orphans, abductees. We try to teach them peace and human rights, life skills – to help them cope with their different problems.”<sup>103</sup>

### Orphans

There are high numbers of orphans in northern Uganda, who lost their parents during the conflict or from HIV/AIDS, and many communities with large numbers of formerly displaced people also have large numbers of orphans living among them. In Uganda, children who have lost one parent may be considered orphans (in addition to those who have lost both parents), in part because of the financial hardship that follows. Both categories of “orphan” give us cause for concern.

Children may drop out of school when a parent dies. Bill O., an 18-year-old returnee, explains why he left school:

“I stopped going to school in the camp when my mother died. My father brought in another woman, and attention for education was given to her children. I was supposed to do domestic work, along with my siblings [from my mother.]”<sup>104</sup>

Pauline P., another young adult who has a daughter of her own, explained why she left school: “I was displaced and stayed in Pabbo camp... I stopped going to school because I was having a lot of problems. I stopped when I was 13 years old. I was having problems with the school fees. There was no money for paying the school. I was living with my mother only. The rebels killed my father. This was when I was still young.”<sup>105</sup>

Orphans may grow up in severe poverty, a particular problem in return where humanitarian assistance has dwindled. Estelle, a 19-year-old whose parents died in the conflict, outlined problems faced by her younger sisters, who live with their grandmother: “What help is there for the orphans, like my sisters? Our grandmother is very old, and doesn't have the ability to move distances, to do garden work. These kids [my siblings] live on their own means, with agricultural work, sometimes with gifts of food from neighbours. I go back on weekends to help. That is how we survive.”<sup>106</sup>

Guardians who care for orphans encounter problems providing for them, including paying their school fees or



An informal school facility in northern Uganda (Photo: IDMC/ Alice Farmer, January 2011).

levies. Estelle, the 19-year-old, noted: “Two of my sisters, who live with our grandmother, have had their report card retained, because we can't pay the fees.”<sup>107</sup> The girls' report cards will not be released until fees are paid, meaning that the girls cannot progress to the next class.

Difficulty providing for the educational needs of orphans was a theme of some focus groups. Women in a focus group emphasised the difficulty of supporting orphans and sending them to school. As one woman said, “I have ten children – five of my own, five of another wife who died. The father is dead too. I can't support them.”<sup>108</sup>

The Inspector of Schools in Gulu District is aware of the problem in supporting and educating orphans, but there is no significant programming to assist orphans in Gulu or elsewhere, as noted by Human Rights Focus in Gulu: “There's no focused programme from the government to address the plight of orphans or child headed households in return areas. The government just assumes they'll be cared for by relatives.”<sup>109</sup>

## Child-headed households and child mothers

Exercising the right to education, both during displacement and particularly in the current phase of seeking durable solutions, including return, can be particularly challenging for child mothers, and children in child-headed households such as those caring for their siblings.

For example, Connie F. and Estelle S. both grew up while displaced, where their household responsibilities prevented them from attaining education themselves, and now they struggle to get education for their siblings and children. Estelle said, “There were schools in both camps. But I didn't go because I'm the eldest child. Our father died, and our mother was very sick. I was attending to my mother and youngest siblings. They didn't go to school either.”<sup>110</sup> Likewise, Connie noted that “I want my daughter to go to school, but I don't have the money. I don't understand what could be changed to make it better.”<sup>111</sup>

This phenomenon particularly affects girls who care for their own children or siblings, though boys may also be affected. Guiding Principle 23 emphasises that “special efforts should be made to ensure the full and equal participation of women and girls in educational programmes,” yet the Ugandan government has taken few steps to help ensure participation in education for these particularly vulnerable groups.

