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The Economic Reintegration of Former Child Soldiers in Northern Uganda

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May 2023

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Abstract

During the Northern Ugandan War, the Lord's Resistance Army kidnapped and recruited 30,000 children and forced them to become soldiers. Nearly twenty years since the end of the war, former child soldiers continue to experience extreme poverty, psychological distress, and social isolation. For many, the economic hardship they face, due to stigma and missing out on school, is their greatest challenge upon returning home. This paper analyzes the strategies used by the government and non-state actors to reintegrate former child soldiers back into the Ugandan economy. These strategies are then compared to best practices in the field using secondary research and semi-structured interviews with experts. While some best practices, such as the inclusion of psychosocial supports, were followed more closely, reintegration in Uganda ultimately failed to successfully follow best practices. Its effectiveness was also hindered by other barriers such as lack of resources and political will. Next steps for reintegration in Uganda are also discussed.

Acknowledgments

I'd like to thank my thesis advisor, Dr. Dan Chong, for his guidance and support throughout this process. Your classes have played an invaluable role in fostering my passion for human rights and global development. I would also like to thank my other committee members, Dr. Newcomb and Dr. Gonzalez Guittar, for helping to shape my undergraduate career and bringing such important perspectives to this project. I sincerely appreciate my interviewees for taking the time to speak with me and for the tireless work they do to support former child soldiers. Finally, I want to dedicate my thesis to the victims of war in Northern Uganda. There are no words to adequately convey the hardship they have endured. Your stories are not forgotten.

List of Acronyms

ADF	Allied Democratic Forces
ALREP	Northern Uganda Agricultural Livelihoods Program
CBO	Community-based Organization
CCF	Christian Children's Fund
CEIP	Community Education Investment Program
CPU	Children of Peace Uganda
CRC	Convention on the Rights of a Child
DDR	Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration
DINO	Development Initiative for Northern Uganda
DRC	Democratic Republic of Uganda
FCS	Former Child Soldier
GUSCO	Gulu Support the Children Organisation
GWED-G	Gulu Women's Economic Development-Globalization
ICC	International Criminal Court
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
IGO	Intergovernmental Organization
JLOS	Justice Law and Order Sector
JRP	Justice and Reconciliation Project
LRA	Lord's Resistance Army
MDRP	Multi-Country Demobilization and Reintegration Program
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
NCDDRR	National Commission on Disarmament, Demobilization, Rehabilitation and

Reintegration

NGO	Nongovernmental Organization
NRA	National Resistance Army
NTJP	National Transitional Justice Policy
NUREP	Northern Uganda Rehabilitation Program
NUSAF	Northern Uganda Social Action Fund
NUTJWP	Northern Uganda Transitional Justice Working Group
PCEIR	Post-Conflict Employment Creation, Income Generation, and Reintegration
PRDP	Peace Recovery and Development Plan
RUF	Revolutionary United Front
SACCO	Savings and Credit Cooperative Organizations
SRSG CAAC	Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict
TPO	Transcultural Psychosocial Organization
UNICEF	United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund
UNITA	National Union for the Total Independence of Angola
UPDF	Uganda People’s Defense Forces
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WAN	Women’s Advocacy Network
WKG	Watye-Ki-Gen
YLP	Youth Livelihood Program

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Introduction

Currently 300,000 children as young as six years old serve as soldiers in armed groups. These armed groups operate across 33 different countries.[1] They look to children because they're easier to influence and recruit than adults. As such, child soldiers require fewer resources and can be quickly replaced. Once they're part of the organization, children pose lower security threats, help to deter attackers, and are more willing to complete dangerous tasks due to their underdeveloped sense of fear.[2] For this reason, 40% of armed groups recruit child soldiers.[3]

Participation in such groups can create long-lasting impacts that affect the child long after the cessation of fighting. These impacts are largely understudied, but experts have found evidence of severe and lifelong consequences for the child. In addition to physical injuries obtained through initiation, training, sexual violence, torture, and combat, former child soldiers (FCS) also suffer from chronic psychosocial conditions. These include PTSD, depression, anxiety, and dissociation, and are the consequence of suffering from, witnessing, and being forced to carry out horrific acts of violence.[4] The role of FCS as both victims and perpetrators of violence leaves them in an especially complicated position. While many family and community members welcome the return of FCS back into their villages, others remain fearful and reject them entirely. Unable to socially reintegrate or to lean on social networks for financial support, FCS

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[1] Roos Haer, "The study of child soldiering: issues and consequences for DDR implementation," *Third World Quarterly* 38, no. 2 (April 2016): 453.
[2] Ibid.; Dr. Chris Faulkner, interview by author, February 9, 2023.
[3] "Understanding the Recruitment of Child Soldiers in Africa," Accord, August 16, 2016, https://www.accord.org.za/conflict-trends/understanding-recruitment-child-soldiers-africa/.
[4] Schauer and Elbert, "The Psychological Impact of Child Soldiering," in Trauma Rehabilitation After War and Conflict, ed. Erin Martz (Berlin, Germany: Springer Science Business Media, 2010): 323-334; *Reintegration of Former Child Soldiers* (New York City, New York: Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, n.d.) https://childrenandarmedconflict.un.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/Reintergration-brochure-layout.pdf.

overwhelmingly cite extreme poverty as one of their largest challenges.[5] Some even describe their financial struggle as more difficult than the violence they experienced as a soldier.[6]

Despite the salience of economic hardship among FCS, there is a dearth of research in the field on the interventions used to reintegrate child soldiers back into the local economy.[7] These interventions are part of a larger post-conflict strategy known as reintegration, which aims to integrate former combatants back into their communities to prevent a reoccurrence of conflict. Interventions typically include support for both psychosocial and economic reintegration. Around the world, reintegration programs are implemented by the national government, foreign donors, intergovernmental organizations (IGOs), nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and community-based organizations (CBOs). However, due to the lack of coordination between these actors, as well as a lack of data collection, it has been difficult for researchers to evaluate these interventions and to draw conclusions about the holistic reintegration of FCS in different countries. There is even less literature on economic reintegration programs because of a tendency for implementing actors to prioritize psychosocial wellbeing. To contribute to this body of literature, I analyze the strategies used to reintegrate FCS back into the Ugandan economy following the Northern Ugandan War.

Throughout the Northern Ugandan War (1986-2006), the rebel group the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) recruited 30,000 children to fight the national government.[8] The LRA was extreme in its recruitment strategies, abducting children from both secondary and even primary schools.

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[5] Neil Boothby, Jennifer Crawford, and Jason Halperin, "Mozambique Child Soldier Life Outcome Study: Lessons Learned in Rehabilitation and Reintegration Efforts," *Child Soldiers: From Recruitment to Reintegration* 1, no. 1 (2006); Michael Wessels and Alison Stran, "A Living Wage: The Importance of Livelihood in Reintegrating Former Child Soldiers," in *A World Turned Upside Down: Social Ecological Approaches to Children in War Zones*, Neil Boothby ed. (Ipswich, Massachusetts: EBSCO Publishing, 2022): 185.

[6] Boothby et al., "Mozambique Child Solider."

[7] Kaufmann, "Economic Efficacy of Reintegration," 23.

[8] Jamie Van Leeuwen, Laurie Miller, Jerry Amanya, and Michael Feinburg, Forced *to Fight: An Integrated Approach to Former Child Soldiers in Northern Uganda* (Washington D.C.: Wilson Center, 2018): 1.

The youngest soldier ever recorded in history was recruited by the LRA at just five years old.[9] Though the dire situation in Northern Uganda received widespread global attention early on, sixteen years later, thousands of returned FCS remain without adequate support. To understand the successes and shortcomings of reintegration programs in Uganda more deeply, I ask in what ways the economic reintegration strategies of FCS in Uganda reflect best practices in the field. This analysis will help to reveal the forces that hindered their effectiveness, which can be used to inform reintegration programs in countries with similar contexts. Reintegrating child soldiers is an especially complex process that virtually no country has been able to carry out with complete success. Governments and non-state actors in low-income countries do their best given their limited resources, societal divisions, and the highly contentious nature of reintegrating FCS who are both victims and perpetrators. Nonetheless, with the rise in youth populations in conflict-prone countries, the use of child soldiers may increase, and finding ways to improve the likelihood of successful reintegration is more important now than ever.[10]

1.2 Defining a Child Soldier

The field of child soldiering has only recently gained traction in the academic literature. As such, even the definition of the term 'child soldier' remains contested. For example, there is debate surrounding the age that an individual is considered a child and whether the term 'soldier' should be used for children that were not directly involved in combat.[11] The most widely accepted definition comes from the 1989 Convention on the Rights of a Child.[12] It defines a child soldier as a member of an armed group below the age of eighteen and includes combatants,

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[9] Godfrey Musila, "Challenges in Establishing the Accountability of Child Soldiers for Human Rights Violations: Restorative Justice as an Option," *African Human Rights Law Journal* 5, no. 2 (December 1, 2005): 322.
[10] Faulkner, interview.
[11] Haer, "Study of Child Soldiering," 455-459.
[12] Ibid., 455.

porters, cooks, spies, and sexual slaves (often referred to as 'bush wives').[13] While the term child soldier tends to lump each of these together, it is important to recognize the diverse experiences of each type of child soldier as well as their particular intersectional identities, which can make them even more vulnerable to poverty, marginalization, and abuse upon their reintegration into society. For example, the experience of recruitment, war, and reintegration varies widely even between female and male combatants.

While not all types of FCS play an active role in perpetuating violence, many child soldiers possess a complex dual identity as both perpetrator and victim. This has created contention surrounding both the legal and social treatment of FCS upon returning home. In general, there is a lack of consensus on the level of agency of the child in perpetuating violence. While many child soldiers are kidnapped and forced into fighting, others join somewhat voluntarily. In addition, while many children are threatened with torture or death, others may participate willingly or even take on a leadership role. However, because of the child's youth, their vulnerability, sociopolitical factors that make joining armed groups attractive, and the coercive recruitment practices of armed groups,[14] an innocence discourse is generally accepted when it comes to child soldiers.

1.3 Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration

At the end of a war or conflict, countries can implement different post-conflict strategies, from holding new elections, rebuilding infrastructure, supporting refugees, to instituting processes of transitional justice. According to the United Nations, disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) is one of the most important strategies for post-conflict peacebuilding.[15]

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[13] Ibid.; Kaufmann, "Economic Efficiency of Reintegration," 23.
[14] Haer, "Study of Child Soldiering," 456-457.
[15] *The Role of DDR in Peacebuilding and Sustaining Peace* (New York City, New York: United Nations, n.d.):1.

DDR supports former combatants in their transition back to civilian life, including their reintegration back into the local economy, which is the focus of this paper. DDR helps to facilitate stabilization, reconciliation, and sustainable development. When child soldiers are involved in a conflict, a separate DDR program is typically created and implemented prior to DDR for adults.[16] This is because DDR for child soldiers involves different processes and goals than that of adults. For example, while the main goal is to reintegrate children back into civilian life, DDR also aims to prevent the recruitment or re-recruitment of child soldiers throughout the war.[17] As previously mentioned, DDR programs are implemented by a number of actors, including the government, IGOs, NGOs, CBOs, and private or foreign donors. DDR generally follows a linear timeline, but all components are interconnected and may be implemented simultaneously.[18] The DDR of child soldiers is unique to each country, but usually includes the following activities.

The first step in the process is the removal of children from combat. Through negotiations with armed groups or military force, the children can escape.[19] After they are freed, the children undergo disarmament and demobilization at temporary admission camps. Disarmament (the first phase of DDR) is the process in which arms are collected from former combatants. The primary goal of disarmament is to maintain security in the region, but it can also

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[16] "Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR) of Child Soldiers: War and Peace," *War and Peace*, Accessed November 29, 2022, https://warpp.info/en/m2/articles/ddr-child-soldiers; *6.20 DDR and Transitional Justice* (New York City, New York: Integrated Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Standards, n.d.): 15.
[17] "(DDR) of Child Soldiers."
[18] Nicole Ball and Luc van de Goor, *Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration: Mapping Issues, Dilemmas, and Guiding Principles* (The Netherlands: Clingendael Netherland Institute of International Relations Conflict Research Unit, 2006):2; Massimo Fusato, "Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration of Ex-Combatants." Beyond Intractability, *The Beyond Intractability Project*, July 2003, https://www.beyondintractability.org/essay/demobilization.
[19] "(DDR) of Child Soldiers."

help child soldiers make the psychological transition from combatant to civilian. [20] As part of the demobilization process, child soldiers receive civilian identification cards and services for their basic needs (i.e., medical attention, food).[21] During demobilization, the second phase of DDR, the child is placed into a rehabilitation center. During this time, program workers trace and contact the families of the FCS to prepare for the child to return home.[22] This step helps to increase the participation of the FCS in the next and final phase of DDR, reintegration.[23]

During the reintegration process, the FCS are placed back into their communities and receive support to integrate socially, economically, and psychologically. The first step of reintegration is reinsertion, in which the child is reunified with their family and rejoins their community.[24] They will often receive short-term emergency supports, such as food, shelter, brief education, and temporary employment.[25] In the second step of reintegration, FCS receive holistic, long-term support so they can sustain themselves after the programs end. According to the Paris Principles and Guidelines on Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups, successful long-term reintegration is achieved "when the political, legal, economic and social conditions needed for children to maintain life, livelihood and dignity have been secured."[26]

National governments tend to invest more into disarmament and demobilization than reintegration because they are more concerned with establishing immediate security.[27] In

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[20] Ibid.; Fusato, "Disarmament, Demobilization."
[21]Fusato, "Disarmament, Demobilization."
[22] "(DDR) of Child Soldiers."
[23] Ibid.
[24] Ibid.
[25] Ibid.
[26] *The Paris Principles: The Principles and Guidelines on Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Group* (New York City, New York: UNICEF, 2007): 8.
[27] ILO Program for Crisis Response and Reconstruction, *Socio-Economic Reintegration of Ex-Combatants* (Geneva, Switzerland: International Labor Organization, 2009): 25.

addition, the research on child soldiering pays little attention to DDR, and especially on reintegration.[28] However, reintegration is extremely important in decreasing the chances of a resurgence of conflict. By providing FCS with the resources to return to civilian life, they are less likely to return to conflict. On the flip side, unsupported youth may join extremist groups, disrupt the social order, or return to their military groups.[29] In fact, the use of child soldiers has been known to prolong wars and to facilitate their reoccurrence.[30] For this reason, reintegration interventions should be a priority in post-conflict situations.

Interventions to help FCS reintegrate can be divided into two main types: psychosocial and economic. Psychosocial interventions aim to support the mental wellbeing of FCS and their social acceptance. Examples include counseling, mentorship, and mediation between community members and FCS.[31] To combat stigma from the community, sensitization campaigns are typically launched to increase awareness about the needs of FCS and their lack of agency in committing acts of violence against the community during the war.[32] Another method used to reduce this stigma is traditional cleansing ceremonies. These ceremonies are performed by traditional healers and are believed to illicit a spiritual transformation that can help rid FCS of 'evil' spirits.[33] While psychosocial interventions are essential in the successful reintegration of FCS, without proper attention also paid to economic interventions, holistic reintegration cannot occur.

[28] Haer, "Study of Child Soldiering," 452; William Deng Deng, "A Survey of Programs on the Reintegration of Former Child Soldiers." MOFA, Accessed November 29, 2022, https://www.mofa.go.jp/policy/human/child/survey/challenge.html.
[29] Fusato, "Disarmament, Demobilization."
[30] Roos Haer, interview by author, February 20, 2023.
[31] Boothby et al., "Mozambique Child Solider."; "(DDR) of Child Soldiers."
[32] "(DDR) of Child Soldiers."
[33] See Stark, Lindsay, "Cleansing the Wounds of War: An Examination of Traditional Healing, Psychosocial Health and Reintegration in Sierra Leone," *Intervention* 4, no. 3 (2006).

Reintegration programs around the world tend to focus more heavily on psychosocial supports, leaving the economic needs of FCS neglected. In addition, much of the academic work has also focused on these psychosocial interventions. As such, there is very limited research on the economic reintegration of child soldiers.[34] By building the literature on economic interventions, future programs can identify and implement the strategies that make them most successful. To contribute to this area of research, this paper focuses on the economic reintegration of FCS.

