



Northern Uganda Community Transformation and Reintegration Festival (#CTRF2017)



Africa Non-profit Chore (ANCHOR)

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List of Acronyms

ANCHOR	Africa Non-profit Chore
ARLPI	Acholi Religious Leaders Peace Initiative
cLRA	Counter Lord's Resistance Army
COI	Community of Interest
CSO	Conflict and Stabilization Operations
CTRF	Community Transformation and Reintegration Festival
DDR	Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration
DDRRR	Disarmament, Demobilization, Repatriation, Reinsertion, Reintegration
D, MEAL	Design, Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability, and Learning
LC3	Local Council Three (sub county political jurisdiction in Uganda)
LC5	Local Council Five (district political jurisdiction in Uganda)
LCB	Lake Chad Basin
LRA	Lord's Resistance Army
MISO	Military Information Support Organization
POL/ECON	Political and Economic Affairs Section
PRDP	Peace, Recovery, and Development Plan
SOCFWD-CA	Special Operations Command Forward – Central Africa
SOCFWD-EA	Special Operations Command Forward – East Africa
SOCFWD-NWA	Special Operations Command Forward – Northwest Africa
UPDF	Uganda People's Defense Forces
US DOS	United States Department of State

1. Executive Summary

Northern Ugandan Reintegration Festival; A big success!

The Northern Ugandan Community Transformation and Reintegration Festival (#CTRF17), an all-day event held on April 22, was an astounding success. It strengthened Uganda's absorptive capacity for new defectors by amplifying voices from across northern Uganda to promote reintegration of former LRA fighters into their home communities and re-engaged the community in dialogue about the challenges related to reintegration and reconciliation.

With pomp, dance, and testimonies, the event brought together religious, political, and cultural leaders, as well as defectors, family members of missing persons, and LRA-affected community members representing the four sub regions of northern Uganda that suffered the most from LRA violence (Acholi, Lango, Teso, and West Nile) who celebrated the strides made in northern Uganda's recovery from the LRA conflict, including the



Figure 1 Ker Kwaro Acholi dancers celebrating the return of the formerly abducted

return from captivity of abducted persons (Figure 1). Speakers and presenters also used the opportunity to encourage and challenge each other in light of the obstacles that still persist against long-term reintegration and to remember those killed and still missing or unaccounted for. The festival created awareness among the community of reintegration challenges and achievements, promoted harmony between LRA returnees and non-defectors, and enhanced the visibility of reintegration service providers for the benefit of all community members. Final estimates place festival attendees between 4,000 and 5,000 at the climax of the event.

The festival began with a street procession flagged off by a spiritual benediction and symbolically led by the UPDF's marching band from the Gulu District Council Hall to the festival fairgrounds. Government leaders from LC5 Amuria, and LC3 Pakele gave speeches, as did the traditional leadership by the Prime Ministers of the Acholi and Lango Cultural Foundations. The festival opened and closed with speeches made by the region's religious leaders and members of the Acholi Religious Leaders Peace Initiative (ARLPI), Archbishop McLeod Baker Ochola and Sheik Musa Khelil. LRA defectors, family members of missing persons, and LRA-affected community members, speaking to the successes and remaining challenges of reintegration, shared testimonies. US Embassy Kampala's POL/ECON Chief gave a speech and received a piece of art work from ARLPI in appreciation of US support to the c-LRA mission. The compilation of art was submitted by pupils of Saint Mauritz Nursery School responding to the question, "What does peace mean to me." Alternating between the guest speakers, musical and theatrical performances were held, with Bosmic Lucky, an Acholi artist well-known in northern Uganda, debuting the Special Operations Command Forward – Central Africa (SOCFWD-CA) Messaging and Information Support Operations (MISO) - funded peace song calling on the LRA to return. Civil society organizations had booths and during the booth tour, presented information about their reintegration and community support activities. Under the coordination of ANCHOR staff, two radio stations with the widest reach (Mega and Speke FM) in Gulu had conducted radio advertisements of the festival, and interviewed a number of special guests

each evening in the week prior to the festival, including ARLPI representatives, civil society actors, defectors, and government leaders.

Feedback on the festival was positive according to reports gathered on the ground as well by MISO's implementing partner, Digital Humanity. The defectors who had participated at the request of the COI felt that the objective of the festival had been achieved. The US Department of State's cLRA Field Representative met a defector at the festival who had heard about the festival through a radio announcement and attended the festival, noting that prior to the festival, he had felt isolated but at the festival, he was able to connect with LRA-victims' associations from his area and hoped to be more engaged going forward. On the morning of the festival, inspired by the reintegration festival, a major local radio station - Mega FM - hosted a discussion between reintegration stakeholders and the local community to take stock of the impact of reintegration and transformation programs.

