

# Children

## Affected by Conflict



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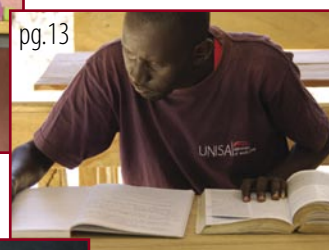
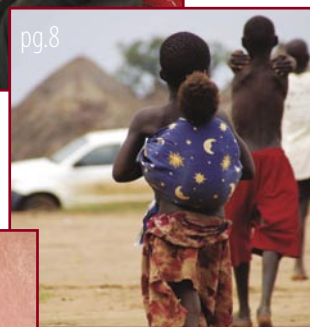
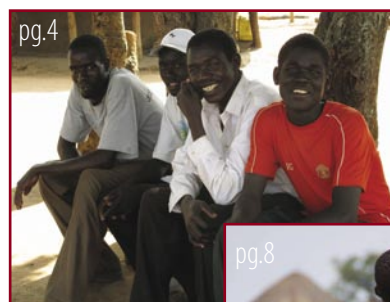
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A child in an IDP camp near Kitgum, northern Uganda, seeking shelter from the rain.

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# Foreword

**Every year on 20 November, the international community observes Universal Children's Day to draw attention to the situation of children around the world and call for their rights to be respected.**

This year Universal Children's Day coincides with the 20th anniversary of the adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child by the UN General Assembly. For the first time, the Convention acknowledged that children are individual rights-holders which was a major step ahead. To date it is the most widely ratified international human rights treaty. But even 20 years after the adoption of the Convention, the rights of children are still not respected and continue to be trampled on.

JRS Eastern Africa has seized both the anniversary and Universal Children's Day as an opportunity to take a closer look at the situation of children in this region. All the children JRS works with in eastern Africa are affected by conflict in one way or another. In northern Uganda thousands of

children have been abducted and recruited as child soldiers or sex slaves by the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA). Hundreds of thousands have been forced into overcrowded, unhygienic internally displaced persons (IDP) camps, where all the cultural and moral values of their communities are lost. In Southern Sudan, children who return after years of war barely find access to education because of a lack of infrastructure and trained personnel. Many have been separated from their families and have had to assume adult roles in order to survive. Girls easily become victims of sexual abuse or are forced to marry at an early age. Our experience in Kakuma, one of Kenya's two refugee camps, has shown that children with disabilities are rejected by their communities and deprived of equal opportunities. Refugee children living in urban centres such as Addis

Ababa, Kampala or Nairobi receive no assistance while their parents struggle to make a living.

Sadly, whenever a conflict breaks out, it is always the most innocent who bear the brunt. Children, in particular, need special assistance and care for their wounds on body and soul to heal; a process that requires due time and is essential for a new beginning. If their wounds are not healed, this will also adversely affect the future of their communities.

Often, their struggle seems unbearable. But their resilience and strength while trying to become masters of their future is a sign of hope. I have met many children who, emerging from a conflict, seemed stronger and more determined to go on with life. Their faith in a God of life helps many to maintain their dignity and not lose hope.

I hope the following accounts from JRS workers across the region and from children accompanied by JRS in eastern Africa will endow you with a better understanding of their situation and encourage you to become yourself an advocate for their rights. ■



# The Rights of War-Affected Children: An Overview

By Wangechi Gitahi  
Jesuit Hakimani Centre

Children are innocent and vulnerable, yet they have become the primary victims of armed conflict. They are its target and are increasingly being used as instruments and perpetrators of violence. Although they are the ones least responsible for it, they are bearing the brunt. They are killed or maimed, separated from their families, abducted, illegally detained and deprived of basic services such as water, sanitation, health care and education. Girls, in particular, face sexual violence which has been used as a weapon of war. Many are recruited into armies and made child soldiers, forced to perform atrocities that leave them traumatised and with deep emotional scars.

The use of children as tools of war is not a completely new phenomenon, but it is the scale and scope being witnessed now that is without precedent. Historical comparative analysis has shown that a child living in a war-torn society today runs a higher risk of being maimed, raped or used as a combatant than a child who lived in equally violent circumstances in the past.