1.4 Economic Reintegration of FCS

The economic component of reintegration is especially important because of the negative consequences of child soldiering on the financial situation of FCS. According to Blattman and Annan, child soldiering is associated with an average decrease in schooling by one year and a drop in lifetime earnings by one-third. They also find substantial decreases in literacy and participation in skilled work among FCS.[35] This is largely due to loss in human capital caused by time spent away soldiering. For countries that rely on a linear career growth ladder, skipping steps on the ladder (e.g., years at school or working entry-level positions) can create irreversible impacts on job prospects for FCS.[36] Further, even skilled FCS can be barred from the local economy due to refusal by other community members to do business with them. This stigma also causes many FCS to lose their social networks that they might normally rely on for financial support. As such, FCS become vulnerable to falling deeper into poverty. In countries like Burundi and Uganda, extreme poverty is a reality of life for FCS that have returned home.[37]

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[34] Kaufmann, "Economic Efficacy of Reintegration," 23.
[35] Christopher Blattman and Jeannie Annan, "The Consequences of Child Soldiering," *Review of Economics and Statistics* 92, no. 4 (2010), https://doi.org/10.1162/rest_a_00036.
[36] Ibid., 16.
[37] Bujumbura, "Former Child Soldiers 'Languishing in Poverty,'" *The New Humanitarian*, November 3, 2015, https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/news/2011/04/05/former-child-soldiers-languishing-poverty; Marc Ellison,

Not only is economic reintegration key for success at the individual level, it benefits the community and state as a whole. War creates destruction, deaths, poverty, and displacement that in turn, hurt the local economy. With the participation of FCS back into the local economy, societal recovery can occur more quickly. Oftentimes, child soldiers are drawn to armed groups due to push factors like poverty, unemployment, and lack of education because armed groups can provide them with basic needs and economic opportunities. [38] Thus, the speedy recovery of local economies can help to halt the cycle of war and poverty by preventing other children from being tempted to join armed forces and to reduce recidivism of FCS.[39] In addition, since child soldiering can exacerbate and elongate war, effective economic reintegration can help facilitate peace and security at both the local and national level.[40]

Economic interventions vary widely, depending on their goal and the actor that implements them. In general, they can be loosely categorized as either a supply or demand intervention. Demand interventions help to create a market and jobs for FCS. They are typically implemented by the government through macroeconomic policies. Supply interventions focus on equipping FCS with the skills and education needed to enter the workforce. These might include traditional and vocational schooling, skills-building, or startup capital. NGOs, CBOs, and foreign donors are more likely to implement these types of projects, though the government may also build infrastructure and create policies and programs to support these efforts. Finally, cash assistance can also help FCS purchase their basic needs and build their assets.

"Tales from Uganda's Female Former Child Soldiers," *Aljazeera*, January 14, 2016, https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2016/1/14/tales-from-ugandas-female-former-child-soldiers.

[38] "Understanding the Recruitment of Child Soldiers in Africa," ACCORD, August 17, 2016, https://www.accord.org.za/conflict-trends/understanding-recruitment-child-soldiers-africa/.

[39] Kaufmann, "Economic Efficacy of Reintegration," 1.

[40] Ibid.; Wessels and Stran, "A Living Wage,"180.

However, as previously mentioned, there is very little research on the efficacy of these programs, so it is difficult to conclusively say which programs are most effective and what makes them successful or not. However, several general best practices on the economic reintegration of FCS can be inferred from the literature. In the next chapter, I discuss these strategies and provide examples of them in practice.

Chapter 2: Best Practices

2.1 Best Practices for Economic Reintegration of FCS

Since there are few comprehensive, cross-national studies on the economic reintegration of FCS, I have drawn the following best practices from expert opinions, recommendations by intergovernmental organizations, standards under international agreements, and individual program evaluations. For this reason, the descriptions of each practice are somewhat fragmented as they are a collection of available information rather than a complete guide. For the same reason, these strategies do not necessarily reflect consensus in the field. To more easily refer back to these strategies, each is assigned a corresponding letter.

A. In Combination with Psychosocial Interventions

As previously stated, the success of economic and psychosocial reintegration are interdependent. For example, a study by Kaufman found that psychological distress among child soldiers had a significant negative impact on earnings.[41] This suggests that improvements to psychological interventions can also improve earnings, and economic reintegration more generally. On the social side, interventions that aim to increase community acceptance (e.g., community sensitization, traditional healing, and cleansing ceremonies) can increase social capital, which in turn, opens new economic opportunities.[42]

Similarly, the level of success achieved by economic reintegration programs can either hinder or enhance psychosocial reintegration. For example, economic interventions can help FCS contribute to their communities, create a new sense of self, improve psychosocial wellbeing, and

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[41] Ibid.; Elisabeth Schauer, "The Psychological Impact of Child Soldiering." In *Trauma Rehabilitation After War and Conflict*, Thomas Elbert and Erin Martz eds. (Berlin, Germany: Springer Science Business Media, 2010): 322.
[42] See Kaufmann, "Economic Efficacy of Reintegration," 2; Theresa S. Betancourt, Stephanie Simmons, Ivelina Borisova, Stephanie E. Brewer, Uzo Iweala, and Marie de la Soudière, "High Hopes, Grim Reality: Reintegration and the Education of Former Child Soldiers in Sierra Leone," *Comparative Education Review* 52, no. 4 (2008): 4. https://doi.org/10.1086/591298. 4); Machel, Graça, *The Impact of Armed Conflict on Children*, Presented to the UN General Assembly (1996): 20.

take part in community reconciliation.[43] Peers in traditional or vocational school can also offer a source of social support to FCS.[44] Put simply by the 1996 UN report *The Impact of Armed Conflict on Children*, "education, vocational opportunities…and the economic security of their families… are most often the determinants of successful social integration and, importantly, they are the factors that prevent re-recruitment."[45] Likewise, poor economic reintegration can undo the progress made toward psychosocial reintegration. According to Wessells, "the greatest psychosocial impact comes not from the emotional residues of past violence but from current life stresses, not least of which is lack of disposable income."[46] In other words, much of the psychological distress experienced by FCS comes from poor economic reintegration. Similarly, poverty can increase the likelihood of the return of conflict, which can create even more psychological distress down the line. In El Salvador, too much focus on psychosocial supports and not enough on economic reintegration led to the explosion of gang violence following the return of former combatants.[47] Therefore, to ensure more sustainable outcomes of psychosocial programs, economic interventions must be just as robust. For these reasons, psychosocial and economic interventions should be implemented concurrently to facilitate holistic, long-term reintegration. In terms of psychosocial interventions, studies conducted by the Conflict Protection and Reconstruction Unit, Verhey et al., and Machel suggest that the most effective interventions are counselling and family reunification.[48]

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[43] Ibid.; Wessels and Stran, "A Living Wage,"192.
[44] Wessels and Stran, "A Living Wage,"595.
[45] Machel, *Impact of Armed Conflict*, 20.
[46] Wessels and Stran, "A Living Wage,"192.
[47] Beth Verhey, "Child Soldiers: Preventing, Demobilizing and Reintegrating," Africa Region Working Paper Series No. 23 (World Bank Post-Conflict Unit, 2001):18.
[48] Ibid., 19; Beth Verhey, "Child Soldiers: Preventing, Demobilizing and Reintegrating," Africa Region Working Paper Series No. 23 (World Bank Post-Conflict Unit, 2001):15; *Child Soldiers: Prevention, Demobilization and Reintegration (*Conflict Prevention and Reconstruction Unit, 2002): 3.

B. Integrated Approach Centered on Community

Perhaps one of the most important factors for successful reintegration is coordination between local, national, and international actors. [49] This reduces repetition of services and waste of resources while increasing the number of beneficiaries that can be reached. It can also increase the opportunity for funding.[50] Most importantly, large actors must involve the community throughout the process. This includes holding consultations with affected persons and other community members on their needs and working with local communities to design, implement, and evaluate new projects. [51] By placing the community at the center, international and state actors can ensure their programs are appropriate to local contexts and needs. It also increases community ownership of the projects, which will make them more sustainable in the long run. Unsuccessful DDR programs are those that impose outsider values.[52] If the program is largely implemented by outsiders, communities must be educated on how to take over the project once aid workers leave. Similarly, community-based interventions should be supported by the government and integrated into long-term national development planning.[53]According to the Global Coalition for Reintegration of Child Soldiers, the sustainability of reintegration programs is determined by whether communities are supported to implement their own solutions.[54] This support typically comes in the form of financial assistance. For example, a large NGO or

[49] Global Coalition for Reintegration of Child Soldiers, *Gaps and Needs for the Successful Reintegration of Children Associated with Armed Groups or Armed Forces,* (New York City, New York: UNICEF, 2020): 1-2.
[50] Faulkner, interview.
[51] Deng Deng, "Survey of Programs."
[52] Faulkner, interview.
[53] Verhey, *Child Soldiers: Preventing, Demobilizing and Reintegrating*, 18. ILO Program for Crisis Response and Reconstruction, *Socio-Economic Reintegration of Ex-Combatants* (Geneva, Switzerland: International Labor Organization, 2009): 12; Global Coalition for Reintegration of Child Soldiers, *Gaps and Needs,* 3; Deng Deng, "Survey of Programs."
[54] Global Coalition for Reintegration of Child Soldiers, *Gaps and Needs,* 7.

government might provide funding or loans to microenterprises (small businesses), savings groups, or other community-based development projects.[55]

C. Focus on Demand and Supply

Economic reintegration programs often focus heavily on providing education and livelihood skills to former child soldiers to prepare them to re-enter the labor force. However, often times, there is a misalignment between the skills that FCS are taught and the type of jobs available in the local economy.[56] Other times, the local economy lacks the absorption capacity to take on the newly skilled FCS. This issue reflects the micro-macro paradox in development in which community-level projects are undone by changes or the lack thereof at the macro level. To combat this dilemma, the International Labor Organization advises that reintegration programs focus on both the demand (creating new jobs through macro-economic policy) and the supply (providing targeted vocational training and traditional schooling) concurrently.[57] They recommend that governments begin the former prior to long-term reintegration during the phase known as reinsertion (i.e., when FCS re-enter their communities) so that the market is ready to absorb FCS when they settle.[58] On the supply side, there are several key factors of skills training and educational interventions that can make them more successful.

First, experts (as well as FCS) agree that education must be a top priority.[59] According to a study by Annan et al., the lack of educational and employment opportunities among FCS in Northern Uganda made it more difficult to reintegrate.[60] However, there are multiple barriers for FCS to receive traditional schooling. These include the shame many FCS feel about being older

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[55] Deng Deng, "Survey of Programs."
[56] Verhey, *Child Soldiers: Preventing, Demobilizing and Reintegrating*, 19.
[57] ILO Program for Crisis Response and Reconstruction, *Socio-Economic Reintegration,* 12.
[58] ILO Program for Crisis Response and Reconstruction, *Socio-Economic Reintegration,* 14.
[59] Verhey, *Child Soldiers: Preventing, Demobilizing and Reintegrating*, 19; Machel, *Impact of Armed Conflict*, 184-203; Betancourt et al., "High Hopes, Grim Reality," 583; Faulkner, interview.
[60] Annan and Aryemo, "From 'Rebel' to 'Returnee'."

than the other children, school fees, scheduling conflicts, and destroyed infrastructure from war.[61] To combat these obstacles, Verhey et al. claim that educational programs are most effective when they offer an accelerated option or use flexible mediums.[62] In addition, they contend that while it is helpful to teach life skills in these programs, FCS must also learn literacy and numeracy at a minimum.[63] Vocational training in DDR programs have largely been ineffective because they have limited reach in terms of the number of people they can serve, lack funding, and are not market-appropriate.[64] However, with greater funding and research, they can help FCS gain skills needed to make a living for themselves and their families. As such, vocational programs should be a priority for reintegration.[65]

D. Attention to Intersectional Vulnerabilities

It is important to note that certain identities increase the vulnerability of child soldiers both during conflict and reintegration. These intersectional identities are specific to the cultural and political context of each country and should be recognized and addressed by implementing parties. Scholars do agree that in general, female FCS face heightened challenges to reintegration. Estimates indicate that nearly half of all FCS are girls, yet they are underrepresented among participation rates in DDR programs.[66] In addition, DDR programs often provide more services to former male combatants.[67] Female FCS face unique burdens from war, and cultural contexts can increase their barriers to reintegration.[68] For example, girls may have more trouble reunifying with their families or finding a husband upon returning home

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[61] Verhey, *Child Soldiers: Preventing, Demobilizing and Reintegrating*, 19. Betancourt et al., "High Hopes, Grim Reality," 583; Betancourt et al., "High Hopes, Grim Reality," 576.
[62] Verhey, *Child Soldiers: Preventing, Demobilizing and Reintegrating*, 19.
[63] Ibid.
[64] Ibid.
[65] Ibid.
[66] Haer, "Study of Child Soldiering," 459.
[67] Faulkner, interview.
[68] *Child Soldiers: Prevention, Demobilization and Reintegration*, 4; *REINTEGRATION*, 8.

because they are considered “unclean” due to their role as ‘wives’ during the war.[69] This leaves girls without a network of support. Girls are also more vulnerable to re-recruitment since they sometimes serve as wives to commanders.[70] Due to these unique circumstances, the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children in Armed Conflict, states that the girl child should receive special programming and considerations in reintegration programs. Similarly, children with disabilities (both pre-diagnosed and as a result of war) are considered an especially vulnerable population that has long been left out of the conversation on reintegration.[71] Child soldiers are more vulnerable to injury or disabilities from war.[72] This is because child soldiers are often forced to participate in dangerous tasks, such as checking landmines.[73] Disabilities sustained by war can create stigma and discrimination among community members who can easily identify former combatants from their injuries. Therefore, reintegration programs must also be inclusive and accessible to children with disabilities.[74] Finally, some scholars like Francis contend that programs should be tailored to the type of FCS (i.e., a combatant v. a cook) in order to more precisely address their needs.[75] It is true that the experience of a combatant differs widely from that of a cook or bush wife, and likely impacts their experience of reintegration.

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[69] Haer, “Study of Child Soldiering,” 487.
[70] Haer, “Study of Child Soldiering,” 488.
[71] Verhey, *Child Soldiers: Preventing, Demobilizing and Reintegrating*, 20; See Dustin Johnson and Shelly Whitman, “Child Soldiers and Disability: Gaps in Knowledge and Opportunities for Change,” *Third World Thematics: A TWQ Journal* 1, no. 3 (2016): 307–20, https://doi.org/10.1080/23802014.2016.1246349.
[72] Tami Tamashiro, *Impact of Conflict on Children's Health and Disability* (UNESCO, 2010).
[73] Ibid.
[74] Johnson and Whitman, “Child Soldiers and Disability: Gaps in Knowledge and Opportunities for Change.”
[75] See David J. Francis, “‘Paper Protection’ Mechanisms: Child Soldiers and the International Protection of Children in Africa's Conflict Zones.” *The Journal of Modern African* Studies 45, no. 2 (2007): 207–31. https://doi.org/10.1017/s0022278x07002510.

E. Equity

When FCS receive support from government and NGOs, it often creates resentment from other community members. Beyond jealousy, victims of war may feel it is unfair that their assailants receive more aid than themselves.[76] According to the UN Policy for Post-Conflict Employment Creation, Income Generation, and Reintegration (PCEIR), to reduce tensions with non-combatants and to promote equity, services should be provided to all members of the community.[77] For example, reintegration programs might fund community projects that can improve the economic status of FCS and all community members. Community projects might include the building of a school, microloans for a small enterprise, or funding to support a community garden. Through this type of intervention, the entire community is lifted, including traditional victims and FCS.

F. Long-term

Reintegration is a long-term process that requires sustained funding and support. Governments, NGOs, and foreign donors should make a funding and implementation plan for the medium and long term, with long-term programs lasting 3-5 years at minimum.[78] This number should be adjusted based on the needs of FCS and the community. Throughout this time, monitoring and evaluation (M&E) should be conducted by the implementing party.[79]

G. Protection of the Rights of the Child

Above all, reintegration programs should prioritize abiding by the Convention on the Rights of a Child (CRC) and the Paris Principles on Children Associated with Armed Forces or

[76] Haer, "Study of Child Soldiering," 458.
[77] ILO Program for Crisis Response and Reconstruction, Socio-Economic Reintegration, 12.
[78] Global Coalition for Reintegration of Child Soldiers, *Gaps and Needs*, 1-2.
[79] Global Coalition for Reintegration of Child Soldiers, *Gaps and Needs,* 12.

