



# Evaluation report of the Supporting War Affected Women Reintegrate their Children through Family Reunions Project

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report sets out the key findings from the final evaluation of the ‘Supporting War Affected Women Reintegrate their Children through Family Reunions Project’: a one year project to support women who had children in captivity during the LRA/UPDF war in northern Uganda to unite/ ‘reintegrate’ their children with the paternal family/clan. This project is a partnership with the Women’s Initiatives for Gender Justice (Women’s Initiatives) and delivered by Justice and Reconciliation Project (JRP) and Women’s Advocacy Network (WAN). During the project 13 reintegrations were conducted in Acholi sub-region (surpassing the target of 12), as well as two dialogues with cultural leaders from Acholi, Lango, Teso, and West Nile sub-regions, and nine radio talk shows to raise public awareness and sympathy on the issue in Lango, Teso, and West Nile. Capacity building training was conducted with WAN to increase WAN’s capacity and legitimacy to advocate for and lead processes for the (re)integration of children born of war and their mothers.

The evaluation is based on qualitative research (key informant interviews and focus groups) conducted in late March/early April 2017 with key stakeholders. It focused on assessing extent of effectiveness and factors positively and negatively influencing effectiveness, but also considered relevance to the target group, impact – wider and longer term effects, and sustainability.

### Relevance

Reintegration of children born in captivity is a key, priority issue for war affected women. Both JRP and Women’s Initiative had identified this through work conducted prior to this project, and it was verified by the findings of this evaluation. There are various reasons for this issue having so much importance attached to it, all stemming from the culture of children taking their identity and gaining access to land, other resources and support from their father’s family/clan.

### Effectiveness

Effectiveness was evaluated for extent to which the project supported reintegrations (the main stated objective), plus extent to which it increased public awareness and sympathy on the issue outside Acholi sub-region, and extent to which it promoted commitment to supporting reintegrations/ unifications from cultural leaders in each target sub-region.

Regarding the reintegrations: 13 full reintegration processes were conducted; all helped the children gain a more secure identity (by virtue of the fact that they were accepted/recognised by their paternal family/clan), in seven cases child(ren) gained access to land; in six cases child(ren) gained support from the paternal family for their welfare (mainly in the form of school fees); in two cases the mother also got access to land and support for her welfare (an unintended benefit). Reintegrations did not, therefore, all result in the full complement of benefits aimed/hoped for. Nevertheless, feedback from women/mothers who participated in the process, and from WAN members/leaders and others, indicates that there was a real positive effect on the war affected women involved from having had the chance to deal with something which had become a source of growing tension and concern. Even so, in cases where access to land and/or support was not forthcoming, there was also some sense of disappointment amongst mothers interviewed for the evaluation.

The key factors which positively influenced effectiveness were, firstly, the reintegration process – which generally emerged as very strong and comprehensive – and, secondly, the skills and commitment of the WAN mediators. The main factor identified as negatively influencing effectiveness was the follow-up/referral stage of the process, which was found to be relatively weak compared to the preceding stages.

Regarding effectiveness in promoting additional commitment on the reintegration issue from cultural leaders, the dialogues were found to have been successful events, which made a clear impression on cultural leaders. Some concrete actions were found to have resulted, including establishment of a new desk/department at Ker Kwaro Acholi for gender issues and instituting of community dialogues on the issue in Lango. There has also been one actual reintegration conducted by a cultural leader because of the engagement. Overall, however, cultural leaders interviewed for the evaluation considered it would not be possible for them to conduct reintegrations without funding for transport and other associated costs.

The impact of the radio shows is hard to assess precisely. Radio stations did report that the response to the shows prompted a fairly high number of calls to the show from members of the public, and that the views/sentiments expressed were supportive. However, there were concerns amongst some stakeholders that, as a standalone action, the radio shows will ultimately have little impact. A danger was identified that the shows would raise false hope/expectation of attendant support with reintegrations – at least one of the radio shows provoked war affected women listeners to call in and request support directly.

The project suffered somewhat from not having a clear, comprehensive set of aims and objectives, with corresponding monitoring and evaluation framework (with outcomes, outputs, indicators etc.). The idea of bringing the issue into those affected sub-regions where it was less known and where stigmatisation of war affected women and children was stronger, was good but perhaps not fully thought through. Monitoring Evaluation and Learning (MEL) activity and contribution was limited.

### Impact

Paternal families were the main group which the project impacted beyond the direct target groups. Evidence suggests that some of them also gained a substantial benefit from the project: a healing effect from the loss of their son was evident in several cases. However, the impact at a wider societal level appears to be negligible because the number of reintegrations conducted through the project was just a fraction of the number of war affected women (and paternal families) affected by the issue.

There were some unintended consequences of the project. Some were positive, such as reconciliations between maternal and paternal families; others, were problematic, such as maternal families demanding compensation from the paternal family and paternal family members assuming they would inherit the war affected woman as a wife.

### Sustainability

This project has built up a platform for a sustainable solution but not to the point where that solution is secured without further intervention/external support. There is now a strong, replicable (at least within the northern Uganda cultural context or similar), and low-cost model for reintegrations. There is also an enhanced technical capacity to conduct reintegrations, as well as increased connections with and commitment from cultural leaders. However, even though small, the costs of conducting reintegrations is still a barrier, and neither WAN or the cultural institutions are at a level where they are likely to generate the funds and drive the issue forward without additional support. The project lacked a sustainability strategy.

### Conclusion and Recommendations

A project which, despite some flaws, has achieved a lot for its relatively small budget and duration. Nevertheless, the work remains unfinished and there is need to take on lessons and expand/scale-up if a major impact is to be made. We recommend the following:

1. Continue to monitor and follow-up project reintegrations
2. Review and refine the reintegration process – though largely successful there are some areas which would benefit from refinement, particularly follow-up and referral
3. Formalise the reintegration model and promote replication
4. Grow linkages and explore a consortium approach – if the work is to be scaled up, other actors, notably District Local Government, need to be more engaged, and a means found of coordinating and focusing activity – one idea is to explore build a consortium including WAN, cultural institutions, and other key actors; this is deserving of serious consideration and further exploration
5. Strengthen strategic planning, project design and MEL – both for JRP and WAN; potentially including a clear strategy/plan for building towards autonomy for WAN.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

This report sets out the key findings from the final evaluation of the ‘Supporting War Affected Women Reintegrate their Children through Family Reunions Project’. The evaluation is based primarily on qualitative research – key informant interviews and focus groups – conducted with a range of informants/stakeholders in late March and early April 2017. A set of evaluation criteria and questions were set based on what was considered most important to explore within time and resource constraints. These are shown in the table below, followed by a table with details of research participants and methods.