It is estimated that over one billion children live in countries or territories affected by armed conflict. Of these, some 300 million are under the age of five. Statistics show that at least 300,000 children are used as combatants on battlefields around the world, two million are deliberately murdered, 20 million are refugees or internally displaced persons, five million are handicapped, twelve million are abandoned, one million are orphans, and ten million are severely traumatised due to violent conflict

Africa is one of the worst affected continents providing for over 60% of the above statistics. Sadly, in most cases these statistics are an under estimation of the situation on the ground as there is usually a lack of proper numbers in conflict areas.

In Uganda, the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) has abducted around 20,000 children forcing them to be child soldiers and sex workers. Thousands of children have died in LRA captivity. In Liberia, estimates say that around 20 percent of the combatants who fought in the civil war between 1989 and 1997 were children.

A survey on children and war in Mozambique showed that throughout the 16 years of war more than 80 percent of the children were forcibly separated from their families.

The international community has continually highlighted the need for advocacy and proper policies. At the Security Council's opening debate on children and armed conflict in July 2008, UN Secretary-General, Ban Ki-moon, emphasised the importance of child protection: "The protection of children is a (...) moral call and deserves to be placed above politics. It requires innovative, fearless engagement by all stakeholders".



Although they are the most innocent, children are the primary victims of conflict

## Developing protection frameworks

Tangible results for the protection of war-affected children have been achieved during the last two decades. The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) which has been established on 20 November 1989 has led to the inclusion of children's rights in domestic legislations and is, to date, the most widely ratified international human rights treaty. Moreover, 118 countries have ratified the Optional Protocol on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict, a monitoring and reporting mechanism on child rights violations during armed conflict, and many states have adopted the Paris Commitments and Paris Principles to prevent the unlawful recruitment of children.

In 1993, the UN General Assembly recommended to appoint an inde-

*The protection of children is a moral call and deserves to be placed above politics. It requires innovative, fearless engagement by all stakeholders.*

pendent expert to study the impact of armed conflict on children. It repeatedly called on member states to end the violation of the rights of the child in armed conflicts and to ratify the optional protocol.

In 1996, the ground-breaking report by Graça Machel, 'The Impact of Armed Conflict on Children' was published. It laid a foundation for developing a solid legal protection framework and constituted an urgent call to action, emphasising that "... the impact of conflict on children is everyone's responsibility and it must be everyone's concern". In response to the report, the mandate of the Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict, who reports yearly on the situation and suggests possible solutions, was established. Six categories of crimes against children in the context of conflict have since been classified: Killing and maiming of children, recruitment or use of children as soldiers, attacks against

schools or hospitals, denial of humanitarian access for children, abduction of children as well as rape and other sexual abuse.

### Significant gaps remain

While much progress has been made, much more remains to be done. With the changing nature of armed conflict, the impact of war on children and young people is more brutal than ever. In June 2009, the Machel Study 10-Year Strategic Review was published, saying that "significant gaps remain in implementation and an alarming prevalence of serious violations of children's rights continues on the ground". The review further stressed that more efforts are needed to prioritise the care and protection of children in armed conflict and to strengthen peace building. The Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and

Armed Conflict, Radhika Coomaraswamy, called on all states to shift the collective emphasis from the development of comprehensive protection norms and standards to their practical application and implementation on the ground. She also stressed the need to establish proper monitoring and evaluation mechanisms which offer effective ways of reporting violations and guidance on which steps need to be taken to end impunity.

"Children are resilient and a source of hope," Ms Coomaraswamy said in another report in October 2007. Quoting a girl who said that children, who are the future, are inheriting an unstable world, she reminded adults, governments and the international community of their responsibility to change the environment of children from one of armed conflict to one of protection and opportunities. ■

Wangechi Gitahi is legal officer at the Jesuit Hakimani Centre in Nairobi, Kenya.