Armed Groups.[80] The CRC outlines the general rights inherent to all children while the Paris Principles offer guidelines on how to preserve these rights in the process of reintegration. The Paris Principles include protecting the best interest of the child, respecting the child's dignity, and upholding the child's right to life, survival, and development.[81] To pursue the child's best interest, the child should be consulted throughout the entire process.[82] In addition, reintegration programs must also not discriminate on the basis of sex, race, age, religion, ethnicity, or disability of the child or their guardians.[83] Finally, under international humanitarian law, child soldiering is illegal and considered a war crime.[84] Therefore, child soldiers are considered victims and should be treated as such.[85]

One way to recognize the victimhood of FCS and the grave human rights violations they endured is to have a robust transitional justice program. Transitional justice is a response to systematic human rights violations intended to curb future violence and to promote peace.[86] There are four key mechanisms: truth-seeking, reparations, prosecution, and reform. Truth-seeking is a process of investigating and publicizing the events that occurred during the war and their impacts. Often, a truth commission will take place in which victims and witnesses can share their accounts. Reparations might also help to provide reconcile for victims. In the DRC, the International Criminal Court (ICC) awarded $10 million in reparations to support hundreds, or even thousands, of FCS after the conviction of war leader Thomas Lubanga.[87] While reparations

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[80] Global coalition for Reintegration of Child Soldiers, *Gaps and Needs,* 3.
[81] REINTEGRATION, 6.
[82] *5.30 Children and DDR*, Integrated Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Standards (New York City, New York: United Nations, 2006):4.
[83] Ibid.
[84] *6.20 DDR and Transitional Justice* (New York City, New York: Integrated Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Standards, n.d):15.
[85] See the Convention on the Rights of the Child (New York, New York : OHCHR, 1989).
[86] *6.20 DDR,* 2.
[87] Reuters, Thomson, "Former DRC Child Soldiers Awarded $10M in Compensation," Theirworld, Theirworld, November 17, 2022, https://theirworld.org/news/drc-child-soldiers-court-compensation-education-thomas-lubanga/.

might include cash payments, they can also be given in the form of community projects or programming to support the needs of FCS, especially their economic needs. Prosecution of top commanders can also provide justice for FCS. Though many of the commanders were also children when they were recruited, there is a general acceptance that they have demonstrated more personal agency. Finally, institutional reforms can prevent reoccurrence of child soldiering in the future through policy changes or laws outlawing the recruitment of children.

Transitional justice typically occurs simultaneously with reintegration programs in a post-conflict context. Though they are separate processes, transitional justice and reintegration are closely tied. Transitional justice can help child soldiers reintegrate back into their communities.[88] For example, seeing the prosecution of commanders and an official condemnation of the recruitment of child soldiers can aid in the child's healing and reintegration.[89] Therefore, transitional justice is considered a best practice necessary for reintegration.

It is important to remember that while FCS are victims first and should receive justice for the atrocities inflicted on to them, they are also perpetrators of violence. While many children are forcibly recruited, a slight majority of child soldiers among violent armed groups join voluntarily.[90] For this reason, experts argue that a purely innocence-centered approach may hinder the reintegration process since the child may be rejected by their communities and other victims. [91] Thus, they agree that some form of accountability benefits both the community, as well as the child's psychosocial wellbeing. They recommend a restorative approach to justice for

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[88] *6.20 DDR,* 7-10; Sharanjeet Parmar, Mindy Jane Roseman, Saudamini Siegrist, and Theo Theo Sowa, *Children and Transitional Justice: Truth-Telling, Accountability and Reconciliation* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Law School, Human Rights Program, 2010).
[89] *6.20 DDR,* 16.
[90] Faulkner, interview.
[91] Haer, "Study of Child Soldiering," 458; Susan Shepler, "The Rites of the Child: Global Discourses of Youth and Reintegrating Child Soldiers in Sierra Leone," *Journal of Human Rights* 4, no. 2 (2005): 197–211, doi: http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14754830590952143.

FCS, since it is not focused on harsh punishments or legal prosecution. [92] While transitional justice offers reconciliation at a community or national level, restorative justice creates reconciliation between a victim and perpetrator on an individual level (though, there is overlap between the two). Restorative justice among child soldiers can include participating in community truth telling commissions as both victims and perpetrators of violence, traditional healing ceremonies, and other local efforts at reconciliation.[93] In the North Kivu Province of the Democratic Republic of Congo, 97% of children who participated in restorative justice peacemaking circles (that promote discussion and solution-seeking among affected persons) changed their mind about joining or re-joining the military.[94] Therefore, a restorative approach to transitional justice can help to both prevent child soldiering and to reintegrate child soldiers.

2.2 Exemplary Practical Applications

Unfortunately, child-centered DDR programs have rarely been evaluated. The few evaluations that have been conducted are largely short-term, making it difficult to identify the sustainability and long-term effects of the programs.[95] In addition, there is a lack of clarity within the field on how to apply best practices[96] According to Haer, this is due to the lack of discussion between practitioners and academics.[97] In order to demonstrate how the aforementioned best practices are applied, I discuss successful reintegration interventions, their outcomes, and how they utilized the best practices. Due to limited research, the following analysis is not a

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[92] See for example Jacqueline Salomé, "Children, Accountability and Justice: Advancing Restorative Justice for Child Soldiers and Child Pirates," *Allons-y: Journal of Children, Peace and Security* 1, no. 1 (2020): 33–51, https://doi.org/10.15273/allons-y.v1i1.10042.
[93] Parmar et al., *Children and Transitional Justice*.
[94] Jean Chrysostome Kiyala, "The Effectiveness of Restorative Justice in Preventing Children's Participation in Armed Conflict in North Kivu Province, the Democratic Republic of Congo: A Participatory Action Research," n.d. https://doi.org/10.51415/10321/3064.
[95] Haer "Study of Child Soldiering,"453.
[96] Ibid., 453-455; Verhey, *Child Soldiers: Preventing, Demobilizing and Reintegrating*, 1.
[97] Haer, "Study of Child Soldiering,"453.

comprehensive review of all reintegration efforts in each country, but a discussion of specific projects/programs. The following interventions were implemented in five countries with similar political, economic, and social contexts to Uganda. Each of the countries used child soldiers during a civil war and deployed more than 6,000 children as soldiers. They all share a GDP per capita below $700 USD (except Angola with a per capita GDP of $4,096).[98] Finally, in each country, community plays an important role in all spheres of life, and traditional practices are valued by citizens.

Livelihood Interventions and Restorative Justice in Sierra Leone

From 1991 to 2002, there was a civil war between the Sierra Leone government and Revolutionary United Front (RUF). Both sides used child soldiers as sexual slaves, combatants, and servants. After the war, 22,000 children were in dire need of reintegration.[99] In response, the Christian Children's Fund (CCF) and the Sierra Leone government created a reintegration program in the Northern Province of Sierra Leone during 2002 and 2003. The program illustrates several of the best practices discussed. It was funded by private donations to the CCF as well as those provided by international aid organizations like USAID.[100]

The intervention focused heavily on the economic component, offering livelihood support from both the supply and demand side. For example, they provided temporary emergency employment (the supply side) as well as skills training taught by local artisans (the demand side). The skills taught in these trainings were determined by a market analysis (which ensured that the skills matched local demand for goods).[101] Since many newly skilled laborers

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[98] "GDP by Country," Worldometer, 2017, https://www.worldometers.info/gdp/gdp-by-country/.
[99] Betancourt et al., "High Hopes, Grim Reality," 1.
[100] "New CCF Sponsorship Opportunity: Help Children in Sierra Leone - Sierra Leone," ReliefWeb, Christian Children's Fund, March 8, 2005, https://reliefweb.int/report/sierra-leone/new-ccf-sponsorship-opportunity-help-children-sierra-leone.
[101] Wessels, "A Living Wage," 187

often lacked the knowledge required to set up a profitable business, financial literacy was also included in the program. Initially, non-combatants were upset that former combatants received these vocational trainings, so the program later opened it up to other youth to promote the best practice of equity.[102]

The program is also an excellent example that demonstrates how community-based solutions to economic reintegration can be supported. Each affected community was consulted on their needs, and they were asked to describe a project they felt would most benefit their community and the FCS (e.g., building a school or health center). A total of 92 projects were completed with materials provided by the CCF.[103] The projects employed 2,840 FCS and 2,160 non-combatants (following a ratio of six FCS to four non-combatants to ensure equity).[104] Microcredit was also used to economically empower the FCS and their communities. Over 800 small groups were formed and received microcredit loans to start a business. The groups were very successful with a 99% repayment rate, which was attributed to the support of staff members, the local artisans, and business skill acquisition.[105]

To address intersectional vulnerabilities, traditional cleansing rituals were facilitated for female FCS to remove the stigma that they were "unclean." In addition, women were consulted on their specific needs. As a result of the special attention paid to the unique experiences of female FCS, 56% of participants in the income-generating activities were girls.[106] The program also implemented psychosocial interventions concurrently with economic supports. These included mental health counselling as well as reconciliation between FCS and community

[102] Ibid., 189.
[103] Ibid.,187.
[104] Ibid.
[105] Ibid., 189.
[106] Ibid.

members (a form of restorative justice).[107] In general, the program was a success; most child soldiers left the bush, encouraged by the support offered by this program.[108]

In addition to this program by the CCF and national government, Fambul Tok (family talk) was a popular community-led restorative justice intervention used in Sierra Leone.[109] Fambul Tok brings together victims and perpetrators around a bonfire to "deal with the effects of the crimes, to focus on repairing the harm, and to provide perpetrators with opportunities for active responsibility."[110] Fambul Tok was used in place of truth commissions, which are common restorative justice mechanisms, because truth commissions left victims feeling resentful of FCS in Sierra Leone. While the truth commissions tend to create a divide between FCS and victims, Fambul Tok focuses on unity and collaboration between the two groups to resolve their conflicts as they see fit. This alternative approach has received international recognition and illustrates the importance of supporting community-based initiatives because they can adequately respond to the unique dynamics of each country context.

Community Programs in Angola

From 1998 to 2002, the Angolan government and their opponent the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA) conscripted thousands of child soldiers in a civil war. Though there are no official records of the number of child soldiers involved in the war, experts estimate the number to be anywhere from 7,000 to 11,000.[111] The reintegration of FCS in Angola focused heavily on community-based interventions. The national reintegration program

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[107] Ibid., 185.
[108] Ibid., 190.
[109] Hope Among, "The Application of Traditional Justice Mechanisms to the Atrocities Committed by Child Soldiers in Uganda: A Practical Restorative Justice Approach," *African Human Rights Law Journal* 13, no. 2 (2013): 451-453.
[110] Ibid.
[111] *FORGOTTEN FIGHTERS: Child Soldiers in Angola* 15, 10th ed, Vol. 15 (New York: Human Rights Watch, 2003), https://reliefweb.int/report/angola/forgotten-fighters-child-soldiers-angola.

offered funding for community projects like in Sierra Leone, and it supported family businesses.[112] The government also offered apprenticeships (similar to the training offered by artisans in Sierra Leone), which were well-received by FCS because they were faster than traditional vocational training. Another exemplary practice in the Angola national program was special considerations for children with disabilities. The Ministry of Education in Angola had a special educational program designed just for disabled FCS.

Community-led reintegration interventions were financially supported by the national program. One key intervention was the use of catechists (social church promoters).[113] Catechists helped with family reunification, monitoring/evaluation, and collecting the documents needed for FCS to attend traditional school.[114] According to Verhey et al., the use of catechists was effective in the case of Angola because they are considered neutral, offered a source of authority, had extensive outreach capacity, and respected the rights of the child.[115] Verhey et al. claim that this strategy may be transferable to countries with similar contexts. Like Sierra Leone, the Angola national program included important psychosocial interventions like community sensitizations, cleansing ceremonies, and mediation.[116] Though fighting resumed in Angola, these psychosocial programs (especially family reunification) decreased re-recruitment according to military groups.[117]

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[112] Verhey, *Child Soldiers: Preventing, Demobilizing and Reintegrating*, 18.
[113] Ibid., 16.
[114] Ibid., 16, 20.
[115] Ibid., 20.
[116] Ibid., 18.
[117] Ibid., 4.

The Mozambique Llanguene Center

The conflict in Mozambique that enlisted child soldiers began in 1964 and lasted for 30 years.[118] The child soldiers in Mozambique were referred to as a 'lost generation' by journalists. To provide support to this lost generation, the Children and War Program Mozambique at Llanguene Center was created by Save the Children. Boothby et al. followed 39 FCS who went through the program across sixteen years.[119] The FCS they interviewed said that the most effective parts of the program for reintegration were the traditional cleansing ceremonies and community sensitization campaigns, which are both psychosocial interventions.[120] Mentorships and workshops on establishing behavioral norms, meaning making, and self-regulation were also provided. Among the most impactful economic interventions were apprenticeships with local carpenters, masons, and other skilled laborers. Apprenticeships allowed FCS to do work that made them higher earnings than other common jobs in the community. Financial support for income-generating activities (e.g., giving seeds or tools for small businesses) and community works projects were also very effective. Community works projects also had a positive impact on psychosocial integration. The families of FCS also received stipends to cover school fees (but most FCS preferred to learn vocational skills). Sixteen years after the program, the former child soldiers were productive members of society, who had an average home ownership of 91% which matched the national average.[121]

[118] "Mozambique: War of Independence," Tufts, World Peace Foundation, August 7, 2025, https://sites.tufts.edu/atrocityendings/2015/08/07/mozambique-war-of-independence/.
[119] Boothby et al., "Mozambique Child Solider."
[120] Ibid., 105.
[121] Ibid., 4.

Education in Liberia

The 14-year civil war in Liberia (1989-2003) included several war atrocities, including mass rape, widespread displacement, and the use of nearly 15,000 child soldiers.[122] Some estimate that at the time, one in every ten Liberian children had been recruited into war. Liberia's National Commission on Disarmament, Demobilization, Rehabilitation and Reintegration (NCDDRR) program did an excellent job at integration and coordination among CBOs, nonprofits, and government which helped to ensure sustainability.[123] They supported interventions for family reunification, education, skill acquisition, and psychosocial interventions.[124] One of the most successful interventions they supported took an innovative approach to increase participation in traditional and vocational education programs. The UNICEF Community Education Investment Program (CEIP) FCS gave school supplies and subsistence allowances to FCS if they attended 75% of classes.[125] The same rules applied to FCS attending skills-acquisition trainings. As a result, the programs had very high enrollment rates (7,000 FCS attended the school program alone).[126]

Entrepreneurship Supported by the ILO in Burundi

Burundi endured a ten-year civil war that finally ended in 2006.[127] Throughout the war, records were not keep of the number of child soldiers conscripted, though experts estimate six to seven thousand. One of the key economic reintegration programs in Burundi was the ILO

[122] "How to Fight, How to Kill," Human Rights Watch, March 28, 2023, https://www.hrw.org/report/2004/02/02/how-fight-how-kill/child-soldiers-liberia.
[123] Bosede Awodola, "An Examination of Methods to Reintegrate Former Child Soldiers in Liberia," *Intervention* 10, no. 1 (2012): 33, https://doi.org/10.1097/wtf.0b013e32834912e3.
[124] Ibid.
[125] Ibid., 35.
[126] Ibid.
[127] Mark JD Jordans, Ivan H Komproe, Wietse A Tol, Aline Ndayisaba, Theodora Nisabwe, and Brandon A Kohrt, "Reintegration of Child Soldiers in Burundi: A Tracer Study," *BMC Public Health* 12, no. 1 (2012):7, https://doi.org/10.1186/1471-2458-12-905.

Reintegration skills training program. The ILO Reintegration produced high employment rates among FCS and literacy rates above the national average.[128] The program's success lied in its dual focus on not only skills training, but entrepreneurial support (as in Sierra Leone). In addition to life skills training, vocational training, and informal education, FCS received assistance in starting a small enterprise. This included coaching, microloans, start-up kits, and financial literacy training.[129] FCS were also guided in how to open a savings account. The program was gender-sensitive, making sure to prioritize the specific aspirations and needs of female FCS, exemplifying another key best practice.[130]

Conclusion on Applying Best Practices

These examples provide a helpful glimpse on how best practices are applied in the field. It is difficult to find a country in which economic reintegration for FCS was entirely successful, but it is appropriate to highlight successful interventions within these countries. From the programs above, it is clear that family reunification, financial literacy, inclusion of non-combatants, community projects, and market-based skills training are some of the most effective practices for reintegration. These practices align with the seven broad best practices discussed in this paper. However, each of the interventions discussed also had their own limitations, typically when they faltered from best practices. For example, the Mozambique Llanguene Center was criticized for being too centralized and focusing too heavily on psychosocial support.[131] In addition, the CEIP vocational program in Liberia that was based on attendance was largely hindered by a lack of research on the local market demand, which is an important detail of the

[128] Ibid.
[129] Ibid., 3.
[130] Ibid.
[131] Aaron Young, "Preventing, Demobilizing, Rehabilitating, and Reintegrating Child Soldiers in African Conflicts," *Journal of International Policy Solutions* 7 (2007).

best practice of focusing on both demand and supply. FCS also complained that the program was too short, underfunded, and poor quality.[132] A short-time frame, underfunding, and lack of coordination between implementing actors was a common theme that limited even the most successful interventions. Each of these issues can be mitigated via commitment to best practices.