*Table 1 Evaluation criteria and questions*

<b>Criteria</b>	<b>Questions</b>
Relevance	How important is the intervention for the target group, and to what extent does it address their needs, interests and priorities?
Effectiveness	To what extent were planned outcomes achieved?
	What were the major factors influencing effectiveness – positive and negative?
Impact	What are the indications on wider and longer term impact?
	What were the unintended consequences – positive and negative?
Sustainability	To what extent are activities, results and effects expected to continue beyond the end of the intervention, and why?

The table below shows which stakeholders were covered by the qualitative research for the evaluation, how many and which method (focus group or key informant interview). As can be seen, the main method used was key informant interview. Two focus groups were conducted, both with WAN – one with WAN leaders and one with regular members. The WAN Chair was interviewed separately. Four mothers and corresponding paternal family members were identified. Interviews were conducted at their respective homes, though it proved not possible to meet with one of the paternal family members. It was also not possible to speak with a cultural leader from Teso, but we were able to interview leaders from the other sub-regions (representing Acholi, Langi and Madi).

*Table 2 Qualitative research*

<b>Stakeholder</b>	<b>Key informant interviews</b>	<b>Focus group discussions</b>
JRP	2	-
Women’s Initiatives	1	-
WAN	1	2
Cultural leaders	3	-
Radio stations	2	-
Mothers	4	-
Paternal family members	3	-

The main analysis in this report is given in chapters 4 to 7, which are structured according to the evaluation criteria and questions. The Effectiveness criteria and questions was given most focus in the research and has the deepest analysis, but we also make as full assessments as possible on relevance, impact and sustainability. These are preceded by a background to the project, and followed by a summary of stakeholders’ suggestions for how the work of the project should be built on, and a conclusion and recommendations chapter.

## 2. BACKGROUND TO THE PROJECT

The 'Supporting War Affected Women Reintegrate their Children through Family Reunions Project' was a one year project which started implementation in 2016 and finished early 2017. This project is a partnership between the Women's Initiatives for Gender Justice, an international women's human rights organisation, Justice and Reconciliation Project (JRP), a national Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) dedicated to working for justice and reconciliation at the grassroots in northern Uganda, and the Women's Advocacy Network (WAN), an initiative of JRP formed in 2011, made up of female survivors of conflict related sexual violence and are housed under the JRP. WAN is formed of more than 600 members spread across 16 women's groups within the Acholi, Lango and West Nile sub-regions of northern Uganda.

The main aim of the project was to carry out reintegration of women and children with the paternal family. The stated objective of the project was to 'support war affected women reintegrate their children through family reunions for family support, access to land and a sense of identity'. The planned outcome was that 'war affected women are supported to reintegrate their children born of war in the community through a family centred approach and to enhance reconciliation among relatives.'

Reintegrations followed a three-stage process:

1. Preliminary stage, with two parts - home/background search and pre-visits with paternal families
  - a) Home/background search - the names and whereabouts of paternal families are often not known to the mothers, and can be hard to discover as males abducted into the LRA often used pseudonyms; various methods are used to locate the family, including consulting others who were in the LRA; background information obtained also helps planning and preparation
  - b) Pre-visits and family dialogues – once located the mediators (usually WAN members) will conduct a pre-visit to the paternal and maternal families with the twin purpose of mediating on any bitterness between them, and informing and preparing about the process (and establishing willingness to proceed – for paternal side especially)
2. Unifications – mothers, children and other members of the maternal family are escorted with mediators/WAN members to the paternal home and supported through a unification process led by local cultural leaders
3. Follow-up and referral – after the unification ceremony mediators/WAN members follow-up with the paternal family to ensure child(ren) and mothers' safety and welfare, and to make referrals to other services and support for child(ren) according to need (including counselling/psycho social, health, livelihoods, education).

The target for the project was to conduct 12 successful reintegrations – all in Acholi sub-region.

Alongside the reunifications, the project also conducted some related activities:

- Capacity building for WAN group members, to increase WAN's capacity and legitimacy to advocate for and lead processes for the (re)integration of children born of war and their mothers
- Dialogues with cultural leaders – to encourage engagement/participation in the issue of reunification

- Public awareness creation outside Acholi sub-region through radio talk shows led by WAN members and cultural leaders – to promote awareness of the issue, support for the project, and empathy for the war-affected women and children in Lango, Teso and West Nile, where there is less awareness of the problem and more stigmatization of children born in captivity.

In effect, therefore, there was a two-pronged approach taken with the cultural leader engagement overlapping: cultural leader engagement and reconciliations in Acholi sub-region; cultural leader engagement and radio talk shows in Lango, Teso and West Nile.

The following table shows the main outputs of the project, all of which are in-line with plans and targets.

*Table 3 Project activities and outputs*

<b>Activity/output</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
Talk shows	9
Cultural leaders dialogue	2
Family reunion	13
Number of children reunited	19
Number of women accepted	13

The project also committed to ongoing monitoring and evaluation (M&E) to measure impact and improve the action, with Women’s Initiatives support.

### 3. RELEVANCE

The following chapter assesses the relevance of the intervention: the extent to which it sought to address an issue of importance to the target group and beyond.

#### 3.1 How important is the intervention for the target group, and to what extent does it address their needs, interests and priorities?

The decision to focus on the issue of supporting war affected women unite/reintegrate their children with the paternal side of the family was informed by JRP's work with women returnees since 2005, from which it emerged as one of the most common and important issues. It was also an issue which had emerged within the work of the Women's Initiatives in northern Uganda including during its advocacy for the integration of formerly abducted women in the benefits of the Peace, Recovery and Development Plan (PRDP). Given this there was confidence on the part of JRP and the Women's Initiative in the relevance of the issue. Moreover, it was observed to be a somewhat neglected issue in the wider society and support landscape, and therefore seen as particularly worthy of focus.