# 6

## Education in northern Uganda today: Those who missed education while displaced

Large numbers of children missed out on education in displacement. There is no overarching policy addressing these children's needs, as a Gulu human rights advocate emphasised: "We now have two generations of students. Those who grew up without education during the war don't fit anywhere now. This is a lost generation – and yet there is no national programme to absorb these people."<sup>112</sup>

Now that IDPs are in the process of finding durable solutions, some young adults are finding ways to bridge gap through non-formal education programs, scholarships, and rehabilitation programming, among others. The Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights emphasises that the right to education encompasses many forms of learning, including basic education and technical and vocational education for adults and children as appropriate.<sup>113</sup>

The programmes which do exist in northern Uganda are insufficient in number and scope to meet the needs of this large group. In addition, their funding is jeopardised, falling as they often do between humanitarian and development funding sources.

### Non-formal educational programming

Two types of alternative education programming have been used to address the educational gap for displaced children and returnee children: youth vocational training programmes (providing basic literacy and numeracy skills and livelihoods training), targeting older children and youth; and alternative learning programs, providing catch-up courses for children between 9 – 15 years old, so that they can join formal schools. Children who have been affected by displacement can benefit particularly from these programmes, as displacement interrupted the normal routine of life, meaning that communities "lost informal education, the guidance of parents."<sup>114</sup>

NRC is one organisation that has been running youth vocational training programmes (the Youth Education Pack, or YEP) in northern Uganda. In NRC's case, the YEP programme is a one-year full time non-formal education and livelihood programme. Literacy and numeracy are taught alongside livelihoods skills so that youth gain sufficient knowledge in starting and running small businesses. Bill O., one student in a YEP programme, commented, "At the beginning, when I enrolled in this program, I had a very low opinion of the education I would get here. But now

I see that the practical skills, the small small things, are very helpful to me."<sup>115</sup>

However, there are certain problems with youth vocational programming. First, there are insufficient numbers of programmes to address the need. NRC has prioritised young single mothers, youth heads of households, and those with little to no previous experience in education. Second, northern Uganda is still struggling economically, and there are limited employment opportunities even for those trained through youth vocational programming. As one expert pointed out: "YEP has some shortcomings – there's a saturation of training areas, and there are problems with marketability of livelihoods skills."<sup>116</sup>

Alternative learning programmes can also be useful ways to bridge the educational gap for children who missed out on education in displacement. These programmes target younger children – those between 9 and 15 – with the intention of providing them catch-up programming so they can rejoin regular school. Like youth programming, however, there are insufficient numbers of programmes to address all children's needs. UNICEF told IDMC that this area is difficult to fund – humanitarian donors are moving out and development donors have not yet taken over.

### Abductees and returnees

There are thought to be 25,000 or more children who were abducted by the LRA during the insurgency.<sup>117</sup> For much of the insurgency, there was no official demobilisation programme – the majority of children leaving the LRA were captured by or surrendered to government forces, or escaped. Allie A. returned to her village after the end of the insurgency: "When I left the rebels I didn't have help, I wasn't in a rehab program. Now, I live with my mother."<sup>118</sup>

In the 1990s, NGOs and other agencies started to establish reception centres to respond to the needs of returning children in Gulu, Lira, and elsewhere. As the 2008 Global Report of the Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers described: "Children stayed from three to four months in the centres, which offered a variety of services, including medical assistance, family tracing, recreational activities, counselling and psychosocial support. Some offered training programs, mainly focused on life skills, and basic skills training. In practice, support for children at reception centres varied widely and was often inadequate, particularly in relation to health and trauma issues."<sup>119</sup>

The Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers notes that children and youth faced a number of difficulties returning to their communities:<sup>120</sup> families and communities stigmatised and rejected former abductees, and those who were able to attend school were badly bullied.

Children and youth returned to their communities with little or no education; they faced economic and other obstacles to reintegrate into school. As Jonathan B. said: “I never had the strength to go back to school. When I came back, I found one of my parents dead, the other weak. They couldn't provide school fees. I had to become the provider for my younger brothers and sisters. I couldn't go to school.”<sup>121</sup>

An education expert at the NGO Echo Bravo explains some of the issues: “Those who grew old in abduction couldn't fit into the average age of primary school when they returned... Abduction leads to disorientation in terms of your thinking, your education is affected. You're stigmatised and impoverished.”<sup>122</sup>

Some attempts were made in Gulu to establish schools that could respond to the psychological and educational needs of children and youth who have spent months or years with the LRA. However, these programmes had the capacity to serve only a small handful of the children and youth who needed and continue to need such care.

