

## Uganda's Forgotten Children

Accountability and Social Torture:  
What happened to the children  
who returned from the Lord's  
Resistance Army?

This research was carried out  
between 2004-6 and from 2012-  
2018 working with some of the  
children who returned from the  
Lord's Resistance Army. A large  
number were never seen by  
their families again, but more  
than 20,000 returned through  
aid financed reception centres,  
such as GUSCO. Girls recruited  
were given to LRA commanders  
as wives, and a high proportion  
returned with babies born in  
the bush - who are now in  
their teens or young adults.  
While the conflict was ongoing  
endeavours were made to reunite  
the returned children with their  
relatives, who were mostly living

in insecure displacement camps  
in very difficult conditions. Once  
left in the camps, relatively  
few were subsequently visited,  
even after the fighting ended in  
2006. Thousands of vulnerable  
children were largely left to their  
own devices. The findings from  
that work is being compared  
to findings on reintegration in  
the region. A key point made is  
that implementing best practice  
guidelines for relocating displaced  
children with their immediate  
relatives in northern Uganda had  
negative consequences. The  
majority of those children who  
passed through a reception centre  
are now settled on ancestral  
land, where they are commonly  
abused because of their LRA  
past. Those who returned as  
babies, whose fathers' were LRA  
commanders, such as Dominic





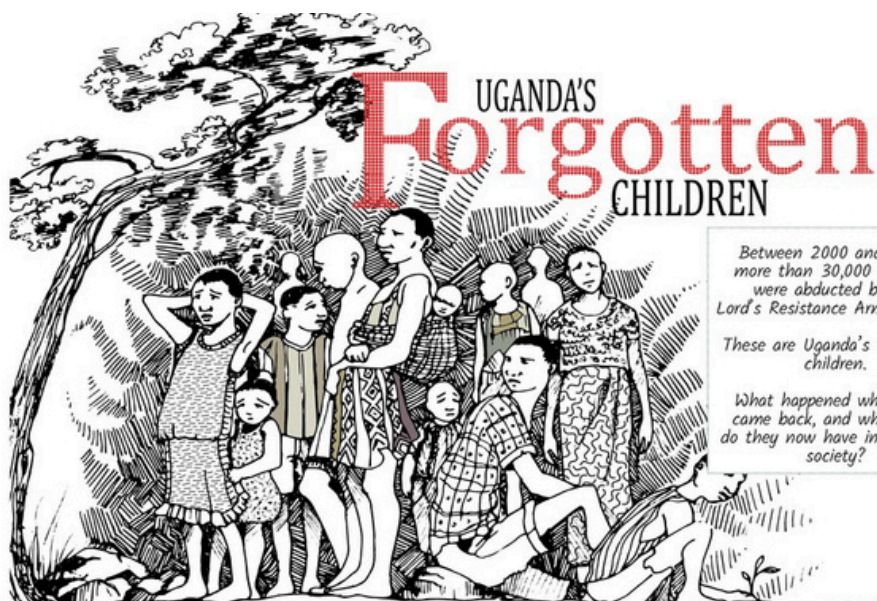
Ongwen, Vincent Otto, or Joseph Kony, often face open abuse. With few exceptions, it is only those who spent a long period with the LRA, and who attained a rank, who have managed to avoid such experiences. They generally live in urban and peri-urban locations, and are the most likely to have received some continued support from NGO. In contrast, the vast majority of the returned children we have spent time with and interviewed have been ignored.

**- Melissa Parker, Tim Allen, Dorothy Atim, Jacky Atingo**

## Charity Atukunda

Charity Atukunda is a visual artist, passionate about drawing and digital illustration. She spent her formative years seeking out her place as an artist, drawing on visual fine arts, graphic novels and animations for inspiration. Charity's work is always marked by a conscious use of pattern, symbolism and mythical allusions. Her work often explores and questions the ideas, beliefs and systems that govern our lives. She currently lives in Kampala, Uganda.





# UGANDA'S Forgotten CHILDREN

Between 2000 and 2004, more than 30,000 children were abducted by the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA).

These are Uganda's Forgotten children.

What happened when they came back, and what place do they now have in Ugandan society?

Northern Uganda has been affected by war and conflict for decades.

The LRA, led by Joseph Kony, emerged in 1987 and engaged in looting, violence and the forced recruitment of children into their service.



By 2003, around 1.5 million people (about 30% of the population) were living in hundreds of internal displacement camps (IDPC), often in appalling conditions.

Most children were abducted from displacement camps.



In their time with the LRA, many of the abducted children experienced, witnessed or took part in terrible violence and killing.