The assertions made on the relevance/importance of the issue for the target group were very much supported by the findings of the research with war affected women and other stakeholders done for this evaluation. There was a widespread view across the different stakeholder groups consulted that reintegration is a highly relevant issue for the target group and more widely.

Amongst WAN members and leaders there was a strong view that reintegration was one of, or *the*, major issue facing women and children affected by war. There were a host of reasons given for this relating to the importance of the paternal family in Ugandan society and culture. As one WAN member put it, "In Uganda, and Acholi children take after the identity of their fathers". Gaining that identity was seen as important in and of itself and as a means to access entitlement to resources and support.

It was explained in one focus group that in previous times if a man went to hunt and something happens to him he would shout out the name of his clan and his clan mates would come out to help, and that the same principle still applies: any time someone gets into trouble it is the clan elders and clan mates who are first to come to the rescue. Being part of a clan is also important for marriage as it is the clan who will contribute towards the dowry/bride price (for males) or decide on how much bride price will be (for females). Practical aspects of gaining access to land (and, with it, livelihood) for children was a key factor for mothers. Some respondents, including cultural leaders and others, referred to it in terms of rights: that children of war affected mothers have a right to know their paternal family and have access to their clan's land and support.

Psychological need for identity was given roughly equal emphasis to the more material considerations. Full identity was seen as coming only if and when a child knew and was accepted at the fathers' home. Being so was asserted to be important for the child's sense of self-worth, pride, courage, and authority. Some spoke of the importance of being able to refer to your clan when speaking in public; that this gives a voice "to talk with out shame". On the reverse side, it was noted that children who did not know their paternal home are subject to stigmatisation and abuse. One of the mothers who had done a reintegration through the project stated that: "In Acholi-land a child who does not know the father's home is often called a bastard ('latin luk'). No one likes to be called that."

Further benefits of reintegration for the child were getting to know the particular traditions and cultural practices of their clan. It was seen by some as important that the child learns and experiences this culture and tradition.

Clearly the resolution of these issues for the child would also be positive for the mother. There were also, however, some separate, direct benefits for the mother. The main one was that women could more easily (re-)marry, because children from another relationship – especially children born in the bush – are often not accepted by the new husband or his family. This was an important factor for younger war affected women especially. One WAN member stated that: “A woman cannot move to her new home with the children, they will need to seek for where to leave the children or they risk losing their new found marital home”. It was asserted that there was a risk that new husbands would sexually molest daughters and treat sons as a threat to land claim. This was reinforced by one of the mothers who had done a reintegration, who told us that she did it partly so that her daughter is not abused in her (new) husband’s house. Moreover, maternal families were asserted to often be uncomfortable, and sometimes outright unwilling, to raise children who should, according to cultural norms, be with the paternal clan.

For the paternal side of the family, reintegrations were said to have substantial psychological benefits. One respondent asserted that in circumstances where the formerly abducted child (now the father of the child born in captivity) is taken to be dead, the newly united child is seen in the eyes of the family members as a replacement for his late dad: his appearance represents the presence of the father. This perception was said to relieve stress, sad memories and stigma in the family. This was largely supported by paternal families spoken to for this evaluation (see Effectiveness chapter).

In terms of wider societal and cultural importance, reintegration was viewed as important for sense of unity and future peace and stability. One cultural leader respondent stated: “If the reunification process is not dealt with it directly affects the culture because culture is socially transmitted. In the event that the families are not re united, we shall definitely have a disorganised society.” Others spelled out the possible effect of having children growing up ‘without an identity’ more explicitly. One WAN respondent asserted that if the children remained without an identity, “there was a high likelihood that they will become frustrated in future and become a source of insecurity in the society”.

## 4. EFFECTIVENESS

The following chapter sets out findings on the extent to which the project was effective in fulfilling its objectives and outcomes, and the reasons behind it – the key factors which influenced effectiveness, positively and negatively.

### 4.1 To what extent were planned outcomes achieved?

As noted in Chapter 2, there was one stated objective and one stated outcome for the project, both relating to supporting war affected women to reintegrate/unite children (born in captivity/war) with their paternal family. For the purposes of assessing effectiveness we have added two further objectives based on our understanding of what the project did and sought to achieve by it:

- Increase awareness of the issue and commitment to supporting reintegrations/unifications from cultural leaders in each target sub-region
- Increase public awareness of the issue, and empathy for the affected women and children in Lango, Teso and West Nile sub-regions.

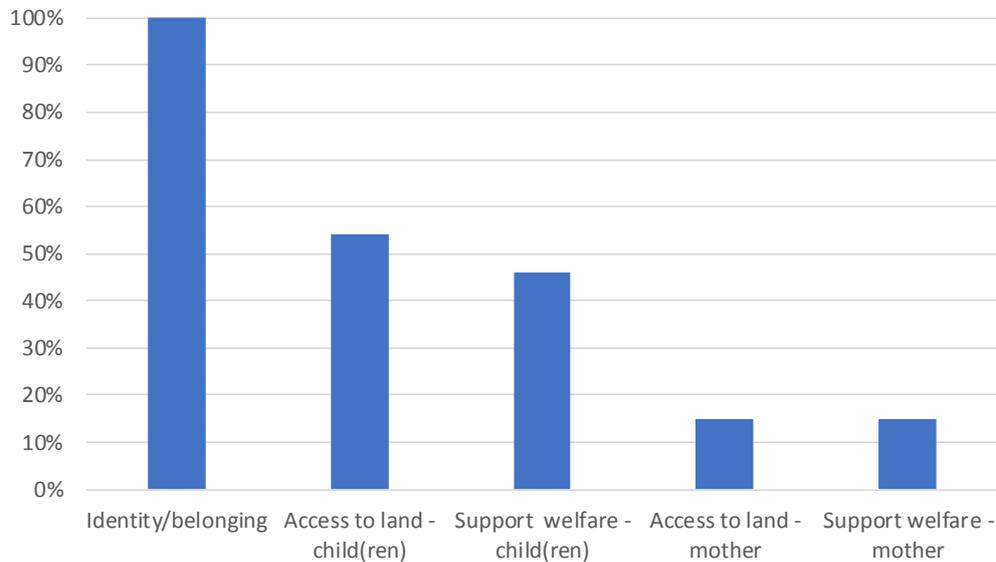
These were not stated objectives in the project plan but emerged as intended effects in interviews with JRP.