## What the Child Rights Convention says:

All adults should do what is best for children. (Article 3)

Governments have a responsibility to take all available measures to make sure children's rights are respected, protected, fulfilled. They must help families protect children's rights and create an environment where they can grow and reach their full potential. (Article 4)

Children have the right to be protected from being hurt and mistreated, physically or mentally. Governments should ensure that children are properly cared for and protect them from violence, abuse and neglect by their parents, or anyone else who looks after them. (Article 19)

Children have the right to special protection and help if they are refugees. (Article 22)

Children have the right to a standard of living that is good enough to meet their physical and mental needs. (Article 27)

All children have the right to primary education, which should be free. (Article 28)

Children's education should develop each child's personality, talents and abilities to the fullest. (Article 29)

Children have the right to relax and play, and to join in a wide range of cultural, artistic and other recreational activities. (Article 31)

No one is allowed to punish children in a cruel or harmful way. (Article 37)

Governments must do everything they can to protect and care for children affected by war. Children under 15 should not be forced or recruited to take part in a war or join the armed forces. (Article 38)

Children who have been neglected, abused or exploited should receive special help to physically and psychologically recover and reintegrate into society. (Article 39)

Children who are accused of breaking the law have the right to legal help and fair treatment in a justice system that respects their rights. (Article 40)



## Northern Uganda: A Fight for a Better Life

For around 20 years, the Acholi region in northern Uganda has been the stage for one of Africa's longest and most ferocious civil wars, turning the Acholi people into a displaced, terrified and traumatised population.

The consequences of the conflict have left a particularly devastating and lasting impact on children and youth. Of the 1.7 million people – over 90 per cent of the total population - displaced and obliged to live in overcrowded and unhygienic camps during the conflict, more than half were children below the age of 15 years and young people under 24.

According to the UN children's fund (UNICEF), 20,000 children have been abducted by the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) during the conflict. They were tortured, abused and forced to commit the worst atrocities. Many had to murder or mutilate their own family members; even forms of cannibalism were common. Whole villages were plundered, looted and destroyed by

LRA leader Joseph Kony's children's army. These children are the most traumatised and emotionally wounded today. Nonetheless, the majority of children and youth did not directly experience trauma but inherited feelings such as hate or grief from society.

Although huge efforts have been made to attend to the needs of traumatised children in the Acholi sub-region, many children remain unaccompanied. General assistance as well as the provision of mental health care has been uncoordinated, inadequate and often lacked proper insight. Few of the former abductees received basic counselling or were offered shelter at one of the reception centres after escaping the LRA.

Since 2006, JRS supports former abductees in various ways. Throughout 2008, a JRS community college provided skills training in carpentry and catering while strengthening life skills at the same time. Young mothers, orphans and former child soldiers benefited from this service. JRS also offers counselling and therapy. At present, a group of 10 boys and four girls meet twice a month with two JRS workers from the psychosocial department whom they share their experiences with. As time goes by, the focus will shift towards strengthening their coping skills. Methods such as testimony therapy, narrative exposure therapy, drawing, drama and dance are used together with rituals and prayers to enhance the healing process. "I like the fact that in the groups we can share our experiences from the bush. Even if we are now at home we still have to cope with so many painful memories and flashbacks from the time we spent with the rebels. It helps to come together, to share and to support each other," says Pauline who was abducted when she was 13 years old and forced to spend two years in captivity.

### Years of camp life leave devastating effect

Since the peace process started in 2006, the situation has calmed down and people are moving back to their



Former abductees during a meeting of a JRS support group near Kitgum



villages. But almost 20 years of camp life have led to a loss of traditional values and a collapse of social structures and livelihoods. Most people are unemployed, without hope and anxious about the future. Many children have no access to education. Around 70 percent of the men in the camps are addicted to alcohol and women, especially girls, often become victims of domestic or gender based violence.

In fact, sexual abuse and exploitation in the context of northern Uganda remains a major and very complex concern, with rape and defilement being the most common forms. This is the result of a variety of factors, such as the cultural practice of forced early marriage, child neglect, lack of life skills and the fact that many families are forced to share rooms or beds. A law intending to protect children from such abuse exists only in theory. Again, it is the children who have to bear the brunt. Orphans and neglected children, who lack protection and support, are particularly at risk. They are left with deep regret, unwanted pregnancies, injuries and sexually transmitted diseases. More than 30 percent of girls have had their first sexual experience as a result of defilement, rape, coercion or incest, usually perpetrated by a parent, relative, teacher, local leader or security personnel. In search of money or food, girls tend to engage in sexual activities with men who are much older and often infected with HIV/AIDS. Short term sexual relationships between young men and women and exposure to multiple partners are common as well, leading to the spread of infectious diseases and young women being left as single parents.

