

NYAKANA CLAIRE (2011-M161-10007)

Coping with Civilian Life: Strategies Adopted by Returnee Lord's Resistance Army Abductees in Nwoya District, Northern Uganda

The twenty years of war between Lord's Resistance Army (LRA-rebel group) and the Uganda Government was dominated by massive killing and suffering, which were aggravated more by abduction of children across the affected region. This is why the bulk of the LRA strength came from children and youth forced to join its military ranks. These constituted around 80% of their forces. The study aimed at finding out how former abductees in the war-affected northern Uganda region are either helping themselves or being helped to cope with the challenges of civilian life after experiences of war. The study took a mixed research methodology, adopting a case study research design, thus having Nwoya district as the case to study. The study worked around three objectives, from which research questions were delivered, these are; 1. To identify the challenges faced by returnee LRA abductees in coping with civilian life; 2. To identify the strategies adopted by returnee LRA abductees to cope with the challenges involved in adapting to civilian life; and 3. To identify the support strategies put in place by the community to help returnee LRA rebels to cope with the challenges they experience in adapting to civilian life. Findings show that former abductees in Sierra Leone, Northern Uganda, Liberia and elsewhere take their own initiatives to fit or be accepted into their communities but, local communities, civil society organisations and central governments also use certain mechanisms and strategies to reintegrate former abductees into their communities after war. Challenges faced by former abductees in northern Uganda included; stigmatisation, pressure to join the national army, fear for revenge from their communities, lack of income and land among others. However, strategies like seeking reconciliation and forgiveness, enrolling in schools, and seeking counselling services are among the strategies that were adopted by returnee former abductees in their effort to fit into post-war communities. Similarly, local communities, NGO's and government departments have helped the returnees through provision of farm inputs, counselling services, humanitarian assistance, reuniting them with their families, and community justice and reconciliation measures. The study, therefore, recommended that the government of Uganda, civil society organisations and local communities need to seriously get involved in promoting transitional justice in northern Uganda, and reconciliation processes which are culturally informed. This will help in forgiveness and acceptance of the returnee abductees as members of their communities. Since this may reduce the stigma and the fear returnees receive from members of their communities.

Key words: Adopt, Resistance, Abduct, Army, Civilian