#### 4.1.1 Supporting war affected women reintegrate their children through family reunions for family support, access to land and a sense of identity

Figure 1 below shows the different types of outcome/result from the reintegrations and what proportion of cases attained them. This is based only on the 13 cases in which the process was completed. There were also others which were dropped after the tracing or preliminary visit stage for a variety of reasons, including not being able to find the home due to use of pseudonym by the fathers (3 instances) and unwilling/unsupportive paternal family (one case).

As can be seen, all 13 completed reintegrations were deemed to have resulted in a sense of identity/belonging for the child (in as much as they were accepted by the paternal family). Seven cases (54 percent) resulted in the child(ren) getting access to land, six (46 percent) resulted in support from the paternal family for the child(ren)'s welfare (mainly in the form of school fees), while in two cases (15 percent) respectively the mother also got access to land and support with welfare. There were no specific targets or indicators on this, although the desired/ideal result for each reintegration was that the child was accepted by the paternal family/clan, was given access to land, and support given for school fees and/or other costs associated with their welfare. Access to land and support for welfare of the mother were not explicitly sought or expected so, where these occurred, it could be seen as a bonus. What results point to overall are the different levels of acceptance. If access to land is a signifier of full acceptance/membership of the clan, then the almost half of reintegrations which did not attain this might be seen as only partial successes. On the other hand, each case has its own unique features and access to land is easier for some clans to grant than others (depending on how much land there is and how much pressure on it). Furthermore, reintegration is ongoing process, and it seems there are prospects that access to land will be given in future for some of those cases where it is not yet there.

Figure 1 Outcomes of reintegration processes completed under the project



In the eyes of several respondents, the reintegrations conducted through the project were its central purpose and achievement. Overall, these were universally seen as having been beneficial by those involved, whether mothers and paternal families or WAN members and leaders. All of the reasons and potential benefits identified as making reintegration important (see Relevance chapter) were evident in the experience of reintegration.

For the mothers and children, the most universal positive effect was gaining a sense of identity for the child(ren) – something which was evident even in cases where other things, like land, had not yet come from it:

*“[My child now] knows her people, home and clan. When I took her there I told her family that I had brought their daughter to know home.”* (Mother of reintegrated child)

*“They [the children] now talk very proudly of the clan they come from. If anything happens to them we know were to run to”* (Mother of reintegrated child)

This in turn had resolved the unease and anxiety the mothers felt over the issue:

*“I was unhappy in the past because I wasn’t so sure of where I would settle my son but now I can proudly say I will live a happy life. A child who doesn’t know his paternal home always stresses you when he tries to ask for his home and you don’t know what to tell him.”* (Mother of reintegrated child)

*“Reintegration of these children was important to answer all the questions that I had been avoiding all this while. I had not told my children my past and the where about of their father but am glad that after this process and project I start another life free from lies and guilt to my children. I can now tell them my story.”* (Mother of reintegrated child)

Some mothers also referred to reduced stigmatisation as a result of the reintegration. Children’s familiarity with clan customs and culture and being “blessed by family rituals” was also cited.

A similar sense of a long-standing source of pain and unease having been resolved was also evident from the paternal side. One WAN member involved in the reintegrations told of how one old woman who had lost her son reacted with real joy when she met her grandchildren. A paternal family respondent interviewed for the evaluation noted that the reintegration has “healed the thoughts that our children died. Now we are ok.”

However, as seen, the project was only partially successful in securing access to land, and especially support with school fees, medical expenses and the like. Where one or all of these had come, mothers were very appreciative and happy. Where they had not there was some disappointment:

*“I wanted help with paying school fees, it was good that the kids got to know their homes but education is the key. I never went to school because my education was cut short by the rebels but I want my children to have a better life by being educated. I thought then if I couldn’t afford then their family would offer support.”* (Mother of reintegrated child)

In some cases there was clarity over what support would and would not be offered: “I have to look for food for my children because the brothers to my husband said they too, have to look after their children” (Mother of reintegrated child). However, there were also perceptions and reports of false promises and pretence on the part of the fathers’ families: “When the children are taken, they are welcomed but if a follow up is made by the mother, nothing is given. The child may face mistreatment. They only pretend to love the child.”

However, findings also suggest that some paternal families are living in poverty and simply unable to provide much in terms of material support. Another factor may be different expectations and understandings between the mother and paternal family. In one case the paternal family expected that on unification the children would mean that the children came and lived at their paternal home. However, the mother did not have the same idea and, in the event, the children left with her and had not returned up to the point of the interview. This was seen on the paternal side as having prevented full reconciliation between the two families and he was not prepared to provide support with school fees, medical expenses, clothing, food or other items if the children were not living there.

Meanwhile in cases where the children had gone to live at the paternal home, there were some reports of them not having integrated well and been found hard to handle by the paternal family. It was noted that some are traumatised and have behavioural problems linked to their past experiences.

Though this was not an issue in the cases directly explored in the evaluation, there have been instances of tension arising between the maternal and paternal families. In one focus group, it was reported that maternal families sometimes blame the paternal family for causing misfortune to their child, while the paternal family may think the girl is responsible for the death of their son. It was stated that if these problems are not solved then the hard work put into bringing about the reintegration will be wasted.

#### 4.1.2 Increasing awareness and engagement of cultural leaders

The main activities for this objective were a dialogue meeting held in April 2016 and a follow-up meeting held in November 2016. Thirty-two chiefs and leaders from Acholi, West Nile, Lango and Teso attended the function. During the dialogue, certain actions were agreed by the cultural leaders. The second event was to discuss how actions were proceeding.

The dialogue was generally seen as a success by evaluation research respondents. In interviews with cultural leaders there was general acknowledgement that the project had caused them to be more aware and give more attention to this issue. One cultural leader respondent asserted that: “The project brought the marginalised, hidden people outside. We now know their needs. Earlier on, we had not known much about the problem of children born in captivity.” It was also stated that the project had “opened the gate to other cultural leaders to start community sensitisation on the importance of accepting the women and their children.”