The Community of Interest (COI) for the c-LRA Mission – comprised of CSO, SOCFWD-CA MISO, and civil society partners ANCHOR and Pathways to Peace – organized the festival, and CSO funded ANCHOR to host the festival. The COI has been working closely to facilitate the defections campaign, including the messages of LRA combatants still in the bush as well as organizing the reception of defectors in Uganda with their family, community, and political/cultural/religious leadership.

Northern Uganda Reintegration Roundtable Identified Key Reintegration Needs



Figure 2 Intra Northern Uganda Community Reintegration Roundtable 2017

victims' associations who discussed the current situation including successes and challenges with the aim of influencing more effective and sustainable interventions and messaging to contribute towards the region's long term reintegration (Figure 2). One of the notable successes of the roundtable was that it uniquely extended the dialogue of reintegration beyond the Acholi population and leadership, to encompass the other four key LRA-affected populations.

At the bequest of Arch Bishop John Baptist Odama, on the eve prior to the festival, ANCHOR hosted a Northern Ugandan Reintegration Roundtable in support of the festival's aim, to strengthen Uganda's absorptive capacity for new defectors as well as reengage key stakeholders towards promoting sustainable reintegration approaches. The roundtable included mid level political, cultural, and religious leaders as well as social leaders, LRA defectors and LRA-affected individuals, leading LRA-

The Key Recommendations from the festival were officially endorsed by Gulu LC5 and Dialogue Chair, Hon. Martin Ojara Mpenduzi and Vice-Chair of ARLPI and Dialogue Vice Chair, Sheik Musa Khelil, and were shared at the festival. The recommendations focused on addressing the disconnect between the local and mid-level government representatives and the LRA-affected community members and defectors. The recommendations to the Victims included: Encouraged to actively participate in community activities and join existing initiatives to give back to the community as a mechanism for healing and reconciliation. This will also alleviate stigmatization and the victim mentality; and encouraged to form organized groups for identification, support and monitoring from stakeholders including government and NGOs. Recommendations to the government included: Requested to put in place safety net programs that identify and address

unique needs of war victims including of women and children - especially those born in captivity and unaccompanied children; Facilitate a dialogue to address the wounds of war and conflict especially in Acholi, Lango, West Nile and Teso sub regions; and strengthen the transitional justice policy, through engaging with war-affected communities. This will lay ground for participation by national stakeholders on a reparations programing for LRA victims. The recommendations to the NGO included: Support the establishment and monitoring of referral mechanisms between persons affected by the LRA conflict and existing socio-economic support structures especially with local government; Tailored holistic reintegration support using fast-tracked skilling with a sustained follow-up and mentorship support to address emerging challenges of targeted clients beyond the 'honey moon' phase of return; and Foster the engagement of regional community stakeholders in continuous dialogue on reintegration.

The Roundtable was followed by dinner, hosted by US Embassy Kampala POL/ECON Chief, to engage eight cultural, religious, political, and social leaders in northern Uganda, across the Acholi, Lango, Teso, and Madi populations. The discussion focused on the national dialogue regarding the balance between truth telling, accountability, justice, and forgiveness that is appropriate for Uganda to heal and move towards national reconciliation.

The Lake Chad Basin/Uganda Defections Exchange – Transformational

During the week prior to the festival, ANCHOR facilitated and CSO funded an exchange between the seven representatives from the Lake Chad Basin countries of Niger and Chad and Uganda to allow individuals from the LCB region to engage with the key actors responsible for the implementation of the c-LRA defections campaign and reintegration of these fighters into their host communities to share best practices and lessons learned in the implementation of DDR, recognizing the critical cooperation between civil society and the military. The LCB/Uganda Defections Campaign Exchange offered an excellent inter-African learning opportunity for communities and governments grappling with how to create and support a successful defection and reintegration campaign.



Figure 3 Hon. Grace F. Kviyucwinyi, Minister of State for N. Uganda, launching Symposium

The exchange included a symposium of speakers in Kampala for one-and-a-half days, bringing the seminal entities in support of the LRA defections campaign, including Government of Uganda's Ministry for Northern Uganda, Amnesty Commission and the Justice, Law, and Order Sector; a leading activist and former defense lawyer for Thomas Kowyelo; SOCFWD-CA's MISO; USAID's implementing partner Supporting Access to Justice, Fostering Equity and Peace (SAFE) Program; and civil society partners Invisible Children, ANCHOR, Pathways to Peace, and the Refugee Law Project. Following the "class-room" symposium, the delegation spent the remainder of their exchange in Gulu, meeting with former defectors, cultural leaders, and an NGO focused on reintegration, as well as visiting MEGA FM radio station, and the National Memory for Peace and Documentation Center in Kitgum.