## Vulnerable women and single mothers

Women and girls have equal rights to education as men and boys, and Guiding Principle 23 calls on states to ensure the “full and equal participation of women and girls” in education. Women and girls can be particularly vulnerable in displacement and in the process of rebuilding communities, and so empowerment through education can be a vital survival strategy. Yet in northern Uganda, programmes catering for the needs of women and adolescent girls are few and far between. Secondary level education – which is in short supply in any case – can be particularly difficult for adolescent girls to attend after they have started menstruation. As one of our interviewees noted: “I stopped going to school because they didn't have any latrines.”<sup>123</sup>

Girls and young women who were previously associated with armed groups faced particular problems accessing education. Girls and young women who return with children (fathered by rebels) faced rejection by their communities or families.<sup>124</sup> Even when their communities accepted them, the girls and young women are unable to go to school due to child-care responsibilities.<sup>125</sup> Girls and young women who were abducted may have trouble getting married: those with children are rejected, while

community members may feel that those with and without children will “become violent and cause havoc to them.”<sup>126</sup>

Single mothers are among the groups of young adults who find it particularly hard to catch up on the missed years of education. However, small numbers of young mothers have been able to participate in non-formal youth educational programming, and in scholarship programmes for formal schools. Yet the numbers reached by these programmes are only a tiny proportion of those affected overall.

IDMC interviewed two young women who had had children before the age of 16, and who were sponsored by an NGO, Echo Bravo, to continue their education. One woman, Joyce A., emphasised the difficulty of attending school as a single mother, even with Echo Bravo's support: “It's difficult. If a child is home, when we're at school – if a child is sick you have to stay home. How does my child stay without me? Who cooks for her and cares for her?”<sup>127</sup>

Lillian G. A. noted some of the benefits of returning to school as an adult: “My 13 year old daughter and I – we have competition and shared experiences. Who's going to win? Who's going to get better grades?”<sup>128</sup> Sponsorship assistance has enabled Lillian and Joyce to continue their education, but they are in the minority; typically single mothers and child mothers are less able to attend school than their peers.

An education expert at Echo Bravo, the organisation that sponsors Joyce and Lillian, discusses the problem of realising the right to education in single-mother households: “There's a multiplier effect – you have little or no resources to raise another person. The future of these children is anyone's guess.”



# 7

## Conclusion and ways forward

Providing education in displacement is of key importance not just to fulfilling children's rights, but also as a building block for a sustainable end to displacement. In Uganda, many people were displaced for over a decade. If children had been educated in displacement, they could use the skills learned – from literacy and numeracy to democratic participation and community leadership – to contribute to rebuilding society. Yet in Uganda, the government and international agencies missed this opportunity, and left more than a generation of children underequipped to rebuild their lives and communities in a peaceful society.

Likewise, provision of education is of key importance in developing sustainable durable solutions to displacement. In Uganda, access to basic services including education could help cement the sustainability of return movements and of other durable solutions. Yet hundreds of thousands of IDPs have returned to communities without functioning schools, meaning that yet another cohort of children will see their right to education squandered. The consequence of failing to provide education for IDPs during the conflict years – and for those emerging from displacement now – is potentially severe.

Northern Uganda faces enormous challenges, with much of the region's infrastructure having fallen into disrepair after two decades of conflict, and with livelihoods stripped away from much of the population. Educated children and youth could help address these challenges. Yet far too many of the young adults affected by displacement in northern Uganda were not educated, and struggle to find jobs and contribute to the rebuilding of their society. Their younger brothers and sisters are hardly faring better, thanks to the very slow pace of educational reconstruction in return areas.