Some concrete actions had reportedly been taken as a result of this increased awareness and attention. Ker Kwaro Acholi has initiated an office called the Acholi Cultural Gender Relations office, which is charged with advocating for the rights of women and girls in the family, and it was reported that there have been mediations with families to allow access to land for women, including war affected women. It is the view of Ker Kwaro that war affected women should have the privileges and rights to access and use land belonging to the clan of their child(ren)’s father.

In Lango sub-region, the project has also reportedly prompted some new governance arrangements, plus some community sensitisations on the issue (though it was not clear how many had been conducted). The Lango cultural leaders have called for a general clan meeting “to sensitise the community on the different cultural aspects of child/mother reunion, and the importance of community dialogue meeting and reconciliation of families.” They have also formed a ‘clan council’, to continue to work on the issue, through empowering, sensitising and mediating.

The cultural leadership of the Madi community in West Nile is also reportedly engaged in some activities, including – like in Acholi – work on a women’s rights, including property rights. A document is reportedly being developed to establish clearly what these rights are. There is also a focus on linking mothers and children to livelihood projects (such as the Government of Uganda Operation Wealth Creation programme), as it is felt that this will provide a means to empowerment. Scholarships are reportedly also being sought for war affected children.

Both JRP and cultural leaders themselves observed that the dialogue between WAN and cultural leaders had empowered women to speak up about the issue. As one cultural leader respondent said, “The process has created an avenue for WAN members to come out and speak about their problem.”

#### 4.1.3 Increase public awareness of the issue, and empathy for the affected women and children in Lango, Teso and West Nile sub-regions

The main activity/output for this objective were the series of radio talk shows held in each of the sub-regions outside of Acholi involving members of WAN and cultural leaders (nine in total). It is somewhat difficult to assess what effect these had on public awareness of the issue and empathy for the affected women and children. In the two interviews with radio stations which had hosted a talk show in Lira (Lango sub-region) and Soroti (Teso sub-region), the radio presenters reported that the shows got a fairly large response in terms of callers, and those who called in were positive and supportive of the project and affected women and children. This is in line with reports of other talk shows made in project reporting. It was further reported both by the radio presenter and a WAN respondent that some war affected mothers phoned into the Teso show and requested support for reintegrating their children.

There were mixed views on the effectiveness of the radio talk shows amongst cultural leader respondents. One considered that the radio talk show he was involved in reached a good-sized

audience, another considered the one he was involved in did not reach much of an audience (partly due to being aired in the evening when, in his view, not so many would have been paying attention to it). Another cultural leader respondent also felt that the radio talk shows had opened up an issue on which people had previously been silent. However, he and others felt much more needed to be done, and one cultural leader considered that the effect of the radio talk shows would have been greater if reinforced with actual reintegrations.

WAN members and leader also noted that WAN does have some reach into Lira (Lango) and West Nile, and is doing some reintegration related work there, though no presence in Teso.

## 4.2 What were the major factors influencing effectiveness – positive and negative?

The following assesses key strengths and weaknesses, enablers and inhibitors affecting effectiveness across important aspects and considerations: the reintegration process, the capacity to deliver the process, which stakeholders were engaged and how well, the approach outside of Acholi, and factors related to administration and management of the project.

### 4.2.1 The reintegration process

The reintegration process was generally seen as a factor positively influencing effectiveness. The techniques used to search for and find the paternal family's home were seen as effective, the preliminary contact was seen as important from both the mother's and paternal family's side, and the mediation and unification itself was also seen very positively.

*"I would say that all the stages were very strong and it was effective. One stage determined the success of the other."* (Mother of reintegrated child)

*"The first stage that involved looking for the home was very strong. It was very hard to try and find out where the home was. I failed to do it on my own, I have always wanted to find it [since] a long time ago but because I couldn't trace it, I gave up."* (Mother of reintegrated child)

It was noted that JRP and WAN had previous experience of doing reintegrations and have learnt from that experience, particularly in relation to the importance of doing the preliminary visit to brief the paternal family and ensure they are ready and willing to proceed.

It was also noted that the utilisation of traditional cultural reconciliation rituals and local cultural leaders is vital to the effectiveness of the unification. Having an approach that fits with existing cultural norms and traditions practiced for generations was seen as a major asset, and vital for gaining confidence and acceptance of the process among the paternal family and their local community. Cultural norms did not always work in favour of the project goals, however: as in the two instances the maternal side of the family asked for fines to be paid by the paternal side.

The part of the process which emerged as the weakest was the follow-up stage. Although follow-ups had been made in all reintegration cases other than one, some mothers and some paternal family respondents saw it as lacking in some respects:

*"The weakest stage is the follow up stage. For the first time if they show you to the family, the next time you can find your way home alone."* (Mother)

*"JRP should create linkage between the families so that children are properly supported... working toward welfare and education of the children [through] linkages to relevant organizations and offices to help cover what they cannot do in their scope of work."* (Paternal family member)

Part of this came from the, previously mentioned, belief that some paternal family members may begin neglecting, excluding or otherwise mistreating children after the mother and JRP/WAN have gone, and that there is therefore a duty to follow-up and ensure their welfare and safety:

*“There should be support/advisory system to rescue these categories of children where there is poor re-unification”* (Paternal family member)

This is despite reports from elsewhere that each reintegrated child is followed up twice in six months and in case of any emergency, immediate action is taken.

#### 4.2.2 Capacity building

Findings generally suggest the skills and competencies to undertake reintegrations effectively was a strength of the project and a factor which positively influenced its effectiveness, although it seems that not everyone involved had the same level of preparedness.

The experience and opinion of the mothers and paternal family members interviewed for the research were very positive about how WAN members handled the process:

*“WAN did great. They tried hard to connect with the families... speaking on our behalf and linking the whole process.”* (Mother of reintegrated child)

*The members of WAN were very skilled and knowledgeable. You know that it is not easy deal with community ... The war impacted very negatively on people’s attitudes toward strangers. The staffs of WAN were very skilled in communication. They have the best languages of talking and letting the community respect and accept their idea. They were very influential in the reintegration process.”* (Mother of reintegrated child)

*“WAN members have very good skills for tracing families for re union. They are also very open and transparent in sharing their life experience, skills and knowledge. They are competent in conducting community dialogue meetings and sensitisation on radios.”* (Paternal family member)

WAN leaders were positive that they and regular members involved in reintegrations were well equipped with the knowledge and skills needed. However, in the focus group with WAN members it was reported that training/ capacity building was not received and members had to learn through doing. One participant stated: “We didn’t have any knowledge, especially for the family dialogue, we would just go for family dialogues without any skill; in case we found challenge, we would abandon the process”.