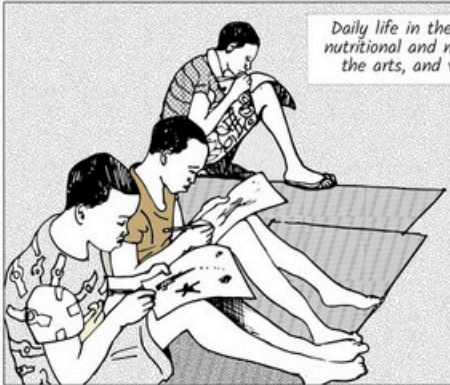
The reintegration of children who escaped the LRA was done through reception centres...



...managed by us and by other humanitarian organisations



Daily life in the centers focused on nutritional and medical needs, sports, the arts, and vocational training.

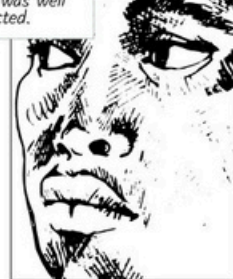


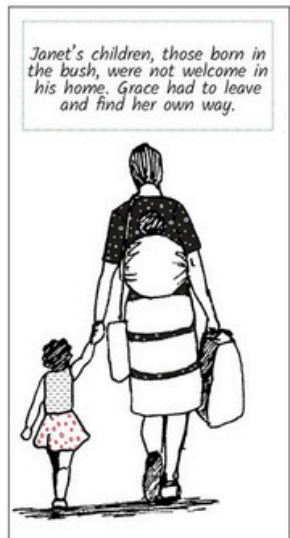
Reintegration focused on forgiveness. Children were encouraged to forget about their time with the LRA.

You are not responsible for the things you have done with the LRA.

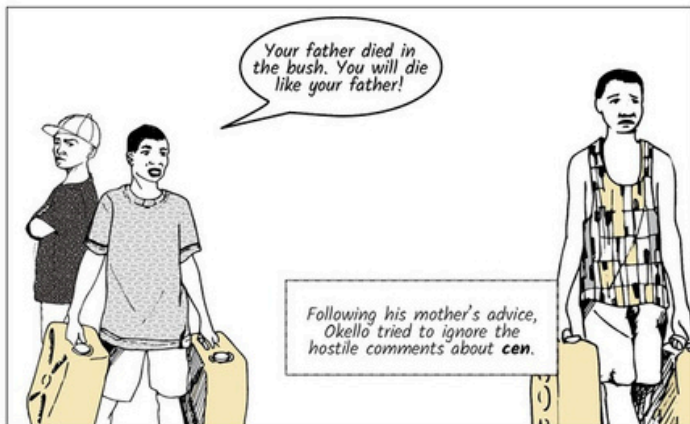
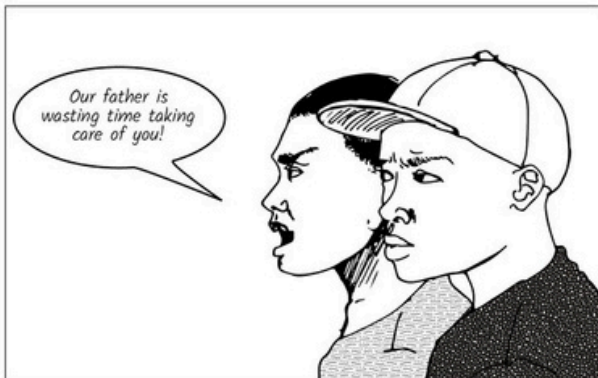
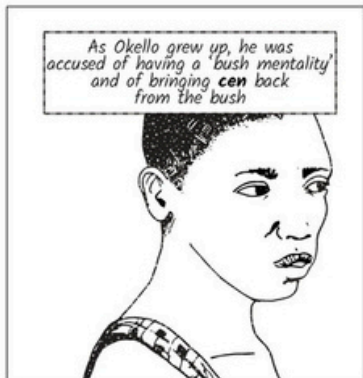
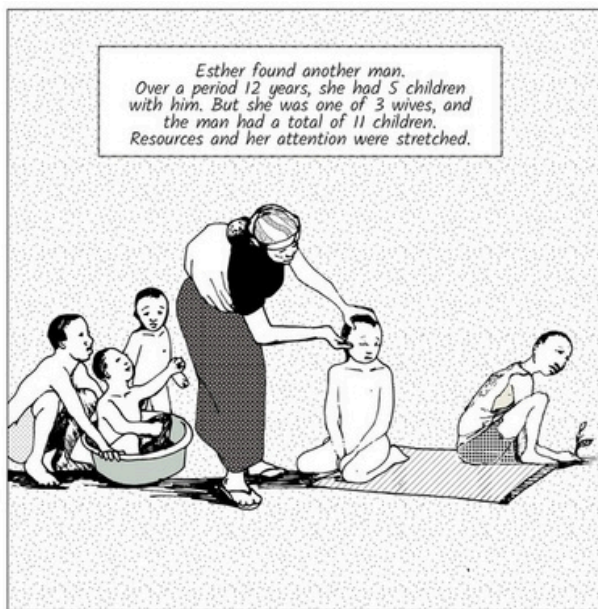