2.3 Barriers to Using Best Practices

As previously mentioned, there is a lack of comprehensive cross-national studies and practical guidance within the literature on best practices in the field, which hinders their effective implementation. According to the Global Coalition on the Reintegration of Former Child Soldiers, another barrier to effective reintegration programs is poor government engagement due to weak leadership and their own biases.[133] For example, FCS many belong to a rebel group that was previously fighting the government, resulting in little incentive by the government to support them. Corruption and mismanagement can also make reintegration programs less robust. In addition, tricky political situations in dealing with armed groups as well as the timing of peace processes can slow reintegration. Similarly, logistical restraints (i.e., lack of infrastructure, funding, and access to remote communities) as well as localized stigma and social conflict can make reintegration less effective.[134] Finally, outside factors, like the status of the local economy can also affect economic reintegration.[135]

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[132] Ibid., 35-37.
[133] Global Coalition for Reintegration of Child Soldiers, *Gaps and Needs,* 13-18.
[134] Ibid.
[135] Haer, interview.

Chapter 3: Methods

3.1 The Selection of Uganda

The conflict in Northern Uganda was selected as the case for analysis because it had some of the highest numbers of child soldiers in the world. The war was considered "a war fought by children on children," with 90% of the LRA forces being child soldiers.[136] Despite the presence of hundreds of NGOs working to support FCS in Northern Uganda, there remains widespread discontent among FCS, and many have been entirely left behind. The Ugandan government is known in the East African community for its impressive development planning, yet its implementation failures continue to hinder its progress in both supporting FCS and reaching its other national development goals. Northern Uganda presents an interesting case because it received vast international attention during the height of the war. Joseph Kony, the leader of the Lord's Resistance Army, is notorious around the world for his war crimes and crimes against humanity. Yet, sixteen years later, international attention—and funding—has dissipated. In addition, the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF), a Ugandan rebel group based in the DRC, has begun recruiting child soldiers in Western region of the nation and bringing them to the DRC.[137] Informants on the ground reveal that the group indoctrinates and recruits youth at Ugandan Islamic schools.[138] The return of the use of child soldiers in Uganda further highlights the timeliness and importance of analyzing reintegration in the nation.

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[136] Luke Falkenburg, "Youth Lost: Ugandan Child Soldiers in The Lord's Resistance Army," *Small Wars Journal*, 2013.
[137] Omaro Geoffrey. "Ntoroko: Captured ADF Fighters Below 18 Years," Chimp Reports, December 14, 2022. https://chimpreports.com/ntoroko-captured-adf-fighters-below-18-years/.
[138] Dr. Jane Ekayu, interview by author, February 9, 2023; Okwir Isaac Odiya, interview by author, February 10, 2023.

Finally, although child soldiers are employed all over the world, around 40% of child soldiers are in Africa.[139] Therefore, much of the research on best practices come from countries in Africa, in which child soldiers are most common in the western and central regions.[140] The practical applications used in this thesis come from countries in these two regions. Therefore, the best practices should be applicable to the Ugandan context.

3.2 Methodology

For this research, I used both primary and secondary data collection to analyze economic reintegration in Uganda. I first provide a detailed account of the strategies and programs used to economically reintegrate FCS in Northern Uganda and discuss their major criticisms. Then, in the following chapter, I compare these strategies to the best practices and discuss other challenges to reintegration in the Ugandan context. Finally, I make brief recommendations on how best key actors in Uganda can provide support for FCS today. These methods were approved by the Rollins Institutional Review Board.

Primary Data Collection

I held seven semi-structured interviews with academics and practitioners from January to March 2023 (See Appendix A for interview guide and Appendix B for list of participants). Participants were recruited using my personal network via email and snowball sampling. Since participants are not themselves FCS, they are not considered a vulnerable population. While not interviewing FCS directly presents a limitation of the research, the decision to not interview such a vulnerable population was made in line with ethical considerations. While sharing their stories

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[139] Brett Tarver, “Child Soldiers in Africa: Mukele's Story,” World Vision Canada, July 13, 2021, https://www.worldvision.ca/stories/child-protection/child-soldiers-in-africa-mukeles-story.
[140] Ellison, “Uganda’s Female Former Child Soldiers.”

can be empowering for many FCS, for others, it can also cause them to relive their trauma.[141] Due to a power imbalance created by the interviewer-interviewee relationship as well as differences in race and socioeconomic status, participants may feel obligated to share. This same power imbalance can also create what's known as the hidden transcript in field research, in which participants respond with what they think the researcher wants to hear or will benefit them the most. [142] In addition, there is a plethora of primary research that details the experiences of FCS during the Northern Ugandan War. This has created research fatigue in these communities.[143] For this reason, I did not interview FCS, but rather used primary accounts from the literature to provide insight into the experience of FCS. I also included information from my lectures and site visits with the School for International Training during my semester abroad in Uganda during the fall of 2021.

Informants were made aware that participation is voluntary, and each of them signed an informed consent form. Participants were not compensated, and interviews were conducted online via WebEx, phone call, or FaceTime. Respondents that preferred to remain anonymous are referred to as "Informant X" throughout the paper.

Secondary Data Collection

Secondary research was collected from reports (from the national government, NGOs, IGOs, and CBOs), field studies, program evaluations, program websites, expert opinions, and national policies. As with all research on reintegration programs for FCS, there is no

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[141] See "Supporting Survivors of Trauma: How to Avoid Re-Traumatization," CORP-MSW1 (OMSWP), March 25, 2022, https://www.onlinemswprograms.com/resources/how-to-be-mindful-re-traumatization/.

[142] See Jim Scott, "The Hidden Transcript of Subordinate Groups," *Asian Studies Association of Australia* 10, no. 3 (1987): 23–31, https://doi.org/10.1080/03147538708712459.

[143] See Florence Ashley, "Accounting for Research Fatigue in Research Ethics," *Bioethics* 35, no. 3 (2020): 270–76, https://doi.org/10.1111/bioe.12829; Tim Allen, Jackline Atingo, Dorothy Atim, James Ocitti, Charlotte Brown, Costanza Torre, Cristin A Fergus, and Melissa Parker, "What Happened to Children Who Returned from the Lord's Resistance Army in Uganda?" *Journal of Refugee Studies* 33, no. 4 (December 1, 2020): 672, https://doi.org/10.1093/jrs/fez116.

comprehensive literature on how FCS were economically reintegrated in Northern Uganda. There were very few program evaluations and minimal record keeping. As a result, as with the exemplary practical applications, the findings are somewhat piecemeal, providing detail when available and more general explanations where information was missing. Finally, in order to investigate how the Ugandan strategies compare to best practices, the following table describes both quantitative and qualitative indicators of success as a guide for analysis. Several of these indicators could not be found in the literature, especially more specific numerical data. So, other determinants of success were used in their place. Finally, each best practice was given a ranking of either low, medium, or high to signify the extent to which reintegration in Uganda followed best practices.

Table 1. Best Practice Indicators of Success

Best Practice	**Indicators**
In Combination with Psychosocial Interventions	• Presence and robustness of psychosocial interventions • Inclusion of family reunification and counselling
Integrated Approach Centered on Community	• Reintegration is part of long-term national development planning • Coordination between local, national, and international efforts • Community participation • Support of community projects
Focus on Demand and Supply	• Balanced focus on skills-training and job creation • Changes to macro-economic policy for job creation • Flexible education that teaches life skills (e.g., financial literacy) and basic literacy and numeracy • Market-appropriate vocational training
Attention to Intersectional Vulnerabilities	• Special programming for girls • Percentage of female participants • Inclusive services for children with disabilities
Equity	• Services offered to community members • Community projects
Long Term	• Program lasts 3-5 years • Evidence of sustained M & E
Protection of the Rights of the Child	• Non-discrimination • No clear violations of the rights of the child as outlined in the CRC • Following the Paris Principles • Child participation • Restorative justice

Chapter 4: The Case of Uganda

4.1 Background on the Northern Ugandan War and the Use of Child Soldiers

The Northern Ugandan War lasted from 1986 to 2006, killing tens of thousands and displacing over one million people.[144] The war was marked by crimes against humanity, terrorism, and the indiscriminate use of child soldiers. The origins of the war can be traced back to British colonial rule. The British divide-and-conquer strategy pitted the North and South of Uganda against one another, which prevented a robust Ugandan nationalism from forming. As a result, the country has been marked by political instability, a lack of government legitimacy, and ethnic conflict.[145]

In 1986, current president Yoweri Museveni came to power after he coordinated a coup against the former leader Tito Okello.[146] Under Museveni's rule, Northern Ugandans accused the government of arbitrary arrests and killings of Acholi people (an ethnic group in Northern Uganda), human rights violations, and failure to hold free and fair elections.[147] They also worried that Museveni's National Resistance Army (NRA), made up almost entirely of Southern Ugandans, would attack the North because of oppression of the South from previous regimes, such as Apollo Milton Obote.[148] Nearly 40 rebel groups formed in the Acholi regions of Northern Uganda in response, one of them being Alice Lakwena's Holy Spirit Mobile Forces.[149] Lakwena began the Holy Spirit Movement to liberate Northern Uganda from oppression by

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[144] Okello Lucima, *Protracted Conflict and Elusive Peace: Initiatives to End the Violence in Northern Uganda* (London, UK: Conciliation Resources, 2002), 10, https://gsdrc.org/document-library/protracted-conflict-elusive-peace-initiatives-to-end-the-violence-in-northern-uganda/; "Timeline: Northern Uganda Crisis," Mercy Corps, January 14, 2020, https://www.mercycorps.org/blog/northern-uganda-crisis-timeline.
[145] Lucima, *Protracted Conflict*, 11.
[146] "Timeline: Northern Uganda Crisis."
[147] Lucima, *Protracted Conflict*, 18.
[148] "Timeline: Northern Uganda Crisis."
[149] School for International Training (SIT) Lecture based on *Uganda Rising* (2006), attended by author, October 25, 2021.

Museveni's National Resistance Army (NRA). After Lakwena was exiled, her cousin, Joseph Kony, took over the movement, creating the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA).[150]

Joseph Kony aimed to replace Museveni's government with a theocracy based on the Ten Commandments of the Holy Bible. While at first, Kony was able to attract followers in Northern Uganda who also resented the NRA, support declined as people became wary of his tactics. In response, Kony turned to carrying out violent raids against the Acholi people and started abducting civilians to fight as soldiers in 1986.[151] Soon after, the LRA began raiding primary and secondary schools to abduct children and train them to fight. For the LRA, children were far easier to indoctrinate. The average age of these child soldiers was 13, but children as young as four have been reported.[152] In total, experts estimate 66,000 people were kidnapped by the LRA, and 25,000-38,000 were children.[153] However, some assess that number to be even higher, but lack of record keeping has made it difficult to estimate the true population. Like other conflicts, child soldiers in Northern Uganda include laborers, porters, cooks, and combatants. Around one quarter of the child soldiers were girls,[154] and many of them served as "bush wives" to top commanders. Kony alone had 55 wives and hundreds of children (known as bush babies or children born in captivity).[155] While about half of children spent less than three months in captivity, others spent over a decade.[156] For example, girls were often kept longer in 'the bush' since they acted as 'wives.'

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[150] Ibid.
[151] Ibid.
[152] Ibid.
[153] *Not Without Us: Strengthening Victim Participation in Transitional Justice Processes in Uganda* (London, UK: REDRESS, 2020), 22, https://redress.org/publication/not-without-us-strengthening-victim-participation-in-transitional-justice-processes-in-uganda/.
[154] Falkenburg, "Youth Lost."
[155] School for International Training Lecture.
[156] Allen et al., "What Happened to Children," 672.

Child soldiers in the Northern Ugandan War were required to take part in campaigns of terror against the Acholi civilians, using destruction of property, arson, torture, mass rape, and murder as weapons of war. They were often forced to commit heinous acts of violence against their own family members and friends as part of initiation, and they were subject to torture from other members of the LRA. To escape this violence, from 1996-2006, the entire Acholi population, around 1.8 million people, was forcibly moved by the Ugandan government into Internally Displaced Person (IDP) camps.[157] These camps became centers for poverty and disease, killing people at some of the highest rates compared to similar emergency conflict situations.[158] Each week, 1,000 people died in the IDP camps from these conditions and violence.[159] Although the camps were intended to protect the Acholi people, they inadvertently made LRA raids easier by centralizing the population. Children often fled to the city in groups during the night to avoid abduction during night raids. These children became known as the night commuters.

In 2005, the ICC indicted Joseph Kony and four other top commanders of the LRA at the request of President Museveni. Prompted in part by relentless advocacy by community leaders, the Juba Peace Talks began in 2006.[160] However, Kony refused to sign the cessation of conflict at the end of the talks in 2008. So, Uganda and its allies (i.e., South Sudan, the DRC, and the United States) launched Operation Lightning Thunder on the LRA. The campaign failed because Kony gained prior knowledge on the attack. As a result, Kony led a brutal ambush on civilians in Garamba National Forest of the DRC. The Ugandan military then pulled back its offensive

[157] Mr. Odoch Quinto, Interview with author, February 9, 2023.
[158] Christopher Blattman and Jeannie Annan, "Child Combatants in Northern Uganda: Reintegration Myths and Realities," in *Security and Post-Conflict Reconstruction*, edited by Robert Muggah, 1st ed., (Routledge, 2008), 11.
[159] School for International Training Lecture.
[160] Dr. Ojok Boniface, Interview with author, February 17, 2023.

forces and made an agreement with the DRC to take over the fight against the LRA. The LRA forces have decentralized across East Africa and Joseph Kony is rumored to be hiding somewhere in the DRC.[161] The Northern Uganda War lasted 22 years due to the unwillingness of either side to come to a peace agreement and because of the support from outside actors.[162] It is also worth noting that while the LRA has become notorious worldwide for its war crimes in Northern Uganda, Museveni's Uganda People's Defense Forces (UPDF) also committed their own share of civilian violence, terrorism, and recruitment of child soldiers (though, to a much lesser extent).[163]

4.2 The Aftermath of War

A region already suffering with political instability and some of the highest rates of poverty in the country, the Northern Ugandan War left the region in ruins. Homes were destroyed, agricultural lands became unusable, and villages were unrecognizable. Some described Acholiland in the aftermath of the war as simply a "conglomeration of [IDP] camps."[164] The over one million displaced Acholi people returned home to nothing. There were no shops, schools, or homes left for them.[165] Over 100,000 people were killed in the Northern Ugandan War, leaving many children as orphans and significantly reducing the area's human capital.[166] In addition, due to the destruction, the region's agricultural industry (its primary sector) was destroyed, and poverty in the area increased.[167] In 2006, 70% of the population was

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[161] "History of the War."
[162] Lucima, *Protracted Conflict*, 13.
[163] Young, "Preventing, Demobilizing, Rehabilitating."
[164] Lucima, *Protracted Conflict*, 13.
[165] Informant X, interview with author, February 2, 2023.
[166] "Kony's LRA Has Killed More than 100,000: Un," The Denver Post, The Denver Post, April 29, 2016, https://www.denverpost.com/2013/05/20/konys-lra-has-killed-more-than-100000-un/.
[167] Blattman & Annan, "Child combatants," 4.

living in extreme poverty. [168] However, since many families lost all their assets in the war, they were unable to begin farming again, even for subsistence. According to a study of people who returned from IDP camps in Gulu alone, 90% said they lacked the capital, land, and tools to re-engage in agriculture.[169] At a national level, the GDP dropped by 3% due to increased spending on the war and decreased foreign investment.[170] Perhaps most complex, thousands of children who were trained to be ruthless killers were returning to families living in grave economic conditions in the very communities the child soldiers were forced to terrorize.