The reason for this contradiction is not clear and may require investigation. It may be that there was a mismatch between those WAN members given capacity building and those who did reintegrations, or perhaps that the capacity building was quite generic and some did not realise that it was for reintegrations.

WAN respondents also asserted that there will be a lasting improvement in skills and empowerment amongst the membership. One cultural leader had noticed this improvement and stated that WAN and its individual members can now be a strong force to unite communities, and members are now at a point when they can take up responsibilities/leadership roles outside WAN.

However, there was little sign of WAN’s organisational capacity having been developed. The project was theoretically part of an ongoing process of WAN moving towards full autonomy. At one point, there was a goal of achieving autonomy during 2016. This has not happened and appears to be some way off. No progress was evident from the evaluation and, in fact, it emerged that WAN was not much involved in key aspects of project management, particularly monitoring and reporting.

### 4.2.3 Stakeholder engagement

#### *High level cultural leaders*

One factor identified as a positive influence on effectiveness was the receptiveness of cultural leaders. One JRP respondent asserted that cultural leaders had really responded well and took the issue seriously. This was apparently partly because it was consistent with a traditional duty to take care of isolated children. One cultural leader respondent put it like this: “As head of clan identity and custodian of land...I also need to accept the children born in captivity [and] make reconciliation of the victims.”

It was also observed that having women and their children talk directly to cultural leaders was observed to have been a very powerful way of communicating the issue, and to have had an impact on the leaders.

On the other hand, there was also some feeling that the verbal support and commitments given by cultural leaders has not been matched by action and may not amount to so much in practice.

#### *Lower level cultural leaders*

Successful engagement of cultural leaders was a critical factor in the effectiveness of reintegrations - specifically the clan heads (as they have the local knowledge). All reintegrations involved clan heads while involvement of higher level cultural leaders was inconsistent: in some cases, they were present, and their presence was reportedly useful and appreciated, but in a number of instances they were not and the process was still able to go on well. Cultural leaders (whether high/Rwot or lower/clan level) were widely seen as the most important external stakeholder across the groups consulted for the evaluation: not just because they are the one to lead the reconciliation rituals but also to support the whole process, including identifying the paternal family, communicating and smoothing relations, teaching the reunited children about the customs and traditions of the clan. One part of their contribution highlighted as crucial is gaining people’s attention and support. One WAN member noted that “when the cultural leaders speak, people listen”.

#### *Engagement of other stakeholders*

There were mixed experiences and views on involvement of other stakeholders in the reintegrations. Some felt that it was not necessary to have anyone else involved (other than WAN or JRP member, clan chief, and the families). There was, however, general acceptance that the lowest level of lower local government (LC1 and LCII) should be involved (as they reportedly were in most cases). It was asserted that the LC1 should be there at the reintegration/unification ceremony as a witness so that s/he is aware of what has happened and better able to perform an ongoing monitoring role. It was also reported by some of those involved in the reintegrations that the LC1 had been active and useful in speaking to the community and promoting acceptance of the war affected women and child(ren), and – in one instance – speaking to the child and explaining how things were in the village and what would be expected of them.

Other, higher local government officials, such as LCIII, LC5, CDO, were not engaged as a matter of course, though they were involved in certain cases and appear to have made a useful contribution in those instances. One WAN leader recounted one case in which the LC5 and CAO were both involved and talked to the community in such a way as to positively influence attitudes toward war affected people. However, involvement of such government representatives was not always viewed favourably. One WAN member asserted that stakeholders aligned to the government would jeopardize the success of the project: “Normally, people lack trust in government workers and once you involve them, people lose trust in a project”. Another WAN member asserted that involving

stakeholders like police would appear like coercing the other party to take up responsibility for the children and provoke them to become belligerent.

However, there was also a counter view, including from paternal family members and cultural leaders, who identified Parish Development Committee (PDCs), sub-county chiefs/LCIIs and CDOs as useful to be involved. One reason for this was to aid linkages and referrals: it was noted that if such stakeholders are engaged and aware of the situation they may act to link children and/or mothers to livelihoods and other support. One mother stated:

*“The sub county chief should have also been invited. In most cases the sub county host a lot of people and programs for scholarships that the children can benefit from. If they are aware of the presence of that particular child within the community she could benefit from the program.”*

Another reason was land issues: LCIIs and LCIIIs were noted to be important in relation to issues of land access and protection.

There was some feeling that lack of consistent engagement of local government stakeholders for specific reintegrations but also for general sensitisation of district stakeholders (LC5, CAO, RDC etc.).

There was also a view amongst some respondents that religious leaders should be involved to bolster messages of peace and reconciliation.

#### 4.2.4 Factors in the Lango, Teso and West Nile related activities

The approach to Lango, Teso, and West Nile was generally seen to have been reasonably effective in and of itself in terms of creating more awareness of the issue, but not sufficient to bring real change, including adoption of reintegrations. Cultural leaders widely admired the reintegration process but there was no strong sense of their being ready or able to lead it. Rather, one cultural leader asserted that he would have liked to see radio talk shows backed up by reintegrations to demonstrate to the public that it can produce a good outcome. Similarly, a WAN respondent asserted that the effect of the project will not be much felt outside of Acholi because there was no direct support, and radio programmes only served to create hope of action which will go unfulfilled without further support (as noted previously, there was at least one instance – in Teso – of radio talk shows provoking requests for assistance with reintegrations).

#### 4.2.5 Project design / methodology

There are strengths but also some clear shortcomings in the project design/methodology which are very likely to have influenced effectiveness both positively and negatively. The key strength, and positive influence, is the reconciliation process. This was clearly stated in the proposal and is grounded in prior experience and learning. However, outside of the reintegrations themselves, the project design is somewhat thin – not clearly linked to an objective and lacking in detail. The objective and outcome relate only to supporting reintegrations: the cultural leader dialogues and radio talk shows are included only as activities under this objective/outcome but do not quite fit with it. There is nothing like a sustainability strategy.