At the conclusion of the Defection exchange visit, delegates from west Africa were able to conduct action planning sessions and to set targets for the application of the lessons learned from the Exchange visit into DDRRR programing in their home communities.

2. Community Dialogue and Reintegration Festival Outcomes

The Intra northern Uganda Community Dialogue and Reintegration Festival achieved the objectives of increasing the absorptive capacity of northern Uganda for the reintegration of former LRA members by way of the following outcomes:

2.1. Awareness created

- About 4,500 members of the public including defectors, school children, government and non-government officials attended the festival. Through carefully selected speakers and testimonies by defectors, affected persons, and family members of missing persons, community members who attended the festival are now more informed of achievements and challenges associated with reintegration and are therefore better equipped to respond aptly.
- In collaboration with IST Research and Grassroots Reconciliation Group, several radio talk shows, SMS, and social media campaigns were utilized to engage with the public to create awareness and provide information with an estimated reach of 1,891,768 people on social media, and 19,705 people via radio.¹
- Feedback from attendees implies that the festival raised the profile of LRA survivors. 'This program is so good because it brings to the attention of people from other parts of the world and other districts, how northerners suffered during the LRA war, strategies used to bring the war to an end, the way of life of the people after the war and the roles of the government, NGOs, CBOS and individuals on recovery process.' Odoch Denis P' Onek.¹

2.2. Harmony between formerly abducted and community fostered

- Attendees severally commended the organization of the festival for its impact on encouraging co-existence between LRA returnees and their communities.
- 'I am Orach David councilor LC3 Palabek kal Sub County, Lamwo District Local Government. I [support] the people of Gulu [municipality] in this wonderful gathering of transforming the life of our Returnees. [I also appreciate the] communication from Chairperson LC5 from Amuria District Local Government [who called for] unity among Ugandans and [urged them to] avoid finger pointing [at] returnees.'¹
- 'I have witnessed people [being] strengthened and given hope of belonging and so they were happy.' Anonymous.¹

2.3. Reintegration services made visible

- A number of reintegration service providers including ARLPI, THRIVE, and GRG operated exhibition booths to display to the public various reintegration services to enable ease of location by targeted community members.
- The scope of the festival exhibitors collectively covered the majority of issues identified by IST Research's data visualization of feedback from the public regarding the most pressing reintegration issues including: land, relatives, stigmatization, fear, hardship, food, and rehabilitation.

¹ IST Research (May 2017) Community Transformation and Reintegration Festival – April 2017

² Feedback from Gulu District Chairperson

2.4. The role of the survivor emphasized

a) Messaging affected communities

- That communication towards LRA affected persons should not just be about endless lamentation of challenges, but rather focused more on identifying the potential in *survivors as key contributors to self and community transformation*. Survivors have been challenged to take responsibility for their own future so that they can be supported effectively. 'The journey to success begins with you.'
- That when *survivors adopt attitudes oriented towards serving their communities* instead of focusing on their disadvantages, it enhances their own healing, reduces stigma, and fast tracks their self-improvement.

b) Survivor participation

- That several current recovery interventions omit the deliberate involvement of those in most need whereas reintegration support must obtain the *participation of survivors* in fostering local solutions to address their own challenges and should encourage *peer-to-peer learning between survivors*.
- Observed that despite the existence of several recovery projects including by government agencies, *vulnerable LRA returnees are seldom reached. Defectors are therefore to be encouraged to be proactive in seeking support* through visiting their local government duty bearers to locate and harness opportunities available to them.

c) Highlighting survivor success stories

- Acknowledged that in spite of popular narratives, several former LRA abductees have had astounding success stories back home. One such testimony narrated during the dialogue was by Abwoyo Acen Pamela from Lamwo District. As a single mother and against all odds, Pamela transformed herself from a vulnerable single parent to a successful entrepreneur running a credit facility, which supports her community. Participants agreed to *highlight survivor success stories* to inspire other community members.

d) Association of survivors

- In order to improve their effectiveness in obtaining support from government and fellow returnees, survivors have been encouraged to form self-reliance groups.