4.3 The Challenges Faced by Returnees in Northern Uganda

"Once the guns went silent, then all the other wars started, the economic… the psycho[logical] war started."[171] As previously discussed, child soldiers experience extreme forms of violence and trauma that negatively impact their psychosocial and economic wellbeing. When returning to a post-conflict context where poverty, violence, ethnic tensions, and political stability have left the communities to which they must return with little resources, reintegration is especially difficult. Each post-conflict context creates unique challenges for reintegrating combatants. In the case of Uganda, the following psychosocial and economic challenges experienced by FCS operate as both barriers to reintegration and as evidence for its dire need. Many of these challenges continue to plague FCS living in Northern Uganda today.

Psychosocial Challenges

When child soldiers returned home in Northern Uganda, they were often met with severe stigma from community members and their families. Having been the direct victims of their

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[168]The New Humanitarian, "Uganda: Survey Reveals Grinding Poverty in War-Affected North – Uganda," ReliefWeb, OCH, April 7, 2006, https://reliefweb.int/report/uganda/uganda-survey-reveals-grinding-poverty-war-affected-north.
[169] Kim et al., *Making the Most of* Reintegration, 29.
[170] CARE, "Economic cost of the conflict in Northern Uganda," Relief Web, OCHA, November 13, 2023, https://reliefweb.int/report/uganda/economic-cost-conflict-northern-uganda.
[171]Dr. Jane Ekayu, Interview with author, February 9, 2023.

violence, people were fearful of living among 'killers'. Specifically, they feared that FCS might act on their "bush mentalities," or a tendency toward violence, if they got frustrated.[172] There was also a common belief that the child soldiers were possessed by cen, the evil spirit of a person who "died badly" that could spread to other people in the community.[173] As such, FCS were ostracized by the people at home. People shamed them, called them names, and refused to speak to them. Since many child soldiers were visibly branded by the LRA (through facial disfigurements or 'cut' limbs), and it was widely known who had been to the bush, there was no escaping the stigma.[174] Women and children born of war faced the most stigma. People could only see them as the wives and children of LRA leaders. This experience of stigma has been widely cited among Ugandan FCS, but some FCS do report feeling accepted by their families who were excited to have them home.[175]

Due to stigmatization, economic challenges, and the trauma they endured during the war, FCS suffered deep psychological wounds. The torture tactics used by the LRA made these psychosocial issues especially prevalent and PTSD became common among Ugandan FCS. While some did not feel shame for their role in the violence, many experienced a deep guilt for their actions.[176] As previously discussed, these psychosocial elements are closely tied with economic viability. As Jane Ekayu of Children of Peace Uganda noted, psychosocial reintegration is especially important because it affects all other aspects of reintegration. Most relevant to this analysis, psychological distress among FCS can impact their economic productivity. Economic hardship can then, in turn, create more distress.

[172] Allen et al., "What Happened to Children," 670.
[173]Ibid.; Jastine C. Barrett, "Navigating the Mystical: Child Soldiers and Reintegration Rituals In Northern Uganda," in Research Handbook on Child Soldiers, ed. by Mark A. Drumbl and Jastine C. Barrett (Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2019), 418.
[174] Faulkner, Interview.
[175] See, for example, Blattman & Annan, "Consequences of Child Soldiering."
[176] Informant X, interview.

Economic Challenges

While all victims of war faced immense economic challenges due to the destruction of the local economy, FCS experienced a unique set of challenges. According to Blattman and Annan, FCS faced more severe economic barriers that their non-combatant peers due to "substantially lower education, diminished productivity, and increased poverty and inequality, largely due to time away." On average, FCS in Uganda missed out on nine months of schooling and were typically abducted during the years in which they would have learned to read and write.[177] As a result, FCS in Uganda are twice as likely to be illiterate. [178] Expensive school fees and their age prevented many from returning to school. For the young girls who returned as mothers, they had to care for their children instead of continuing their education.[179] For those who were able to return to a formal education, they often faced stigma from their peers.

Unfortunately, going straight into the workface was just as difficult, in part due to the same stigma.[180] Mr. Okwir Isaac Odiya, founder of the Ugandan NGO the Justice and Reconciliation Project, noted that even if FCS can get a job, they may face discrimination at work or be underpaid. Unemployment is extremely high in Uganda, making prospects for FCS to find jobs very low, especially since they lack education or employable skills. As Dr. Faulkner described, due to lack of opportunity, "the tangible skillsets are just absent [among FCS], the skill set that [they] have learned is violence." Even if a FCS possesses a set of employable skills, they lack the resources to use them productively.[181] In addition, many FCS who lost limbs due

[177] Blattman & Annan, "Consequences of Child Soldiering."
[178] Ibid.
[179] Melissa Parker, Cristin A. Fergus, Charlotte Brown, Dorothy Atim, James Ocitti, Jackline Atingo, and Tim Allen, "Legacies of humanitarian neglect: long term experiences of children who returned from the Lord's Resistance Army in Uganda," Conflict and Health 15, no. 43 (2021): 3.
[180] Ekayu, Interview.
[181] Ibid.

to war physically cannot work.[182] These obstacles help explain why FCS had 33% lower earnings than non-combatants in Uganda in 2008.[183]

Another major issue that harmed economic reintegration was land access. Typically, the male child will inherit land from their parents in Acholiland. So, FCS who were rejected by their communities would therefore not receive any land. The situation was even more challenging for female FCS. In Acholi culture, girls are expected to marry. Their parents would then pay a bride price to her husband's family, and the daughter would receive land from her new in-laws. However, former female combatants, especially those that were bush wives, were ostracized due to perceptions that they were "used" or" unclean."[184] In addition, the husband's family often did not receive a bride price due to financial hardship from the war, which made them hesitant to give their new daughter-in-law land. Women who had children in the bush faced even greater barriers. Even if they were able to remarry, their relationships were often rife with abuse and the threat of leaving from their husbands. Other times, the woman could find a new husband, but he would not accept her child as his own. As a result, some women left their child with their paternal family so they could remarry to support themselves and the child financially.[185]

As a result of these barriers, most former child soldiers fell into extreme poverty.[186] Many have cited this economic struggle as their main challenge upon returning home, and it has negatively impacted their psychological wellbeing. Mr. Odiya saw this first-hand working directly with FCS. He said:

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[182] Quinto, Interview.
[183] Blattman & Annan, "Consequences of Child Soldiering."
[184]Haer, Interview.
[185] Ekayu, Interview.
[186]Ibid.; Odiya, interview.

> Some of the stress and trauma is not as a result of the bush experience. It is a result of the second experience of the bush. Now we are home, I have lost my livelihood. I don't know where to start from. I am going to sleep hungry. My children are home and other people's children are going to school. I cannot relate to people in my community because of poverty. So, this takes that person back to trauma.[187]

Finally, in addition to these psychosocial and economic challenges, many FCS today are in need of dire medical attention to remove bullets or address chronic pain from the torture they endured.[188] These issues underscore the necessity of proper reintegration and provide context to the challenges of this process.

4.4 Reintegration

Today, there are upwards of 500 NGOs working in Northern Uganda, many of them specifically working to support the reintegration of FCS. However, their work has been just "a drop in the ocean" to address the complex needs of tens of thousands of FCS.[189] Experts on the ground suggest that just 10% of the entire FCS population have received any reintegration support.[190] This is due in part to the lack of state leadership in creating a single strategic plan to coordinate these efforts. There are literally hundreds of actors (i.e., the government, NGOs, CBOs, IGOs, foreign donors, and private donors) and countless interventions, many of them working almost entirely independently. This has created duplication of services and has left many FCS falling through the cracks.

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[187] Odiya, interview.
[188] Discussion with the Women's Advocacy Network (WAN) through SIT, attended by author, October 26, 2023.
[189] New African, "Foreign NGOs Draw a Blank in Uganda's Northern Region," IC Publications, April 24, 2019, https://newafricanmagazine.com/18690/.
[190] Odiya, interview.

The government has made some attempts toward a more concrete plan to guide reintegration efforts, but they have not been effective nor comprehensive. The two major policies have been the Amnesty Act and the Peace Recovery and Development Plan (PRDP). The Amnesty Act has provided some emergency relief to former combatants but is not long-term nor holistic. By contrast, the PRDP is a more long-term plan that aims to provide a single framework for all actors working toward post-conflict building in Northern Uganda. However, reintegration is only briefly mentioned in the policy. The PRDP is more focused on economic development of Northern Uganda more generally, and less on DDR. There has also been some collaboration between NGOs and other actors, but these partnerships have been limited.[191]

Due to the ad hoc nature of reintegration in Uganda, it is difficult to discuss reintegration in Uganda in a systematic way since there are a variety of projects with their own unique goals, operating across very different time frames. To provide some structure to this review, I have split the interventions into two broad categories: psychosocial and economic programs. While the focus of this paper is economic reintegration, it is impossible to discuss the latter without the former because they are intrinsically connected, as previously discussed. Under each category, I include the major programs and policies as well as some smaller interventions, depending on the availability of information. I also provide key criticisms from academics, practitioners, FCS, and other war-affected persons.

4.5 Psychosocial Interventions

Reintegration in Uganda has focused much more heavily on psychosocial reintegration, like many other countries with large populations of FCS. In this section, I discuss the following interventions used in Uganda and their main critiques: rehabilitation centers, family

[191] According to one interviewee, NGOs work alone about 60% of the time.

reunification, community sensitizations, counseling, and mechanisms for justice and reconciliation. These efforts have been primarily led by NGOs, CBOs, and IGOs rather than the government. However, since NGOs often work as the implementing partners of the government, the true level of engagement by the government is unclear.

Rehabilitation Centers

Rehabilitation centers are typically the first step of reintegration for FCS returning home. In Uganda, the government army rescued FCS and placed them into Child Protection Units until they were transferred over to rehabilitation centers. These centers were largely implemented and funded by World Vision, the IRC, CBOs, and foreign donors.[192] They provided medical treatment, informal counseling, and family reunification support. Some centers also provided basic education on numeracy, religion, health, and vocational skills.[193] The children typically stayed at these centers and received these services for two to six weeks before reuniting with family or returning to the community.[194] While the rehabilitation centers provided major emergency support for several FCS, the centers had several challenges.

Since most FCS escaped from the war rather than being rescued by the Ugandan army, they returned directly to civilian life rather than first passing through a rehabilitation center. Due to mismanagement of records and a lack of systematic recordkeeping by rehabilitation centers, there are no precise numbers of the FCS who passed through them. However, based on preliminary records, experts estimate that only 13% to 43% of children went through these

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[192] Lorea Russel and Elzbieta M Gozdziak, "Coming Home Whole: Reintegrating Uganda's Child Soldiers," *Georgetown Journal of International Affairs* 7, no. 2 (2006): 57.
[193] JaeHyun Kim, Youngmin Song, Chingis Toregeldin, and Michael Veglucci, *Making the Most of Reintegration: Partnering with Former Child Soldiers in Lira, Uganda* (Kampala: Global Livingston Institute, 2016), 15, https://www.globallivingston.org/dir/research/making-the-most-of-reintegration.
[194] Falkenburg, "Youth Lost"; Blattman & Annan, "Child combatants."

centers[195] (though some estimate much lower or even higher rates[196]). This created inconsistency in the type of reintegration interventions FCS participated in. For children that went straight home, they did not receive the emergency reintegration services provided at the centers. By skipping these centers, FCS also missed out on long-term reintegration services. Typically, rehabilitation centers also referred FCS to NGOs for longer-term services like skills training or mental health counselling. Without the guidance of these centers, it was difficult for these FCS to find the services on their own.

Another major critique was that the centers were not culturally appropriate, especially those implemented by outsiders. For example, the staff at these centers typically used an innocence-centered approach to counselling and in their interactions with FCS.[197] One way was through advocating the idea of *timo kica*, or forgiveness, among the FCS and not blaming themselves. They also employed more western approaches, such as those based on Christianity like prayers or western diagnoses like PTSD. Beneficiaries complained that this approach was too westernized and ignored cultural contexts such as concerns about the evil spirit of cen.[198] They also felt that the purely innocence-centered approach ignored the violence and pain they endured. Akello argues that the rehabilitation centers were not effective for this reason.[199]

For those looking to participate in more traditional healing practices, a community-based rehabilitation center was built called the Gulu Support the Children Organisation (GUSCO). They were funded by Save the Children and the Danish International Development Agency but

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[195] Ibid.
[196] Blattman & Annan, "Child combatants."; Allen et al., "What Happened to Children," 664.
[197] Allen et al., "What Happened to Children," 666.
[198] Grace Akello, "Child Agency and Resistance to Discourses within the Paris Principles in Rehabilitation and Reintegration Processes for Former Child Soldiers in Northern Uganda," in *Research Handbook on Child Soldiers*, ed. by Mark A. Drumbl and Jastine C. Barrett (Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2019), 437.; Young, "Preventing, Demobilizing, Rehabilitating."
[199] Akello, "Child Agency," 472.

were founded and run by community members.[200] GUSCO used more culturally appropriate interventions, such as helping to facilitate traditional reconciliation practices, unlike the centers implemented by foreign donors.[201] However, even the GUSCO centers had their own issues. They were overburdened, serving six times their capacity.[202] In addition, while GUSCO offered even some economic interventions, their long-term impact was minimal because they were not market appropriate. Parker et al. found that of the 34% of women and 22% of men that received skills training from one the GUSCO centers, just ¼ of women 1/5 of men used their skills upon return to their community. Unfortunately, the skills they learned did not have enough demand in the villages.[203] A similar situation occurred at another center; some 100 FCS received training to become bicycle mechanics from one of these centers to return to the same village that could only support three or four mechanics.[204] For this reason, Parker et al. argued that the rehabilitation centers hindered reintegration since they didn't provide targeted or long-term care, which likely created even more frustration among FCS.[205] Others have also noted that follow up-care by the rehabilitation centers was very limited.[206] In sum, while rehabilitation centers offered essential emergency support for some FCS, most did not pass through these centers and for those that did, the interventions were not always culturally appropriate, well-funded, effective, or long-term.

Family Reunification

Rehabilitation centers and other organizations, like UNICEF, worked to reunite the child soldiers with their families in Uganda. They typically announced the names of the children who

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[200] Allen et al., "What Happened to Children," 666.
[201] Ibid.
[202] Ibid, 664.
[203] Parker et al., "Legacies of Humanitarian Neglect," 3.
[204] Akello, "Child Agency," 484.
[205] Parker et al., "Legacies of Humanitarian Neglect," 2.
[206] Allen et al., "What Happened to Children," 664.

were rescued on the community radios and contacted family members through tracing. [207] There are no numbers that indicate how many children were reunified with their families, but most children that passed through the centers received support in finding their relatives. Many of them were welcomed home by their families and community members. They received economic support, land, and care from their loved ones. However, according to the literature and my interviews, this positive experience of family reunification was likely not widespread.

For one, children who did not pass through the centers (over half) did not receive this type of guidance and likely did not reunite with family. In addition, receiving family reunification services didn't mean that the children were immediately and successfully reintegrated back into their families and communities. Many children were reunified with their families who were still living in the IDP camps, so they joined them in difficult conditions, and had to flee at night with the other night commuters to avoid being re-recruited by the LRA. The families of other children simply could not be traced. It is possible that they died during the war, leaving the FCS as orphans. Many families also never heard about what happened to their child, and there are still 10,000 children who went to the bush and never came back.[208] Finally, just because families were contacted, did not mean they were willing to bring the children back into their homes. While many were excited to welcome the children back, others felt that their children were not the same when they returned and did not pick them up from the centers. In response, volunteer mothers took in children who became orphans from the war, had been rejected by family, or whose family was unable to be traced.[209]

[207] Kim et al., *Making the Most of* Reintegration, 15.
[208] School for International Training Lecture.
[209] Odiya, Interview.

In addition, even if families had initially been welcoming to the children, at times because the children returned with a small aid package, stigma or fear towards them resurfaced as time went on. According to Allen et al., this created a sort of "social torture," to be forced to live with families and communities who shamed and harassed FCS.[210] In fact, Allen et al. found that FCS who did not return to the communities to which they originally belonged faced less stigma, suggesting that family reunification in Uganda may have been more harmful than helpful in reintegration.[211] Similarly, Parker et al. found that those not living on ancestral lands (land given to FCS by family) were better able to reintegrate socially.[212] As a result, Allen et al. has called for re-evaluating the use of family reunification for reintegration in all post-conflict contexts. He believes it should not have been used in the case of Uganda. Though this is not the consensus in the field, it is true that family reunification in Uganda may have been less effective than in other contexts or less effective among some families. The major issues with family reunification in Uganda was the exclusion of children who did not go through rehabilitation centers, insufficient capabilities to trace the families of all children, and stigma that was not adequately addressed. In addition, while family reunification can provide transformative economic support at times, many of the families continued to experience extreme poverty and were unable to provide resources for returnees, creating an even greater strain on the family. As noted by Parker et al., family reunification could not supplement the need for follow up from NGOs and long-term psychosocial and economic interventions.[213] While the family can provide some support, external support is still necessary.