#### 4.2.6 Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL)

Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) emerged as a generally weak. Although the JRP/WAN proposal to WI states that the funding will support M&E, there are only two short sentences on it in the proposal, no results framework/logical framework or similar was developed, so there are no indicators by which progress/performance could be monitored and evaluated, and there is no M&E Plan or similar setting out how M&E will be conducted. In the limited M&E framework which was set, there is some confusion evident about what constitutes an outcome and an output. An outcome

is a change that results from an intervention. The stated outcome for this project was more-or-less a re-statement of the objective, and it states what the project will do (it will support reintegrations), rather than what change it will bring about. Outputs are direct results of the project and should, in a well-designed project, directly lead to the outcomes. The stated outputs for this project are reports (the types of reports which most projects produce – quarterly progress, annual review etc.), rather than the results of what the project did to achieve the outcome e.g. '12 successfully concluded reintegrations', 'two dialogue meetings with cultural leaders from each sub-region', 'An agreed set of actions for cultural leader to conduct' etc. Each outcome and output should have specific, measurable indicators and means of verification (i.e. from what source the evidence needed for each indicator will be derived and by who).

#### 4.2.7 Project administration and management

There were some issues concerning the administration and planning of the project which negatively influenced effectiveness:

- Inconsistent fund disbursement – funds were sometimes disbursed late due to donor delays causing planned reintegration activities to be postponed, with reported loss of confidence in the community; additional funds were then added based on consultations by WI with JRP regarding the amount of additional resources the reintegration programme could effectively absorb.
- Scheduling reintegration meetings was reported to be challenging – difficult to find a time when all parties are available, and often subject to delays from the paternal family's side.

The delayed fund disbursement appears to have largely been due to delays in the disbursement of funds by donors to Women's Initiative. At times, late reporting from JRP also reportedly contributed to delays. It was noted that, since schedules were determined by families and prone to changes, at times internal procedures for requesting funds were not followed because of need to go for an activity abruptly.

Coordination and communication between the Women's Initiative, JRP and WAN appears to have been a positive influence.

## 5 IMPACT

### 5.1 What are the indications of wider and long term impact?

There are a number of ways in which the project had an impact beyond its immediate objectives.

For one, as noted previously, there were clear benefits for paternal families as well as the war affected women and children supported.

There were mixed indications on how much the project has impacted WAN and JRP visibility. One or two respondent reported that there was an increased awareness amongst the community that JRP/WAN are there and can help on this issue. However, it was also found when visiting paternal families that JRP and WAN did not have strong recognition.

The bringing together of the different cultural leaders from different sub-regions was also remarked on as quite a unique event which may have positive ramifications for future.

Overall impact at a societal level reaching into the longer term is hard to assess, particularly so soon after the project has ended. One cultural leader stated that: "A healthy society is where more people are helpful and supportive to each other. The reunification project has clearly brought that out". One WAN member stated,

*"This project will always be known for bringing back the lost identities by bringing back hope where it was lost completely. It will also be remembered for letting a smile in the faces of the mother's children who have for a long time been deprived of their rights."*

However, it was also widely noted that the scale of the project is very small compared to the level of need. As such, the impact at a cultural/societal level will probably be small unless the project leads to further efforts, and this is under some doubt (see Sustainability Chapter).

### 5.2 What were the unintended effects/consequences of the project – positive or negative?

Several unintended consequences were identified, both positive and negative.

One positive unintended consequence has been that, in some instances, the reconciliation has prompted reconciliation between maternal and paternal clans - this was not foreseen but has come as a significant additional benefit. As previously noted, however, there have also been instances when the reintegration raised tensions between maternal and paternal clans over demands for compensation.

The project has also prompted other groups to come forward (i.e. not formerly abducted women) and seek reunification, including women who had children by soldiers in IDP camps, and also men who lost their wives while in the bush. One respondent even stated that it has made people think that a similar process could be used to trace children born in secret outside marriage (not connected to war).

Another unanticipated result of reconciliations has been that paternal family members have demanded for both mothers and children to settle on land, and some men from the clan to become interested in inheriting the women. This has both positive and negative aspects. For those women who were looking for somewhere to settle, it has been positive. But some did not want to settle on

the paternal family's land, and most of the women already have another husband or partner. One mother interviewed for the project was facing such a situation and told us:

*"I can foresee negative consequences [of the reintegration] in the future. The uncles are interested in inheriting me, no one is minding about how to take care of the child but they are asking me to go live back there as a wife. They have been having conflicts amongst themselves on who will take the responsibility."*

It was noted that WAN always advises the mothers to take a stand and refuse to be inherited.

## 6 SUSTAINABILITY

### 6.1 To what extent are activities, results and effects expected to continue beyond the end of the intervention, and why?

There was no sustainability strategy or similar in the design of this project. The indications from the evaluation research are mixed: some real positives but, ultimately, activities appear unlikely to continue on any widespread, consistent basis without further funding.

The big positives for sustainability are in technical capacity and having a replicable model for reintegration. At least in the areas covered by WAN, there are enough people with the technical capacity (and commitment) to conduct a significant number of reintegrations (albeit still below that needed to meet the full potential demand). WAN has been doing reintegrations for some time so this is by no means all attributable to the project, but the project has grown that capacity. It has also increased the engagement and commitment of cultural leaders and strengthened the link between cultural leaders and WAN. Meanwhile, the pre-existing rehabilitation process has been refined to the point where it can be replicated. JRP noted that they are in the early stages of developing documentation/tools for this.

Another plus is that the reintegrations are a relatively low cost activity: the main cost is transport to get people to the paternal home for the preliminary visit, unification ceremony, follow ups and so on. Despite this, none of the different organisations involved (JRP, WAN, cultural institutions) have the funds needed, and this threatens to prevent the technical capacity and will that is there being utilised. When asked if they would be able to take on the work of the project all three cultural leaders interviewed replied with a clear 'no', because of lack of funds for transport and other costs (though there are other activities like setting up offices/councils and continuation of dialogues).