The Ugandan government, in partnership with international agencies and donor communities, must devote more resources to rebuilding the educational system in northern Uganda. The educational system should be strengthened beyond its pre-conflict state, so that today's children can get a real education and help to create a sustainable peace in the region.

# 8

## Methodology

This case study is based on research conducted by IDMC from October 2010 to January 2011, with assistance from NRC's country office in Uganda. Sources include: desk research, data from the Uganda Ministry of Education and Sports, consultations with stakeholders and experts, and interviews with children, parents, teachers, and community leaders.

When interviewing children, parents, teachers, and community leaders, IDMC used a variety of interview techniques, including one-on-one interviewing and focus group discussion in order to ascertain first hand opinions from children. In both focus group discussions and individual interviews, IDMC was able to obtain a range of participants across age and sex. IDMC also took care to ensure a range of experience among participants, including children who had attended school, children who had never attended school, and including participants from vulnerable groups including child-headed-households, child mothers, and former abductees.

IDMC relied on participatory ranking methodology (PRM)<sup>129</sup> during focus group discussions, asking participants to identify, rank, and account for priorities and concerns. The process used to select priorities and concerns was iterative, in that the group worked together to define the themes in question and identify which were the most important to them. At each step of the process, group members' responses were recorded, so that qualitative and quantitative data was collected. Focus groups were conducted in mixed groups as well as segregated by gender and by age. Care was taken throughout the focus groups to ensure that people were not prompted or felt the need to give sensitive information in front of the group.

Participation in interviews or in focus groups was voluntary. Interviewees and focus group members were told the purpose of the study and its use. They were made aware of the risks and opportunities of participation, and given the name of staff members with whom they could ask follow up questions.

To ensure confidentiality, all interviewees and focus group members are represented in this report with aliases (first name and last initial), with the exception of expert interviewees who are identified by their profession and organisation only.

## Notes

- 1 IDMC interview with Connie F., 19 January 2011, Pabbo, Uganda.
- 2 IDMC interview with NRC official, 20 January 2011, Gulu, Uganda.
- 3 IDMC, *Difficulties continue for returnees and remaining IDPs as development phase begins*, 2010, [www.internal-displacement.org/8025708F004CE90B/\(httpCountrySummaries\)/BB30FD6129997238C12577FA004755E2?OpenDocument&count=10000](http://www.internal-displacement.org/8025708F004CE90B/(httpCountrySummaries)/BB30FD6129997238C12577FA004755E2?OpenDocument&count=10000).
- 4 Based on UNHCR Factsheet of 31 March 2011, at [www.internal-displacement.org/idmc/website/countries.nsf/\(httpEnvelopes\)/2439C2AC21E16365C125719C004177C7?OpenDocument#50.2.1](http://www.internal-displacement.org/idmc/website/countries.nsf/(httpEnvelopes)/2439C2AC21E16365C125719C004177C7?OpenDocument#50.2.1)
- 5 The above figures do not include IDPs in Karamoja, or in urban areas outside the Acholi, Lango, Teso and West Nile regions.
- 6 IDMC, as note 3.
- 7 IDMC, as note 3.
- 8 Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, *Global Report 2008*, pp. 346-347.
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## About the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre

The Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) was established by the Norwegian Refugee Council in 1998, upon the request of the United Nations Inter-Agency Standing Committee, to set up a global database on internal displacement. A decade later, IDMC remains the leading source of information and analysis on internal displacement caused by conflict and violence worldwide.

IDMC aims to support better international and national responses to situations of internal displacement and respect for the rights of internally displaced people (IDPs), who are often among the world's most vulnerable people. It also aims to promote durable solutions for IDPs, through return, local integration or settlement elsewhere in the country.

IDMC's main activities include:

- Monitoring and reporting on internal displacement caused by conflict, generalised violence and violations of human rights;
- Researching, analysing and advocating for the rights of IDPs;
- Training and strengthening capacities on the protection of IDPs;
- Contributing to the development of standards and guidance on protecting and assisting IDPs.

For more information, visit the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre website and the database at [www.internal-displacement.org](http://www.internal-displacement.org)

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