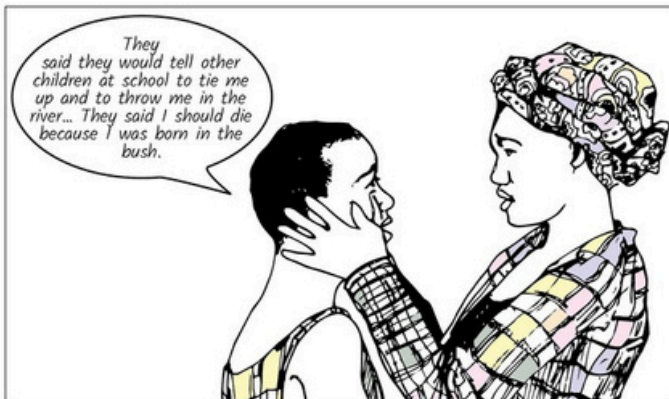
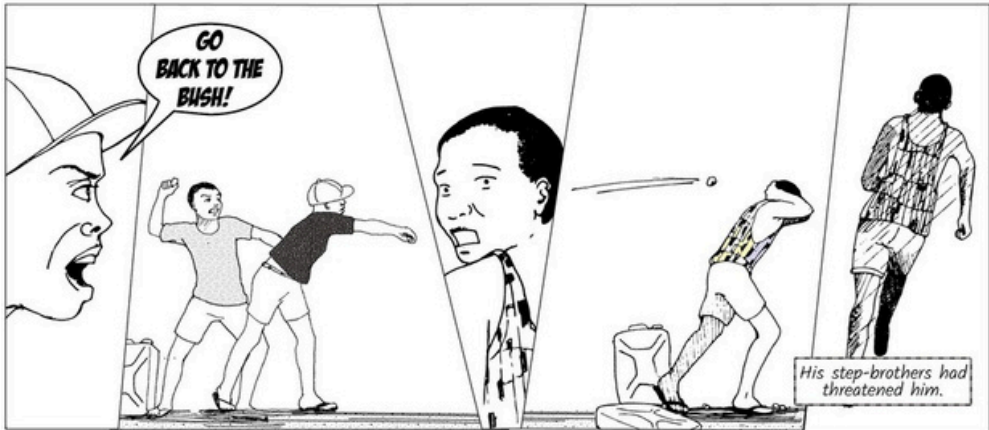
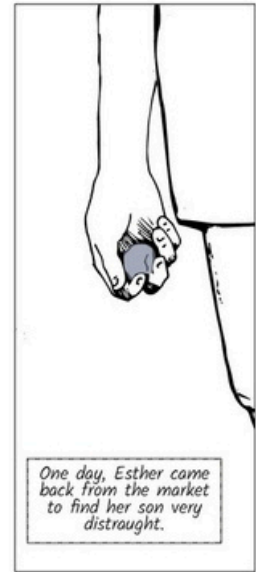
Not everyone felt that way. Some regarded their time with the LRA as a positive experience. But everyone was well aware of the answers their counsellors expected.











Attending school was difficult for Grace. Her uncle was reluctant to pay her fees. At school, she was often made to feel like an outcast.



"You have bush mentality!"



Perhaps to escape, she eloped with a young man at the age of 14.



The relationship did not go well. Things went bad after he found out she was 'a child from the bush'...



...He started to beat her badly. While Grace was pregnant with his 2nd child, he took on another wife and seemed unwilling to care for Grace



With no one else to turn to, Grace decided to stay with the man. She shared her story with women with similar experiences who lived in her neighbourhood.



Accept your fate and stay quiet. Where else will you go?





*Grace suffers from trauma. As a young child in the bush, she witnessed her babysitter being shot dead.*



*She also witnessed women being beaten. Now, she herself is being beaten by her husband.*



*And she has nowhere to go.*



*Rejected, she has pinned her hopes on her father, Dominic Ongwen, being released from imprisonment in The Hague. She longs to be reunited with him.*



*She has a picture of him on her phone symbolizing, perhaps, her hope for a better future.*



Our approach to reintegration was overly simplistic, with devastating consequences.



Seeing what has happened to Grace and Okello...



I realize their enduring distress is not exceptional. There are countless other women and children in similar situations.



I cannot say the care we provided has led to successful integration.



Why did we show so little interest in following up on the welfare of these women and children after they left us?



Okello hopes to go to school in Apaa, while also helping tend his uncle's land. But his uncle is unwilling to pay school fees, and Okello is forced to work long hours for little pay.



With little to hope for in his future, Okello asks...



Where will my future be?



END