### Cultural patterns exclude girls from education

Education is another major issue in the Acholi sub-region. Due to cultural patterns, boys are preferred over girls. Since families tend to see girls as a source of income they choose to marry them off at an early age instead of allowing them continue their education. Early pregnancies com-



Drawing helps heal the wounds of traumatised children

bined with a lack of support from their families put additional strain on girls. With female teachers facing various difficulties in their profession, few role models are available to girl students. Hardly any alternatives are open to those who miss out on an education. Due to the lack of post-primary education opportunities many students do not complete their primary education. Furthermore, very few can afford post-primary education. Those who continue attending primary or secondary school often have to live with the stigma of belonging to another age-group than their peers. Few teachers trained in special needs education are available for children and youth with

*More than 30 percent of girls have had their first sexual experience as a result of defilement, rape, coercion or incest.*

disabilities, already penalised by the lack of appropriate facilities and educational materials. Consequently the drop out rates among these children are very high.

Human rights abuse, the breakdown of protective environments and inequality in the Acholi sub-region are clearly

the consequences of conflict. Children and youth are naturally dependent on their families and communities for protection and assistance. In northern Uganda, many children are deprived of this support and become victims of abuse. This increases their vulnerability and forces them to adopt negative coping mechanisms. It is heart-rending to see their needs are not being adequately addressed neither in their families, nor in their communities nor even at regional level.

### Wounded, but resilient children

Still, there is hope for the children of northern Uganda. Despite the numerous difficulties, stories of children who have regained hope after having lost all faith in the future, show that it is possible for them to find a new perspective and a way to live with their past. Intervention by various agencies, including JRS, have helped heal the wounds and improve the quality of their lives. Those accompanied by JRS have shown that they want control over their future lives, irrespective of the politics or social structures around them. In the face of all the difficulties and challenges the conflict has imposed on them, they have chosen not to give in to despair and bitterness but to fight for a better life. ■

Ogena Godfrey and Stephanie Brosch both work in the JRS Psychosocial Programme in Kitgum, Uganda.

# Abducted by the Lord's Resistance Army

## TESTIMONY

The Story of Alex, 24 years

I was 18 years old when I was abducted by the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA). The rebels came at 10 o'clock in the morning. We all ran away but they had positioned one of their groups on the other side of our village and we ran right into their hands. I managed to dodge three soldiers but the fourth one kicked me and I fell. Then they tied my hands and asked me questions about the presence and the movement of the Ugandan army in our area. They also asked me why I ran away when I saw them and I told them that it is common to run when you see something strange happening.

After we had walked for a mile we met other senior rebels who asked the same questions again. I did not answer so I bent and they hit me with a stick for so long, that I could hardly bear the pain. Other abductees who watched the scene later told me it were about 120 beats.

During the following weeks we moved around. Two captives were killed by government soldiers who had pursued us. Another day we were hit by a government helicopter and the rebels treated my injuries with drugs they had looted before. My hands had been tied for a long time and my right hand was sore. Still, we kept walking and looting.

On our way to Southern Sudan, we captured three women who had gone fishing and the rebels forced us to kill them but we did not know how. They told us to use sticks and threatened that, if we do not kill them, they would force the women to kill us. So we beat them to death.

Shortly after, we met another group of rebels. They said that LRA leader Joseph Kony was with them, so we gave them all our food and other supplies before walking back all the way we had come. For the following week we were trained in the use of weapons.

Then the rebels took us to Gulu to test our loyalty. They forced us to loot in order to find out who might be planning to escape. I was part of a group sent to attack an internally displaced

persons (IDP) camp. We lost three soldiers during this attack and since the fighting was so fierce, some of us had to leave their guns behind. After this attack we joined another rebel group which was operating in the area.

In a fight with a civilian I lost my gun. As a result, we were punished and ordered to go back and kill everything alive. We committed the worst atrocities I can remember. We killed children by pounding their heads on the ground and captured four government soldiers. But instead of killing them immediately, we tortured them slowly. We tied their hands and feet and burnt them alive.