## 7 Views on how best to build on project achievements

All stakeholders interviewed were asked what they thought should be done after the end of the current project. Several ideas and suggestions were put forward, including:

- Ensure those who have done reintegrations continue to be monitored and supported
- Continuation and scale-up of reintegrations, including into sub-regions outside Acholi through expansion of WAN or establishment of similar institutions
- Strengthen the follow-up/monitoring stage of the reintegration process
- Continued capacity building for WAN, including in resource mobilisation
- Broaden the target group to include non-abducted women with children from the war, children still in the bush or living outside Uganda, and/or men seeking to trace their former wife/children
- Formally document the reintegration process and disseminate, including across the wider transitional justice field
- Promote community dialogue meetings to raise awareness of the issue at community level
- Link to/incorporate livelihoods and education support for war affected women and children
- Engage stakeholders not widely engaged at this point, including civil society, District Local Government (including probation officers, childcare units, social workers), and lower local government (including Parish Development Committee).

One further interesting idea, put forward by both WAN and a cultural leader was to develop a consortium including WAN, the cultural institutions, and other key players. This was seen as important for more effective coordination and resource mobilisation. It was also seen as a way to incorporate or more effectively link to other services and support (livelihoods, health, education etc.). It was asserted that the issues faced by war affected women are complex and there needs to be a mechanism for bringing the different types of support needed together.

Regarding the Lango, Teso and West Nile sub-regions, there was a sense that a first step has been taken but that there is now need to back it up. Some ideas for how to do this were put forward by one of the cultural leaders interviewed: for WAN/JRP to attend clan meetings, and train/capacity build the cultural institution branches with a remit on women's rights (e.g. the clan council in Lango).

## 8 Conclusion and Recommendations

The Supporting War Affected Women Reintegrate their Children through Family Reunions project has effectively supported war affected women in Acholi sub-region to resolve a major source of difficulty and tension for them and their children. In doing so it has contributed to the wider effort for justice and reconciliation in the areas of northern Uganda affected by the LRA/UPDF conflict.

The strength of the project has been the utilisation of prior learning and experience to deploy a clear, appropriate and comprehensive process; working through the WAN structure and, therefore, empowering war affected women to lead the process as well as benefit from it, and; engaging cultural leaders both at the higher and lower levels. A further key aspect was to venture into new territory by engaging cultural leaders and raising public awareness from areas outside Acholi sub-region, which are also affected but where little attention has been given to the issue to date.

The project's stated objective was to support war affected women reintegrate their children through family reunions for family support, access to land and a sense of identity. Not all those three aspects (support for welfare, access to land, sense of identity) were achieved in every case, but evidence collected for this evaluation suggests that the 13 reintegrations conducted during the project have brought substantial benefits, not only to the war affected women and their children, but to the paternal families. There was a real sense of healing in interviews with both mothers and paternal families.

Overall, the engagement of the cultural leaders can be judged successful and important. There are clear signs that it has genuinely awoken them to the issue and spurred some potentially significant action on pushing it forward within the cultural institutions. The effect of the radio talk shows held in Lango, Teso, and West Nile is harder to assess, but has contributed to some extent to promoting awareness of the issue amongst the public in those areas.

However, despite these various important achievements, the project was not fully realised in its design and there is a clear sense of it leaving behind something unfinished. Much as the project has further built up a platform for a sustainable solution, the point has not yet been reached whereby the reintegration agenda can be taken forward without outside funding and support. This is perhaps at least partly inevitable from such a short-duration project. However, clearer design and MEL would have at least increased the chances of having a more sustainable impact. The benefits to the mothers and children directly supported are likely to sustain at least in some cases, though more follow-up would be beneficial. However, the likelihood of further ongoing action being taken from WAN members and/or cultural leaders is much shakier, and there is a real risk that little will come without further intervention.

The following sets out some recommendations for how the work done under the project could most effectively be built on, and the reintegrations scaled-up.

### 8.1 Recommendations

#### **1. Continue to monitor and follow-up project reintegrations**

Successful and beneficial as reintegrations appear to have been, there is still need to check on the children and mothers, ensure their safety and welfare, mediate on any problems that have arisen, and refer to external services/support as needed and possible. Lack of resources may be a challenge and constraint for this but discussions should be held with and within WAN to ensure that what can be done is done.

## **2. Review and refine the reintegration process**

The evaluation generally found the reintegration process to have worked well, but it also pointed to one or two areas which would benefit from review and refinement. One is the follow-up/referral stage which seems less fully developed and less effective than the preceding stages. There was little evidence of links being made to other services or support (e.g. psycho-social, livelihoods), more was evident on monitoring of the child's welfare but it appears this may also need strengthening. One obvious way to do this, which was put forward several times in the research, is to strengthen linkages with local government. Clearly local stakeholders such as LC1s, clan heads, are best placed to do regular monitoring. This does happen but there is perhaps a need to formalise it and support it a little more. Meanwhile, LCIIIs and parish councils could potentially be brought in more to assist with linking to services and support.

Another area which may benefit from attention is management of expectations of the clients. It was apparent that some mothers go in with high expectations (e.g. land, school fees) which are not always met, and that paternal family members sometimes make assumptions (e.g. that the child and mother will come and live on their land) that are not always accurate. This points to need for clearer briefing and advising of both sides. While conducting the review it may also be worth exploring what is behind the finding that some WAN members appear to have gone into reintegrations without having been trained for it, despite the conducting of this training.

## **3. Formalise and disseminate the reintegration model**

JRP's idea of documenting the rehabilitation process and promoting it as a replicable model seems an excellent one (albeit it should be done after the above suggested review and refinement exercise). A well-documented process could potentially be used as a tool/resource around which to training other actors on how to conduct and/or support the reintegration process.

## **4. Grow linkages and explore the consortium approach**

There is need to maintain and develop the linkages established with the cultural institutions and leaders. Linking with the two new women's rights focused branches in Acholi and Lango would appear to be one potentially fruitful avenue for this. There is also need to explore and establish new links, particularly with District Local Government. As acknowledged by JRP, some consideration and testing is needed to establish how this can work effectively.

The idea for a consortium has potential and there also appears to be appetite for it. This should therefore also be further explored. Under this approach, District Local Government would presumably be part of the consortium. This would potentially strengthen access to funds and potential to link with government services and support.

## **5. Seek to strengthen strategic planning, project design and MEL**

This evaluation indicates that there is something of a gap/weakness in this area which needs to be addressed to enhance effectiveness, impact, efficiency and sustainability of interventions, as well as to support the goal of an autonomous WAN.