2.5. The role of community leaders revived

a) Intra Northern Uganda Healing

- It was observed that resentment towards the Acholi still exists among other communities of northern Uganda who still consider the LRA and Acholi community as one and the same people targeting an ethnic conquest. The Gulu District Chairperson pledged to join the Barlonyo *community in solidarity* to commemorate the LRA massacres of 2003.
- The Amuria District Chairperson invited participants to join him in Amuria for a memorial prayer for all those who have lost their lives due to the LRA war in June this year to promote healing.

2.6. The need for Government's enabling role highlighted

a) Need for a central reintegration data-base

- The districts are 'finding effective reintegration not to be possible without a comprehensive database of former abductees and those still in captivity'². *A central database will enhance government's coordination, improve follow-up, and prevent duplication of services.*

b) Sustain the amnesty law and local peace structures

² Feedback from Gulu District Chairperson

- It was acknowledged that the *Amnesty law should be sustained* because it has enabled so many children and people in captivity to come back home. It was further agreed that, ‘even after Dominic Ongwen completes the ICC process, he still has to return home to meet his community’.
- Participants observed that, ‘through negotiating for Juba peace talks, it was possible to set up peace committees in all parts of Acholi which supported abductees to come from bush’, and therefore such *local peace structures should be kept functioning*.

c) Continue with defection collaboration

- The participants applauded the ongoing defection mechanism in which the Uganda government, US military, and civil society groups have collaborated to enable many abductees return home and have proposed for the LRA *defection effort to be continued*.

d) Address unique challenges of women and children

- The meeting observed that women and girls who bore children in captivity continue to be rejected within their communities of origin because of cultural reasons. Children born in captivity continue to be stateless.
- In spite of PRDP and other initiatives, the unique plight of women and children returnees has evaded government’s attention. Government needs to *address the unique challenges faced by child mothers and children born in LRA captivity*.
- It was further agreed that children born in captivity were struggling to own land and therefore needed to be supported to stand on their feet.

2.7. The need for a supportive Civil Society stressed

a) Facilitate Intra Northern Uganda Engagement

- Participants appreciated the role of the dialogue because it was a stern ‘reminder to us, in spite of the prevailing relative peace in the region, of the difficult question of how much the formerly abducted persons have suffered and the need for interventions to help address their unique challenges’³.
- Participants proposed that a follow up *intra northern Uganda dialogue should be supported* in the near future to facilitate engagements between communities across northern Uganda to find lasting solutions towards healing and reintegration⁴. ANCHOR was advised to provide more time for deliberation during future meetings.

b) Reintegration Referral Mechanisms

- Participants observed that defectors lacked information on where to obtain help for various reintegration needs within their communities and hence the need to *improve reintegration referral mechanisms between defectors and service providers*.

c) Establishing Safety Nets

- In spite of several past recovery programs in northern Uganda, participants observed that there were a number of former LRA members with *unique reintegration challenges including women and children for whom special attention is needed*.

d) Establishing returnee empowerment spaces

- Participants from Barlonyo in Lango sub region had found the use of *radio programs to be very effective in providing a platform for survivors to air out their voices freely* and also to channel messages to their friends, relatives and other people still in captivity to come back home.

³ Remark made by Gulu District Chairperson

⁴ Plea made by Amuria District Chairperson

3. Implementation management

3.1. Event marketing

The event was marketed through a multi-pronged and collaborative approach as follows:



Figure 4 Festival mobilization talk show at Mega FM

Radio advertisements: Adverts were run on Mega FM and Speke FM - two local radio stations with the widest coverage⁵ - in collaboration with two MISO contractors (Grassroots Reconciliation Group and DIGITAL HUMANITY). Local reintegration service providers were mobilized and hosted to talk shows including Child Voice International, Refugee Law Project, Justice and Reconciliation Project, THRIVE Gulu, Youth Leadership for Reconciliation and Economic Development, and Acholi Religious Leaders' Peace Initiative. On the eve of the festival, political, cultural, and religious leaders were hosted to a radio talk show moderated by ANCHOR staff.

Roadside banners and posters: Four (4) event banners were developed by MISO with input from ANCHOR and erected at all main roads leading into Gulu town during the week leading up to the festival. Posters developed by MISO were displayed at all public notice boards and along street posts.

Social media campaign: DIGITAL HUMANITY and ANCHOR both ran social media ad campaigns during the week leading up to the festival with a gross estimated reach of 1.9 million people.



Figure 5 ANCHOR staff installing Festival Roadside banners in Gulu



Figure 6 Festival advance entourage riding through Gulu town

Mobile advertisers: A mobile announcer was contracted to advertise the event for two days leading up to the festival using a truck-mounted public address system. On the morning of the festival, ten motorcycle announcers were hired to further aid mobilization.