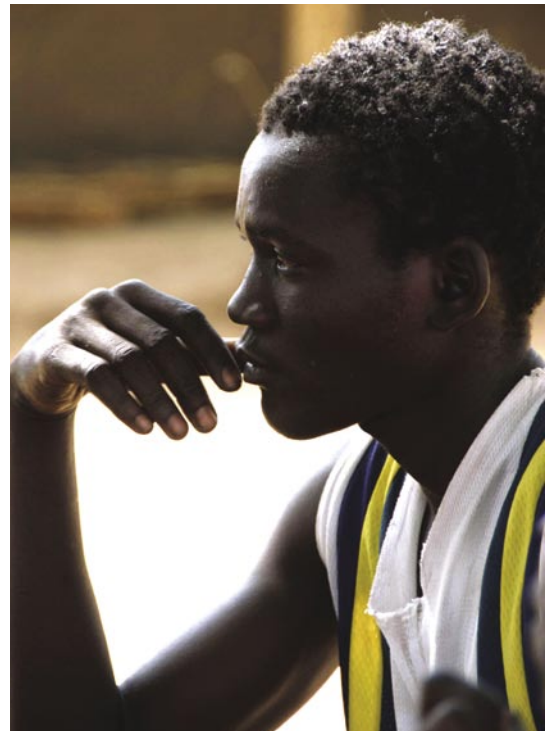
### Escaping the horror

After I had been with the rebels for one and a half years I felt part of them and somehow forgot about home. But one night I dreamed that all my relatives had been killed. I kept thinking of them everyday.

By coincidence, Okello, a fellow abductee, and I were selected to watch over the other soldiers. It was then that I decided we had to escape. I took Okello's gun and fired in the air to make the rebels believe that we were attacked by government soldiers,

which would give us time to run away. We ran the whole day and were very hungry. The following day, after we had slept, we continued walking and came across a bushy road which we followed.

We decided to throw away our uniforms and put on civilian clothes. Then we stopped a car and told the driver our story. He got scared and went off. Shortly after, he came back with an army officer who took us to the military barracks where we were questioned. After one week we were released and taken to a reception centre in Kitgum.



Former LRA abductees are the most traumatised and wounded today



## Starting a new life

While at the reception centre, my parents were located and came to see me and after one month I was sent home. I thought of joining the army but later thought this may not help me and I joined school. I had been in standard six when I was abducted, so I joined standard seven. I later joined secondary school but after one year dropped out and started attending the JRS community college which offered skills training for young people in vulnerable situations.

The life skills training helped me cope with life. When I came back from the bush I preferred to be alone. Memories from my time with the rebels kept coming back and I was not comfortable among big groups. After going through the training I find it easier to mix with people and talk to them. I feel more confident now. I have also learnt how to make furniture which helps me to earn a living. In the future I would like to continue my vocational training and with the money I earn, continue my secondary education. ■

## What other Children Experienced

*"The following morning all abductees were severely beaten and oil was applied on our chest because they believed that the oil would change our heart and make us forget about escaping home." (Taban, 16 years)*

*"On our way to Kitgum there were three women in a garden. We were forced to beat them to death and we did so because once you refuse they will kill you." (Taban, 16 years)*


*"I did not want to kill or loot other people's property. But the instruction was clear: Obey the orders and live or refuse and perish." (Paul, 16 years)*

*"Since only the soldiers and those who had been in captivity for longer were allowed to eat, we were hungry most of the time. All others were beaten when they tried to get some food." (Josephine, 13 years)*



*"Two years in captivity was not only painful but also very difficult for me. It was unbearable. I slept, ate and wandered like an animal in the wild." (Paul, 16 years)*

*"When I went home to reunite with my family I found myself back to square one. I began to live as a displaced returnee in a crowded camp, lacked any tangible means to earn a living, was uncertain of the future and had flashbacks of my bush life experiences." (Paul, 16 years)*



# Prayer

Lord I thank you for creating me. I pray that you continue to protect me. I would like to thank you for making me pass through the difficult situations that came my way. I also thank you, God, for letting me know everything I did not know. I pray this through our Lord Jesus Christ.