[210] Allen et al., "What Happened to Children," 680.
[211] Ibid, 664.
[212] Parker et al., "Legacies of Humanitarian Neglect," 2.
[213] Ibid.

Community Sensitizations

To combat the stigma that hindered family reunification and reintegration in general, NGOs and CBOs led the effort on educating war-affected communities on the lack of agency children had in committing violence. (Indeed, only a small portion of child soldiers in Uganda joined voluntarily.[214]) Much of this work was done by Save the Children and the Norwegian Refugee Council.[215] However, multiple local NGOs and CBOs were also involved. In an effort to combat issues with funding, one of the NGOs I spoke with, the Justice and Reconciliation Project, empowered and taught community members to lead sensitizations so that the project would last even if the NGO was no longer part of it. However, in a competitive economic context with few jobs, the Justice and Reconciliation Project said that many of the people they trained left for better jobs. This is the harsh reality of implementing reintegration programs in a developing country in a post-conflict context.

Though there are no evaluations of these educational efforts, informants commented that the programming was initially robust until they ran out of funding.[216] While it is not possible to identify the impact that these programs had on attitudes towards FCS or the psychosocial reintegration of FCS, one informant noted the following:

> It was our failure to protect our children. We failed. And that's why they ended up in wrong hands. If the community realized that, the rebel stigma would have gone down.

In addition, FCS have been surveyed on their experience of stigma, which can provide insight on the effectiveness of community sensitization interventions. While Blattman and Annan found that over 90% of participants in their study felt accepted by their communities in 2008, Allen et

[214] Blattman & Annan, "Child combatants."
[215] Akello, "Child Agency," 441.
[216] Odiya, Interview.

al. found that 46% of women and 59% of men reported stigmatization.[217] Allen suggests the differences in research findings may be because Blattman and Annan sampled participants within a network of NGOs, whose beneficiaries would undoubtedly be better off than FCS not connected to NGOs. It is also possible that there were simply very diverse experiences among FCS. My interviews with practitioners who work closely with FCS had findings more similar to Allen et al. They noted that it may appear that the community is accepting of FCS publicly because that's what they have been told to say, but when you speak with community members one on one, they admit they still have stigma and fear towards them.[218] One informant cleverly compared the situation to the typical Ugandan food, posho, which is like a cornmeal. When posho is served, it may appear to be cool on top, but underneath, where no one can see, it's still piping hot. The continued widespread presence of stigma towards FCS to this day indicate that community sensitizations have not been effective in supporting psychosocial reintegration. In general, the programs lacked funding, coordination, and capacity to extend their reach.

Counseling

While rehabilitation centers, family reunification, and community sensitizations helped FCS to reintegrate socially, counselling is more focused on provided individualized psychological support. In Uganda, NGOs and CBOs have provided mental health support for FCS. Examples include the Transcultural Psychosocial Organization (TPO), which provides counselling and does outreach to provide services for FCS. UNICEF has also helped fund community-based counsellors, which can provide more culturally relevant therapy.[219] The only issues with counselling programs were, like many of the other psychosocial interventions, they

[217] Allen et al., "What Happened to Children," 664.
[218] Informant X, Interview.
[219] Barrett, "Navigating the Mystical," 431.

had limited reach. According to the literature and my interviews, psychological distress continues to be a major issue among FCS. In a study by Leeuwen et al. of nearly 1000 FCS in Uganda in 2018, over 75% of participants showed signs of PTSD.[220] When Jane Ekayu of Children of Peace Uganda conducted a recent study on bush wives and their children, she also said 'emotional breakdown' was common.[221] It is important to note these numbers are only of the FCS that are easier to reach and are likely connected to some NGOs. The rates of psychological distress may be more severe for FCS living in remote locations with even less community support. Some authors have also pointed out that counselling programs have lacked the expertise needed to handle the psychological needs of FCS. According to Wessells, there was not enough clinical support for people experiencing deep trauma, which is common among FCS.[222] Ultimately, non-profit counselling has benefitted numerous child soldiers in Uganda but still, there are thousands who have not received any mental health support at all, much less at the extent needed to work through the horrific violence they've endured.

Justice and Reconciliation

Justice and reconciliation interventions are beneficial for the FCS, their victims, and for the community as a whole. They help to create peace, and aid in the child soldier's psychosocial and economic integration back into the community. The Ugandan government has been most involved in this aspect of reintegration for FCS but has not been the sole player. The following section is divided between 1.) government-led legal and policy responses and 2.) informal community-based responses.

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[220] Leeuwen et al., *Forced to Fight*, 2.
[221] Ekayu, Interview.
[222] Michael Wessells, "Do No Harm: How Reintegration Programmes for Former Child Soldiers Can Create Unintended Harm," in *Research Handbook on Child Soldiers*, ed. by Mark A. Drumbl and Jastine C. Barrett (Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2019), 847.

First, the Ugandan government helped the ICC to indite the top five LRA commanders. None have been convicted except for Dominic Ongwen. The same LRA leaders have also been indicted by the Ugandan International Crimes Division.[223] No state actors have been prosecuted despite their role in the violence.[224] These prosecutions fall under retributive justice, which is based on harsh punishments to deter future crimes. However, when it came to all other former combatants, they were subject to restorative justice, which is focused on promoting peace and reconciliation rather than punishment. Under the Amnesty Act (2005), all former combatants who reported themselves to a local reporting office received amnesty. Amnesty was universal; all those who applied, received it.[225] In addition to an official amnesty certificate, FCS who applied for amnesty also received a reinsertion package of cash and daily household items (i.e., a mattress, clothing). The packages were funded by the World Bank and the Multi-Country Demobilization and Reintegration Program (MDRP). Many have viewed the program as a success; a total of 11,000 child soldiers received these packages to help them return to civilian life.[226]

While many FCS were satisfied with the packages, there have been some complaints from both FCS and their victims. For one, all FCS received amnesty and the same amount of financial aid, no matter the crimes they committed. It was the same amount for FCS who were kidnapped and forced into fighting and for the commanders who abducted them. It was also the same for someone who was held in captivity for a few weeks and for someone who spent a decade in the bush. [227] Studies have shown that children who spent more time away faced even

[223] *Not Without Us*, 9.
[224] School for International Training Lecture.
[225] Blattman & Annan, "Child combatants."
[226] Ibid, 10.
[227] Ibid, 11-12.

greater issues with reintegration, suggesting that a more targeted approach to amnesty would have been more appropriate.[228] To make matters worse, there was a lack of transparency by the government explaining who received what and why. Victims also felt frustration that the people who inflicted harm upon them were receiving support through these packages and they weren't.[229]

Other complaints were that the packages were delayed for a long time, leaving FCS with very little when they first returned home.[230] They were also very small. A staff member at the Justice and Reconciliation Project added that the amount of aid they received had little to no impact on the livelihood of FCS.[231] In general, amnesty in Uganda was criticized for not being targeted, for being insufficient, and for being delayed.

The only other form of compensation for FCS and other war-affected victims was the livestock compensation payment program. Those who lost cattle due to seizure by the LRA or the Ugandan government were entitled to make a claim for compensation. However, as many as 60,000 who have applied for the program have yet to receive compensation in just the Lango region of Northern Uganda alone.[232] The payments also do not compensate for any other loss of assets or for human rights violations committed against them, so they are not considered reparations. As one FCS put it crudely, the government would compensate people for a cow, but not a limb.[233]

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[228] See Blattman & Annan, "Consequences of Child Soldiering."
[229] Boniface, Interview.
[230] Blattman & Annan, "Child combatants," 11.
[231] Boniface, Interview.
[232] Bill Oketch, "60,000 Lango War Claimants Yet to Be Paid Four Years Later," Monitor, Nation Media Group, December 11, 2018, https://www.monitor.co.ug/uganda/news/national/60-000-lango-war-claimants-yet-to-be-paid-four-years-later-1795172.
[233] Discussion with the Women's Advocacy Network through SIT.

As far as reparations, 10% of war-affected persons report receiving payment as retribution from the government.[234] However, since the term reparations is viewed and defined differently across victims and practitioners, it is unclear if this 10% refers to amnesty packages, the cattle compensation, or true reparations to make amends for violence during the war. According to practitioners on the ground, many FCS have died of medical complications or suicide waiting for reparations that were promised long ago by the government.[235] Nonetheless, if the reparations were truly intended as compensation to apologize for the violence victims have endured, they would be considered to be transitional justice. As a reminder, unlike restorative and retributive justice that works on an individual level, transitional justice is a nationwide response to systematic human rights abuses. [236] Since the top commanders of the LRA perpetrated human rights violations on a mass scale, their prosecutions are also considered transitional justice.

In addition to these two mechanisms, government also designed policies to more comprehensively contribute to transitional justice. One effort was the government-sanctioned creation of the Northern Uganda Transitional Justice Working Group (NUTJWP), a coalition of civil society members who work with the government and the Justice Law and Order Sector (JLOS) to advocate for justice for victims in Northern Uganda.[237] The second mechanism was through the National Transitional Justice Policy (NTJP). The policy has four pillars: accountability, truth seeking, reparations, and non-recurrence.[238] Under each pillar, the NTJP

[234] *Not Without Us*, 9.
[235] School for International Training Lecture; Site Visit at the Justice and Reconciliation Project through SIT, attended by author, October 26, 2023.
[236] Boniface, Interview; Grace Akello, "Reintegration of Amnestied LRA Ex-Combatants and Survivors' Resistance Acts in Acholiland, Northern Uganda," *International Journal of Transitional Justice* 13, no.2 (2019): 252.
[237] "Northern Uganda Transitional Justice Working Group (NUTJWG)," PeaceInsight, Peace Direct, August 2015, https://www.peaceinsight.org/en/organisations/nutjwg/?location=uganda&theme.
[238] *Not Without Us*, 6.

describes the research-based strategies Uganda should take toward reconciliation, the challenges to implementing these strategies, and then specific recommendations. It also discusses intentions to support traditional justice mechanisms. The policy has major potential and is the first transitional justice policy in the African Union.[239] However, the policy has remained on paper for the last ten years, only introduced to Congress five years ago. If the NTJP actually made it into law, it could create real change, but it is not without its own set of critiques.

Criticisms of the NTJP have largely surrounded victim participation and the lack of programming for child soldiers. The NTJP has been lauded for its commitment to citizen participation through consultations with victims. However, according to a report by Redress, participation was not as robust as it should have been.[240] Many victims felt excluded, especially those that live in hard-to-reach rural areas, and the victims that were included were only consulted after the NTJP had been drafted. The report also indicates that there has been a lack of communication by the government with affected communities and civil society organizations about the progress of the NTJP.[241] The NTJP also does not explicitly mention the particular issue of child soldiers nor targets them in proposed programming. With these limitations and the fact that the NTJP has yet to be passed, many feel that true transitional justice has yet to be implemented in Uganda.[242] Nonetheless, they are hopeful NTJP can provide long-needed support, especially in the form of reparations.

Interestingly, victims have been somewhat resistant to the government's restorative justice approach to FCS. According to Akello, this approach, based on amnesty, forgiveness, and

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[239] Ministry of Internal Affairs, *National Transitional Justice Policy* (Kampala, Uganda: Ministry of Internal Affairs, 2019), 6, https://drive.google.com/file/d/1zbqYZgRVpUpDrQUTM5c_GeMsuItrB9O2/view.6
[240] *Not Without Us*, 7.
[241] *Not Without Us*, 8.
[242] Boniface, Interview.

innocence of FCS was forced onto survivors who preferred retributive justice and wanted the LRA and government to take accountability.[243] Victims also did not receive financial support like the amnesty packages FCS received, nor has there been any government-mandated truth-telling commissions to validate the experiences of victims. This led to what Akello calls acts of resistance by community members, or the shaming, harassment, and revenge toward FCS.[244] Essentially, since victims were not receiving justice through an institutional framework, they took it upon themselves to implement justice socially. According to Akello, this indicates that the government's reconciliation efforts were not effective. This has hindered the social reintegration of FCS.

In sum, the government's approaches to justice and reconciliation have combined restorative, retributive, and transitional justice, though they have not been robust. The major criticisms have been the universal application of amnesty and insufficient support for both FCS and other victims. Since the government failed to provide proper justice and reconciliation, many informal community-based solutions sprouted up.

One commonly cited example in the literature is traditional justice rituals. Most of these rituals were conducted in the IDP camps during the war by elders or the cultural institution Ker Kwaro Acholi, though support also came from organizations like UNICEF. The most popular of these traditions is mato opu or drinking the bitter root. During Mato Oput, the FCS will voluntarily tell the truth of the crimes they committed, and their clan will take responsibility for it. At times, there is also compensation, like a sheep, to the victim. This ritual helps to rid the FCS of the evil spirit of cen and to provide restorative justice. During lwoko pik wang, or

[243] Akello, "Reintegration of Amnestied," 251.
[244] Ibid, 252.

washing away tears ceremony, a goat is slaughtered, and blessings are given to the FCS.[245] It's a type of spiritual cleansing ceremony, which were especially important for reintegrating female former combatants. In general, these traditional approaches are considered effective, especially when there is an accountability measure involved like compensation.[246]

However, these ceremonies have not been as robust or totally effective as some of the academic literature portrays. Only a small portion of the FCS population, around 25%, participated in these ceremonies.[247] This is due in part to the cost of the ceremonies for the FCS and the dwindling influence and reach of cultural institutions. [248] In addition, the ceremonies didn't always lead to improved reintegration. For example, if community members knew that the FCS played an active role in perpetrating violence, such as by being a commander, these practices did very little.[249] For the FCS themselves, the guilt still remained after these ceremonies, so it did not benefit their psychosocial reintegration.[250] Finally, in the Amnesty Act and other announcements, the Ugandan government claimed it would support these traditional justice mechanisms, though there has been little evidence of this.

Community-based approaches have been able to provide justice in the absence of government intervention, though they have not been as extensive or effective as is portrayed in the literature. In addition to cleansing and reconciliation ceremonies, there has also been community-based initiatives to promote reconciliation through youth clubs and sports activities for FCS and other victims. Several NGOs and CBOs have also done extensive work advocating for justice to government.[251]

[245] Akello, "Child Agency," 417, 418.
[246] Barrett, "Navigating the Mystical," 432.
[247] Ibid, 421; Allen et al., "What Happened to Children," 670.
[248] Odiya, Interview.
[249] Barrett, "Navigating the Mystical," 423.
[250] Informant X, Interview.
[251] See, for example, the work of Children of Peace Uganda.

Conclusion on Psychosocial Interventions

The major psychosocial interventions in Uganda have been rehabilitation centers, family reunification, counselling, and justice and reconciliation. Besides a few legal processes, most of the interventions were implemented by non-state actors. Their work has been lifesaving for thousands of FCS. However, these non-state actors simply lack the capacity to reach the thousands of FCS in desperate need. In the following chapter, I discuss the how their interventions have aligned or strayed away from best practices, as well as outside factors that have affected their ability to reach more FCS.

4.6 Economic Interventions

As previously noted, there has been a much larger emphasis on psychosocial reintegration in Uganda (with good reason), but that has left economic reintegration as an afterthought. There have been very few economic interventions specifically targeted for FCS in Uganda, though there were numerous regional development programs in Northern Uganda following the war. The next section is divided between governmental broad-based development initiatives and non-governmental targeted approaches.

Governmental Broad-based Development

The Ugandan government has focused more on broad-based economic development initiatives in Northern Uganda rather than programs targeted to FCS. They anticipated that improvements to the economy in Northern Uganda would trickle down to victims of war, including former child soldiers. The first of these policies was the Northern Uganda Social Action Fund (NUSAF), which was funded by the World Bank. Its primary focused areas were funding community-led development projects, skills training, asset building, and

infrastructure.[252] There have been three phases in total. According to the Office of the Prime Minister, over three million people in Northern Uganda have benefited from the program. [253] Despite multiple reports of corruption and stealing from the program, NUSAF has been able to hit several of its targets and has had a generally positive economic impact. For example, participants of their Youth Opportunity Program improved their incomes by 41%.[254] While NUSAF was beneficial for general development in the region, it was not an explicit reintegration program. It is possible that the community projects helped to reintegrate some FCS. For example, Labora Farms was a farming project funded by NUSAF that provided FCS with livelihoods and a means to socially reintegrate.[255] However, Labora Farms had a number of controversies surrounding it and FCS reintegration was still not a main goal of NUSAF.