Coordination meetings: In order to generate grassroots support among reintegration actors on the ground, ANCHOR initiated and convened three partner weekly coordination meetings and obtained the participation and support of several organizations in mobilizing key community demographics.

3.2. Participation

All key stakeholders were mobilized to participate in the festival.

The main originator of the concept was Arch Bishop John Baptist Odama, a well-respected community leader who has been invested in community reconciliation and recovery for over two decades. Partner coordination was conducted under the aegis of Gulu District Local Government.

⁵ IPSOS media audit report, 2017

Partners were involved in mobilizing LRA survivors and the general public through their existing networks as well as involvement in radio talk shows to market the festival.

Local preschoolers were involved through participation in an art challenge and poem recital in which they were asked to represent and articulate the meaning of peace.

All four sub regions affected by the LRA were represented at the event. Participants from each sub region were selected from communities most affected by the conflict i.e. Pakele in West Nile, Barlonyo in Lango, Obalanga in Teso, and Lamwo in Acholi sub region.

Other guests invited were drawn from a mix of religious, political, and cultural leaders considered being influential and/or invested in reintegration work.

3.3. Gender

The participation of women in the dialogue was emphasized during selection of survivors resulting in 43% of attendees being women. Gender outcomes were intentionally teased out of the discussions to ensure fair representation.

3.4. Expectation management

Participants were informed that this initiative was intended to stimulate intercommunity dialogue and finding local solutions but not to precede new donor funding.

3.5. Risk management

3.5.1 Cash handling

Due to high cash volumes in the field, cash-handling risk was managed under 'fidelity insurance'. Staff handling cash were also checked into secure accommodations.

3.5.2 Crowd management

Due to the high attendance of people expected at the event, twenty members of the Uganda police force were facilitated to provide security during the event.

3.5.3 Cash flow management

Due to projected delays to access project funding, credit supply with associated vendors was utilized.

4. Lessons Learned

Mobilization: A primary lesson learned was to provide sufficient shelters for the anticipated sitting capacity as well as refreshments to boost attendance. Social media may be a very good tool for information dissemination. However, the demographic that attended the festival may be best accessed via radio and through grassroots mobilization.

Post event media reportage: Facilitating journalists to attend and cover an event does not automatically translate into publication of the activities. Additional consideration must be made to guarantee press coverage as a deliverable.

Do-no-harm: In mainstreaming reintegration services, practitioners have generally shunned interventions that specifically target defectors for fear of escalating social tensions and stigmatization. However, in so doing, the unique needs of some formerly abducted adults and children may have been neglected.

5. Challenges

5.1. End of USSF Advisor LRA Mission

Several accomplishments in the management of the LRA defection cycle can be attributed to progressive improvements in the civil – military collaboration of several parties involved in ending LRA

violence.⁶ These include the ability of civil society organizations to deploy resources and expertise in remote locations of the conflict. It is therefore anticipated that the end of the USSF and UPDF missions in central Africa will bring about unprecedented challenges in the implementation of defection programming including but not limited to come home messaging, repatriation, rehabilitation, and reintegration.

6. Proposed next steps

a) Advocacy

The findings of the intra northern Uganda community dialogue will be disseminated among key stakeholders including reintegration partners, government agencies, and the diplomatic community (LRA watchers) so as to enhance the effectiveness of future reintegration programming.

b) Strengthening reintegration referral mechanisms

Subject to resourcing, reintegration actors will be identified and networked across northern Uganda, who provide psychological, social, economic, and medical reintegration support, with the aim of highlighting unserved and underserved communities as well as linking individuals in need to available reintegration services.

c) Establishing survivor engagement platforms

Subject to funding, sub regional radio programs will be developed and utilized as tools for LRA survivors to engage among themselves as well as with the rest of their communities to continue the dialogue of transformation. Special focus should be given to communities identified as centers of gravity of the conflict and/or where the most challenges persist.

An annual intra northern Uganda dialogue spearheaded by community leaders, and hosted on a rotational basis, is proposed as an annual exercise to promote healing across the affected sub regions.

d) Creating reintegration safety nets

In light of the findings during the community dialogue sessions, survivor reintegration safety nets will be promoted to cater to the unique needs of defectors that are not ordinarily served by mainstream programming including but not limited to recently returned child mothers and children born in captivity, stateless children, etc.

⁶ Munduga, Patrick (2016) Factors Influencing the Attrition of Armed Group Members in Central Africa.