The other major broad-based development and recovery program was the PRDP, which also had three phases. The main pillars were state authority, rebuilding communities, repairing the northern economy, and peacebuilding. Again, while the PRDP was able to hit several of its objectives, it was tainted by corruptions scandals. This meant that less money reached the ground and many other objectives went unmet. In addition, reintegration was just one small part of the PRDP and has been fairly general. It has only reiterated intentions to continue with family reunification and reinsertion packages. PRDP Phase 1 also claimed that skills training would be provided but according to my interviews, it doesn't appear this ever occurred. Dr. Boniface, who has been working with FCS for nearly 20 years, says he has never heard of any FCS who benefited from the PRDP directly. In fact, only 7% of the 3,000 people surveyed in Northern

[252] Simon Kisaka, "How NUSAF has changed lives in Northern Uganda," OPM Office of the Prime Minister, July 5, 2021, https://opm.go.ug/nusaf3-has-transformed-lives-in-northern-uganda/.
[253] Ibid.
[254] Chris Blattman, Nathan Fiala, and Sebastian Martinez, "NUSAF-YOP: Youth Opportunity Program," Poverty Action Lab, J-PAL, n.d., https://www.povertyactionlab.org/evaluation/nusaf-yop-youth-opportunity-program.
[255]"Labora Farms," Wikipedia, July 17, 2021, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Labora_Farms.

Uganda reported benefiting directly from the PRDP.[256] They reported that most projects were infrastructure projects, like roads, police vehicles, and homes for chiefs. Though there were consultations with some FCS and other vulnerable groups, experts indicate it was minimal.[257] The PRDP has also been hindered by a lack of long-term planning and government commitment, gender-based discrimination, limited funding, poor facilitation among local governments, weak monitoring and evaluation, and other issues with functionality.[258]

Both development programs have struggled with corruption and mismanagement, and neither target FCS or victims of war.[259] Some more targeted approaches implemented by the government, like the building of a vocational school in Lira and in Gulu for FCS, have been left abandoned. Other examples of broad-based development initiatives in northern Uganda have been the Northern Uganda Rehabilitation Program (NUREP), Northern Uganda Agricultural Livelihoods Program (ALREP), the Youth Livelihood Program (YLP), and Development Initiative for Northern Uganda (DINO).[260] Dr. Boniface contends that the development in these practices have not trickled down to FCS as intended. As with other policies in Uganda, the benefits of these projects have remained largely on paper.

Targeted Non-governmental Approaches

Targeted economic interventions in Uganda have been minimal; even NGOs have placed a greater emphasis on psychosocial reintegration.[261] Nonetheless, programs include engaging FCS in income-generating activities, settling land disputes, educational support, providing

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[256] "The Peace, Recovery, and Development Plan," Peacebuilding Data, n.d., http://www.peacebuildingdata.org/research/uganda/results/transitioning-to-peace/prdp.
[257] Robert S. Esuruku, "Horizons of Peace and Development in Northern Uganda," Accord, August 19, 2011. https://www.accord.org.za/ajcr-issues/horizons-of-peace-and-development-in-northern-uganda/.
[258] Ibid.
[259] Akello, "Reintegration of Amnestied," 266; Ekayu, Interview.
[260] Site Visit to Gulu Women's Economic Development-Globalization (GWED-G) through SIT, attended by author, October 26, 2021.
[261] Blattman & Annan, "Child combatants," 2.

startup capital, medical assistance, and vocational training. Notable NGOs and CBOs that have worked or are currently working on economic reintegration are Watye-Ki-Gen (WKG), Gulu Women's Economic Development-Globalization (GWED-G), Save the Children, UNICEF, and the Women's Advocacy Network (WAN).

The first, the Women's Advocacy Network or WAN, focuses on asset building. It operates under the Justice and Reconciliation Project (JRP) whose staff I interviewed for this project. WAN empowers savings groups made up of female FCS. These groups are called SACCOs, or Savings and Credit Cooperative Organizations, in which every week, each member contributes a small amount of money so the group can save enough money to buy materials for an income-generating activity, such as craft making or animal rearing. WAN now has 22 SACCOs around northern Uganda.[262] SACCOs have become a popular way to engage FCS in the economy in Northern Uganda. They tend to work well for FCS, except for those who have zero capital.[263] At WAN, other people in the community became skeptical of seeing FCS forming in groups. To reduce this stigma and promote equity, WAN began including non-combatants in the savings groups. Similarly, Gulu Women's Economic Development and Globalization (GWED-G), a grassroots NGO, partners with over 100 of these women's groups and 18 CBOs in the region.[264]

Skills training is more difficult to come by. Some rehabilitation centers offered skills training soon after the war and organizations like War Child provided training on income-generating activities like beekeeping, welding, and animal keeping.[265] However, as recent as 2016, a study by Kim et al. found that there is currently only one formal vocational program that

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[262] Discussion with the Women's Advocacy Network through SIT.
[263] Ekayu, Interview.
[264] Site Visit to GWED-G through SIT.
[265] Quinto, Interview.

serves FCS in Gulu and Lira (two cities in Northern Ugandan with large FCS populations).[266] Some NGOs in the region offer more informal training for skills like business or computer skills, but these projects are rarely evaluated and lack proper funding, which can hurt their effectiveness in the long-term. [267] In general, according to the founder of CPU, just 15-20% FCS have likely received any skilling interventions.[268] According to Allen et al., skills-training and education was more likely to be given to those who served in leadership positions and who served for longer durations.[269] This meant that those who were kidnapped for shorter time periods, of just a month or so, were unable to reap these benefits, making economic reintegration even more challenging.

Even among those who received the skills, stigma has hindered their ability to make a living. Children of Peace Uganda (CPU) has helped to provide support for small startups to FCS, but stigma prevents people from buying their products.[270] As such, most of the businesses have failed. Similarly, when the JRP provided former female combatants with goats, no one would buy from them at the market and other people in the community began killing the goats.[271]

As a result of these limitations, in 2006, less than a quarter of FCS surveyed had a job, and most of these jobs offered work for just two weeks out of the month.[272] In another study published several years later in 2020, 62.5% of the 62 FCS surveyed feared food shortages compared to just a quarter of non-combatants. Their incomes were also far lower than average in the region.[273] Many FCS have had to take on informal employment like cleaning or prostitution,

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[266] Kim et al., *Making the Most of* Reintegration, 21.
[267] Young, "Preventing, Demobilizing, Rehabilitating."
[268] Ekayu, Interview.
[269] Allen et al., "What Happened to Children," 665.
[270] Ekayu, Interview.
[271] Odiya, Interview.
[272] Kristin E. Henderson, "Missing Link: The Rehabilitation of Child Soldiers," (Master's Thesis, California State University, 2015), 64, https://csuchico-dspace.calstate.edu/bitstream/handle/10211.3/144861/henderson.thesis.formatted.pdf?sequence=1.
[273] Molly Chen Yolanne Li, *Consulting Project for Global Livingston Institute & Children of Peace Uganda* (Ithaca: Cornell University, 2020),

especially the women and children born of war who moved to Gulu town to escape stigma.[274] Several female FCS in Gulu have formed informal groups to support one another and help connect to resources. Some use the groups to start self-help initiatives as well. According to Dr. Boniface of the JRP, he encountered 16 of these groups in his research. Other FCS who have not been able to find support networks like these have been driven to crime, and many of the children born of war are now homeless.[275]

Conclusion on Economic Reintegration

In conclusion, economic reintegration interventions in Uganda have been minimal. The existing government programs are mismanaged and do not target FCS, while community-based solutions lack capacity. As a result, FCS continue to lack land, skills, and capital to support themselves. This has led to the majority of FCS living in deep poverty.

Conclusion on Reintegration in Uganda

While some have concluded that the reintegration of FCS in Uganda has been successful,[276] a majority in the literature and of those I interviewed believe it has not been sufficient. For example, according to the Coordinator of Save the Children, Uganda, of the 300 children who were rescued and reintegrated in 2004/2005, none were found in the same communities they were reintegrated into, suggesting reintegration did not work.[277] As previously

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https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5be066eca9e028fe088be707/t/5ff48ce10f63d0051d5dbd63/1609862371399/GLI_CPU_Final+Report_22Dec2020.pdf.

[274] Boniface, Interview; School for International Training (SIT) Lecture on Gender Complexities of Planning Reconstruction, Resettlement, and Recovery, attended by author, October 26, 2021.

[275] Boniface, Interview.

[276] See Sally Sharif, "A Critical Review of Evidence from Ex-Combatant Reintegration Programs," (Politics of Return Wokring Paper No. 2, Centre for Public Authority and International Development, London, 2018), https://eprints.lse.ac.uk/90890/6/SallySharif_DDR_paper.pdf; World Bank, *Demobilization and Integration in Uganda: Laying the Foundation for Post-conflict Recovery by Building Regional Peace* (Washington, DC: World Bank, 2013).

[277] Grace Akello, Annemiek Richters, and Ria Reis, "Reintegration of former child soldiers in northern Uganda: Coming to terms with children's agency and accountability." *Intervention: International Journal of Mental Health, Psychosocial Work & Counselling in Areas of Armed Conflict* 4, no. 3 (2006): 229–243.

noted, many FCS in Uganda moved to more urban areas to escape stigma. This trend, as well as reports of extreme poverty, unemployment, harassment, and psychological distress among FCS support this notion.

Among FCS, there is a common sentiment of feeling abandoned. As Dr. Boniface put it, the reintegration of FCS has become an "an old question," and no longer a priority in Uganda. However, in taking a critical lens of the reintegration program, it is important to recognize the immense efforts of the community, NGOs, and foreign donors. Many of the informants also expressed gratitude for the programs the Ugandan government has implemented. It was also noted that at times, support and opportunities were there, but FCS simply lacked information on how to retrieve them.[278]

In general, there appeared to be two types of FCS, those who were well-connected with NGOs and therefore better off, and those that were entirely unaware of opportunities for support, and as a result, left behind. According to my informants, the FCS most likely to get support were living in urban areas, wealthy, and/or had families involved in local advocacy for FCS. [279] There was also mixed responses to the question of support for women. The literature and some of my informants said female FCS were less supported than men, but others said that since men were expected to fend for themselves, women received more targeted programs.[280] Again, due to lack of recordkeeping and inconsistent or mismanaged monitoring and evaluation, it's difficult to make any sweeping conclusions about specific details regarding reintegration in Uganda. However, it can be concluded that reintegration was subpar in Uganda. In the following chapter,

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[278] Odiya, Interview.
[279] Allen et al., "What Happened to Children," 674.; Ekayu, Interview.
[280] Odiya, Interview.

I discuss how Uganda's reintegration compares to best practices and some possible explanations for these results.

Chapter 5: Comparison to Best Practices

5.1 Comparison to Best Practices

In this chapter, I discuss how reintegration in Uganda has both aligned with and strayed from best practices in the field. I give a ranking of low, medium, or high for each best practice to indicate the extent to which Ugandan reintegration strategies followed best practices. I also use the indicators of success from Table 1 in the methods section to highlight some of these trends. It is important to note that since there were hundreds of different interventions, it is difficult to make sweeping conclusions about whether each one met the following best practices. The following analysis is based on my own observations of the programs and projects I found and included in the previous chapter.

A. In Combination with Psychosocial Interventions

Indicators of success:

- Presence and robustness of psychosocial interventions
- Inclusion of family reunification and counselling

Ranking: Medium

Economic reintegration of FCS in Uganda has generally followed Best Practice A. There have been multiple psychosocial interventions that have in effect, helped to reintegrate FCS into the local economy by reducing stigma and helping FCS to heal emotionally. However, these programs have not been far-reaching nor long-term. The continued presence of stigma, demand for justice, and psychological distress among FCS indicate that these interventions have not been implemented at a large enough scale for a long enough time. The same is true of the second indicator; family reunification and counselling were present in the reintegration process but were not robust. Family reunification has been a priority for reintegration in Uganda. However, Allen

et al. has brought up concerns about the use of family reunification in Uganda. While entirely removing family reunification would present a host of new challenges, it is possible that adjustments or alternatives could be made to the process. For example, parents might be required to undergo certain training to reduce their own biases before bringing their child home or alternative housing might have been provided for children who were old enough to live on their own. In general, family reunification would have been more effective if other components of reintegration were more thorough, such as community sensitizations and justice and reconciliation, as they would have helped to reduce these stigmas. Above all, ensuring the best interest of the child (under Best Practice G: Protection of the Rights of the Child) is the number one best practice that should be followed. So, if other best practices, such as family reunification, oppose the best interest of the child, they should not be followed.

B. Integrated Approach Centered on Community

Indicators:

- Reintegration is part of long-term national development planning
- Coordination between local, national, and international efforts
- Community participation
- Support of community projects

Ranking: Low

Failure to follow Best Practice (B) appears to have been one of the greatest barriers to properly reintegrating FCS in Uganda. Uganda only adequately fulfilled two of the four indicators for this best practice. First, reintegration was added to long-term regional development planning, namely through the PRDP and NUSAF. However, reintegration made up just a few lines in these policies. Similarly, the PRDP and NUSAF were both mentioned in the Ugandan

National Development Plan, though there is little evidence that reintegration has been meaningfully included in national planning beyond these formalities. Second, coordination between implementing actors was not substantial, despite government policies and reports repeatedly calling for it. This has perhaps been one of the greatest setbacks to the process as it's led to a chaotic, uncoordinated response to a complex and systematic issue. Third, community participation was integral to several policies related to reintegration, though respondents have indicated that consultations were superficial or rushed.[281] For example, the government rarely spoke directly to FCS.[282] Finally, the Ugandan government did provide support for community projects through NUSAF, meaning it was successful in this indicator. However, I was unable to find evidence that the government fulfilled its promised to support community-based reconciliation efforts, such as traditional cleansing ceremonies.

C. Focus on Demand and Supply

Indicators:

- Balanced focus on skills-training and job creation
- Changes to macro-economic policy for job creation
- Flexible education that teaches life skills (e.g., financial literacy) and basic literacy and numeracy
- Market-appropriate vocational training

Ranking: Low

There has not been sufficient attention paid to demand or supply. Skills-training interventions have been afforded to a select few, and there has been evidence of these programs not being

[281] SIT Lecture on Gender Complexities.
[282] Ekayu, Interview.

market-appropriate. I was unable to find interventions that provided educational interventions. The only educational interventions I came across were scholarships or coverage of school fees. On the supply side, while job creation has been mentioned in policies such as the PRDP, I was unable to find their outcomes. However, unemployment remains a consistent issue not just among FCS in Northern Uganda, but for all citizens across the country. While the lack of available jobs has inevitably hurt FCS, stigma and a lack of skills have equally created friction for FCS to entering the economy.

D. Attention to Intersectional Identities

Indicators:

- Special programming for girls
- Percentage of female participants
- Inclusive services for children with disabilities

Ranking: Medium

Economic reintegration in Uganda did provide extra support to girls, though it was not sufficient to combat the extra challenges they faced in reintegration. There was special programming provided for female combatants, such as through the Women's Advocacy Network or GWED-G. However, the governmental programs, such as the PRDP, made no mention of gender complexities. There was also mention from one of the informants of discrimination against women in PRDP programming. In terms of reintegration more generally, there was no information available on the percentage of participants that were female. I also did not come across any programs specifically targeting children with disabilities. However, there were medical programs that provided surgeries for children with severe injuries. Unfortunately, these programs were few and under-funded. In terms of other intersectional identities, the programs in

Uganda did not pay attention to the disparities between support for different groups. For example, poorer children who lived in more rural areas were less likely to receive support. Reintegration actors in Uganda needed to identify the FCS who were more likely to be left behind and conduct targeted outreach to them.

E. Equity

Indicators:

- Services offered to community members
- Community projects

Ranking: Medium

Best Practice E unfolded in an interesting way in Uganda. The broad-based development programs like NUSAF and PRDP did provide support to communities in Northern Uganda at large, which indicates Uganda upheld the principle of equity. Though, as previously discussed, their benefits did not often reach the ground. Interestingly, in the case of amnesty, equity was applied, but was not seen as a positive trait. FCS called for more targeted means of implementing amnesty that differentiated between types of FCS.

At other times in the reintegration process, equity was not followed. For example, victims of war felt left behind as FCS received support. In addition, as one informant noted, the use of broad-based development strategies without targeted support to victims and FCS presented a situation in which the most impacted people went without support. These findings suggest that the inclusion of targeted programming should also be a feature of best practices.

F. Long Term

Indicators:

- Program lasts 3-5 years

- Evidence of sustained M & E

Ranking: Low

Most reintegration interventions in Uganda were not long-term. Government rehabilitation centers only supported children for a little over a month and did not provide any follow-up care. Afterward, FCS had to find NGOs for support, whose interventions vary significantly in length. Though there are some long-term interventions, there has not been any national reintegration planning to coordinate these interventions and ensure their sustainability. For the second indicator, I was able to find published outcomes of monitoring and evaluation (M & E) from some government and NGO programs. However, these results included mainly numerical targets rather than follow-up consultations with community members. This makes it difficult to determine the holistic and long-term impacts of reintegration programs.

G. Protection of the Rights of the Child

- Non-discrimination
- No clear violations of the rights of the child as outlined in the CRC
- Following the Paris Principles
- Child participation
- Restorative justice

Ranking: Medium

First and foremost, it must be recognized that the Ugandan government violated the right to the protection from war according to the Convention on the Rights of the Child both by being unable to prevent the recruitment of tens of thousands of child soldiers and by recruiting its own child soldiers. In the reintegration process, the government has also failed to follow several of the Paris Principles for Children Associated with Armed Forces. For one, the lack of adequate

reintegration services constitutes the violation of the principle of ensuring the child's right to life, survival, and development. The report of gender-based discrimination by the PRDP also violates this right, as well as the principle of non-discrimination. The second principle that the Ugandan government did not adequately fulfill was the participation of the child in reintegration. While FCS were at times consulted, consultations were often surface-level and not up to the standards desired by FCS and the community. Finally, the Ugandan government did not follow the guiding principles on justice because it did not provide adequate transitional justice mechanisms to FCS and other victims. The government's prosecution of the top LRA commanders was by far the most significant step taken toward transitional justice. Other efforts, such as the design of the NTJP, have yet to make meaningful contributions to transitional justice.

Despite these violations, it is important to recognize that the government and other key actors did implement some of the guidelines outlined in the Paris Principles. For example, family reunification was prioritized as the guidelines recommend. However, this has posed an interesting dilemma in the case of Uganda. Allen et al. argued that family reunification violated the key principle of ensuring the best interest of the child because he claimed it created more harm than good. In fact, Allen et al. has called for the re-consideration of including family reunification in the Paris Principles. However, as the principles remain now, the Ugandan government did what was deemed best according to the document.

Key actors have also respected the victimhood of the child through amnesty and community sensitizations. However, the Paris Principles also describe the need to have some measure of accountability to ensure the best interest of the child through social reintegration, namely through restorative rather than retributive justice. Restorative justice was not systematically implemented

in Uganda. Only a small percentage of FCS participated in community-based reconciliation efforts.

Conclusion on Uganda's Alignment with Best Practices

Though economic reintegration in Uganda has aligned with best practices in some respects, it has only done so in parts. It has failed to provide successful results on all of the indicators of a single best practice. Economic reintegration has most closely aligned with the inclusion of psychosocial interventions and protecting the rights of the child, though has not met all of their requirements. Reintegration in Uganda has strayed the most from using an integrated approach centered on community, focus on demand and supply, attention to intersection identities, equity, and long-term. It is possible that smaller interventions, especially by non-state actors, have been able to implement many of these practices but at a much smaller scale than might be possible if it was done in coordination or with the support of government.

From the analysis of the case in Uganda, I found that my list of best practices is incomplete. It should also include using targeted approaches in addition to broad-based community initiatives to ensure that FCS and other victims receive appropriate support. In addition, further research should be conducted to evaluate the appropriateness of family reunification in all reintegration contexts. Above all, it's become clear that the best practices to economically reintegrating FCS cannot be applied in a blind, universal manner. They must be tailored to match the unique needs of each post-conflict setting. Finally, though it is clear that reintegration in Uganda has been hindered by a failure to follow best practices, other outside factors help to provide a more complete picture of why these practices were not followed and why reintegration was not effective.

5.2 Barriers to Effective Reintegration

Political, Economic, and Cultural Context

When speaking with the informants in my study, the lack of political will was perhaps the most common explanation for poor reintegration in Uganda. It's not that the Ugandan government didn't know what to do (their policies acknowledge the improvements that needed to be made, many of which included the above best practices), they just didn't do it. According to my informants, once Kony left the country, the government saw the war as over and moved on to other issues.[283] They contended that the Ugandan government was too focused on security, not understanding that "peace goes beyond the sound of the gun."[284] Beyond this indifference, Dr. Faulkner noted that ethnic tensions that led to the Northern Ugandan remained after the cessation of fighting. As such, the Ugandan government, criticized for being anti-Acholi, was unwilling to support former LRA combatants who rebelled against the government. While in other conflicts, there is often a transition in government following the war, the same government that was involved in fighting during the war is still leading the country today.[285] This helps to explain why reintegration may have looked different in Uganda than in other countries.

In addition to the lack of political will, the Ugandan government also struggles with corruption, poor implementation, mismanagement, and lack of resources. These challenges have hindered the state's ability to implement national development policies as a whole and have also hurt the reintegration process. Some informants noted that if the government does not provide for its citizens normally, how could it possibly be able to, or want to, support FCS?

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[283] Ekayu, Interview.
[284] Odiya, Interview.
[285]Boniface, Interview; Ekayu, Interview; Faulkner, Interview; Young, "Preventing, Demobilizing, Rehabilitating."

The lack of political will and limited government capacity left non-state actors to fill the gaps in needs of FCS. Not only were NGOs and other non-state actors severely restrained by funding and capacity, the government also deliberately limited the work of NGOs. In Uganda, NGOs are subject to close scrutiny and surveillance by the government, which will shut down NGOs suspected to be critical of the government or working on controversial issues. According to one NGO, over 50 NGOs supporting FCS were shut down by the government.[286]

Reintegration was also hindered by the economic and cultural context of Uganda. Since FCS were returning to already poor families, their prospects were already dim-looking regardless of their experiences in war. Unemployment is extremely high in the country, and reliance on an agricultural industry that collapsed in the war meant there was next to zero opportunities for anyone to make a living in the region. In terms of cultural context, beliefs in cen and the role of women in Acholi society made it more difficult for FCS to reintegrate. In addition, since the cultural institutions were displaced by war, they could not play a more robust role in reintegration as in the case in other countries.[287] In sum, the specific political, economic, and cultural context of Northern Uganda provided challenges that made implementing best practices more difficult and at times, fruitless.

Funding

Funding has been a major issue for reintegration in Uganda, as in many other countries. Donor funding has significantly decreased as other issues in the world have been deemed more pressing, and as FCS have become adults, and therefore perceived as less vulnerable. One informant put the issue as follows:

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[286] Site Visit to GWED-G through SIT.
[287] Boniface, Interview.

> The government have made a wrong statement that Northern Uganda is in peace. So, this kind of makes an understanding of the international world, that the people in Northern Uganda are no longer in need of …support. And that's the reason why donors have shifted their interest from supporting transitional justice into emergency refugee programs. And yet, reintegration and reconciliation should take more than the years of war.[288]

In addition, donors have become hesitant to give when there have multiple reports of embezzling funds for reintegration in Uganda. This has also decreased the reach of these funds by reducing the amount that gets to the ground. Donors also tend to prefer to donate to consortiums or coalitions, so the lack of coordination between actors has hindered their fundraising abilities.[289]

Data

Poor data-keeping had shown up multiple times as a barrier to reintegration in Uganda and reflects a more general trend of mismanagement in the process. One of the greatest issues related to data is that there is not a single list with all the names of the FCS who were kidnapped. Rehabilitation centers often failed to collect information or lost records. For example, 11,000 records at the World Vision reception center went missing.[290] At the same time, many children lied about their identity for fear of being punished.[291] The NTJP has cited that one of the primary barriers to giving reparations to FCS is the absence of a database with the names, locations, types of FCS, and their needs. As such, the creation of this database has been cited as one of the most pressing needs for FCS.[292]

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[288] Odiya, Interview.
[289] Odiya, Interview; Ekayu, Interview; Faulkner, Interview.
[290] Allen et al., "What Happened to Children," 666.
[291] Kim et al., *Making the Most of* Reintegration, 15; Interview, Faulkner.
[292]Boniface, Interview; Odiya, Interview.

5.3 Efforts Toward Reintegration in Uganda Today

These challenges have not been missed by the hundreds of actors continuing to fight for proper reintegration for FCS. Today, most of the FCS are 18 to 25 years old, and still facing many of the same issues they did when they first returned home as children.[293] There is much work being done by NGOs, CBOs, IGOs, civil society organizations, community members, and survivors of war to advocate for better reintegration of FCS. The most collaborative effort has been the Nairobi Process, a coalition of seventeen countries around the world that have faced similar issues with reintegration. The project was established by the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict (SRSG CAAC). The goal is to facilitate consultations with FCS, asses the strengths and weaknesses of each reintegration program, and to make recommendations to key actors like national governments, the UN, the African Union, NGOs, and donors on next steps. [294] During the International Symposium in March of 2023, these recommendations will be presented. Afterward, the national governments and foreign donors will begin implementation. The Nairobi process can provide essential improvements to reintegration for FCS in Uganda. Most importantly, it will provide a comprehensive framework to guide reintegration, which has been suboptimal in Uganda. The passage of the NJTP, which has promised reparations, also gives hope for the future. In addition, if the Dominic Ongwen case surpasses appeals, FCS will receive additional reparations from the ICC.

[293] Odiya, Interview.
[294] "Nairobi Process," Children and Armed Conflict, United Nations, n.d., https://childrenandarmedconflict.un.org/nairobi-process/.

5.4 Conclusion

According to my informants, there have been very few, if any, fully successful cases of economic reintegration of child soldiers in any country around the world. More often, there are only certain projects or pieces that are successful or effective. This was no different in Uganda. This paper has summarized the best practices in the field and provided some exemplary applications of these practices. These best practices should be revised to match the specific political, economic, and cultural contexts of each post-conflict environment. In addition, I have discussed numerous interventions and strategies of economic reintegration to contribute to a comprehensive understanding of reintegration of FCS in Uganda, which has been lacking in the literature. Most notably, I found that reintegration in Uganda has been an ad hoc process, largely driven by NGOs, rather than a coordinated national strategy. Last, I analyzed reintegration strategies in Uganda according to best practices in the field to reveal that economic reintegration of FCS in Uganda faltered from best practices more often than it followed them. From my research, it appears that a lack of political will, due to Uganda's unique post-conflict environment, has likely been the main cause for this trend.

In spite of decades of lackluster involvement by the government, civil society organizations have successfully coordinated with the UN through the Nairobi Process to continue to push reintegration to the forefront of the government agenda. As the process unfolds, lack of political will may continue to be an issue, but proponents are hopeful that with the support of other national governments and the UN, the Ugandan government will take action. Funding issues also have the potential to hinder new programs under the Nairobi Process. However, it is likely that foreign donations to the region will increase as the reintegration effort in Uganda becomes more coordinated and centralized under this process.

Recommendations from the Nairobi Process will provide the basis of a new approach to reintegration in Uganda. In addition, several key authors and stakeholders in the field have made several detailed recommendations for how Uganda should move forward in the economic reintegration of FCS.[295] Nonetheless, I include a brief summary of the major recommendations that appeared most frequently in my research. First, the urgent needs of FCS must be met swiftly. Many FCS are unable to meet their basic needs (such as food and healthcare) due to the extreme poverty they experience. When asked, FCS and the NGOs who work with them commonly cite the necessity of reparations to fulfill these gaps. They request reparations in the form of financial support (e.g., cash, loans, seed money to start a business), vocational training, community development projects (e.g., a school), and support for income-generating activities (e.g., a cow to sell milk). One informant suggested that while the process for formal reparations remains under way, emergency reparations should be provided to FCS in the meantime. Related to reparations, informants cited the dire need for a registration of all FCS and other victims of war with their names, locations, and needs. With this information, the government will be able to implement a systematic distribution of reparations and more fully understand the current status of FCS, as well as the severity of the issue. Similarly, NGOs and foreign donors will have a better idea of gaps and overlaps in services.

In addition to reparations, programs focusing on social reintegration can provide FCS better opportunities to reintegrate into the local economy. Despite popular discourse that champions the notion of widespread forgiveness of FCS, stigma continues to be one of the largest barriers to economic reintegration. As such, informants dictated the need for more

[295] See Leeuwen et al., *Forced to Fight*; *Not Without Us*; Sofia Vindevogel, Michael Wessells, Maarten De Schryver, Eric Brokaert, and Ilse Derulyn, "Informal and Form Supports for Former Child Soldiers in Northern Uganda," *The Scientific World Journal* 2012, no. 825028 (2012); Blattman & Annan, "Child combatants."

community sensitizations. Efforts toward reconciliation, such as through truth-seeking commissions, can also address stigma from a deeper level. Above all, FCS and other victims of war, should be consulted not only on their needs, but their ideas for how best those needs can be met. Consultations should be systematic and equitable, ensuring that even the hardest to reach FCS are included. They should also be conducted with other victims of war, who have received even less support than FCS. In addition, consultations must occur not only at the start of new reintegration programs, but throughout the entire process of implementation and after the program has concluded. Fortunately, consultations with FCS and other victims of war have been a staple of the Nairobi Process.

Despite decades of suboptimal results in the economic reintegration of FCS in Uganda, if the government and other non-state actors act on these recommendations and follow best practices, there is hope that the condition of FCS in the region will improve. This will not only uplift thousands of vulnerable people who have felt left behind but will contribute to preserving sustainable peace in the region. In addition, if delayed reintegration efforts in Uganda are successful, it can provide a model to other countries in which reintegration originally failed. This paper has aimed to contribute to this critical discussion.

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Appendix A

Interview Guide

1. Tell me a bit about your background either researching or working with child soldiers.
2. In your experience, what appear to be the greatest needs of former child soldiers?
3. Can you speak on the connection between poverty and child soldiering?
4. What policies in Uganda have been put in place to provide economic reintegration for former child soldiers?
5. What community-based efforts for economic reintegration have you seen in Uganda?
6. What, in your opinion, are the best practices for economic reintegration?
7. What has the Ugandan government done well?
8. What is missing in the economic reintegration efforts of the Ugandan government?
9. What is the greatest need of former child soldiers in Uganda?
10. What is the economic condition of former child soldiers?
11. Can you speak on the economic condition in Uganda? Is employment available? What is the informal economy like? Is it difficult to get a job without education?

Appendix B

List of Participants

1. Dr. Chris Faulkner: Assistant Professor of National Security Affairs in the College of Distance Education (CDE) at the United States Naval War College. Faulkner's research focuses on quantitative data collection of armed groups that employ child soldiers. He also looks at patterns in the recruitment practices of child soldiers as well as the downstream effects of child soldiering (e.g., external violence, group fragmentation). He has also taught a course on child soldiering. On Uganda, Faulkner published "Money and Control: Rebel Groups and the Forcible Recruitment of Child Soldiers" in the journal *African Security*, which investigates the impact of resource endowments on the level that armed groups in Uganda aggressively recruit child soldiers.
2. Mr. Okwir Isaac Odiya: Head of Office at the Justice and Reconciliation Project, an NGO in Gulu, Uganda that supports child soldiers through research, advocacy, and services. He has worked there for seven years.
3. Dr. Roos van der Haer: Haer conducted research in the DRC with almost 300 child soldiers and is one of the foremost academics in the field.
4. Dr. Ojok Boniface: Dr. Boniface is the cofounder for the Justice and Reconciliation Project. He has been working with child soldiers since 2004 and conducted his PhD on children born of war in Uganda.
5. Mr. Odoch Quinto: Author of *War-Torn Child*: *One with the Wild*, Iconic Publications 2021. The book describes the stories of different youth victims of the Northern Ugandan War. Quinto was born in raised in Northern Uganda.
6. Dr. Jane Ekayu: Founder and Executive Director of Children of Peace Uganda (CPU). CPU was founded in 2010 to support FCS in reintegration after returning from rehabilitation centers. She has been working with FCS since 2004.
7. Informant X: This informant preferred to remain anonymous. They are a freelance researcher in Uganda. They were also the ghostwriter of a biography on a child soldier from the Northern Uganda War.