**Amen.**

by a young man who is 22 years old and stayed in LRA captivity for six months

“I like the fact that in the JRS support groups we can share our experiences from the bush. Even if we are now at home we still have to cope with so many painful memories and flashbacks from the time we spent with the rebels. It helps to come together, to share and to support each other.”

(Pauline who was abducted by the LRA at the age of 13)

## What is Trauma?

Technically speaking, a trauma represents a sudden, unexpected and intense event that overwhelms the individual's coping capacities. It is a life-threatening experience that severely compromises the emotional well-being of a person. Psychologists speak of “primary victims”, if an individual experiences trauma directly or of “secondary victims” if they witness this happening to another. Moreover, individual trauma needs to be distinguished from societal trauma, which is shared by a whole population and inherited by younger generations.

Three basic categories of traumatic experiences can be distinguished: natural disasters, accidental disasters caused by human beings, such as fires or chemical accidents and intentional harm caused by human beings, such as a direct threat to life, rape, torture, abuse etc.

Some persons develop a so called post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) after having been through such an experience, which is characterised by three groups of symptoms, all appearing within the first month:

1. intrusion or re-experiencing of the trauma though flashbacks and nightmares
2. avoidance of reminders of the traumatic situation, such as persons or locations
3. increased arousal, leading to concentration and memory problems, which will ultimately result in learning difficulties.

Not everybody who experiences trauma will develop PTSD. However, other emotional and psychological problems may occur. Typical reactions include withdrawal from contact, obsession with war games, feelings of insecurity, fear or anxiety about the future, depression, hopelessness and aggressive and violent behaviour. On top of all this, children and youth in war zones also have to cope with the loss of loved ones. It is not surprising that trauma victims easily turn to drug or alcohol abuse as a way of coping with their situation.

Source: Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, DSM-IV-TR, published by the American Psychiatric Association



Children depend on their families and communities for protection



# Refugee Children in Kampala

Children, who depend on others for nurture and protection, are often perceived as vulnerable in physical, social and psychological terms. It is hardly surprising, that in exile this vulnerability increases, with serious consequences for them and unique challenges for those who, like JRS, try to serve them.



Most urban refugee families live in miserable conditions

Recently I asked some students aged between 13 and 19 about the problems of urban refugee children. They mentioned poor accommodation and lack of food at home, inability to communicate with Ugandan children due to language barriers, and lack of money for school fees. But I was unprepared for their insight into the inner wounds caused in many of them by conflict, displacement or loss of family members. "Having gone through these experiences makes me feel different from Ugandan children. They don't seem to know any suffering," said 15-year-old Yvette. Also, they attributed a number of difficulties they face to their trauma: poor social skills and low self esteem, inability to interact well with others, trouble thinking and calling

things to memory, as well as a very limited attention span in class and a tendency to lapse into daydreams.

## Lack of support - a major problem for refugee children

Research carried out by the Refugee Law Project, one of JRS's principal partners in Kampala, reveals that the lack of psychosocial and post-trauma counselling and support for those who have been traumatised either in their country of origin or in the country of asylum is a major problem for refugee children.

This is particularly worrying, because child refugees, the same research tells us, are at least three times as trauma-

tised as their adult counterparts by the time they arrive in the country of asylum. A child, who is most in need of an emotionally secure and familiar environment, is easily destabilised by any inconsistency, including conflict and displacement. We can only guess what a shock a child must experience when it is uprooted from the relative "security" of its home, for reasons most children are too young to understand. On top of that, the loss of family members and the hardships of life in exile, easily lead to an unstable youth and adulthood.

The research also mentions the low level of access to education, medical services, food and shelter of the children of urban-based, self-settled refugees as another major issue in urban refugee children's lives. If parents are without a job and depend on food assistance, their children will go hungry, not attend school and not be taken to hospital when they fall sick.

## Rasheeda's and Theresa's experience

It is hard for children to admit that their parents are unable to provide for them. They are normally used to their parents being seemingly indestructible pillars of security, who deserve due respect. In exile, however, they see their parents humiliated by extremely poor living conditions and straitened economic means. Like 16-year-old Rasheeda, many children try to make up for their parents' inability to sustain the family.

I saw her one day, when she emerged from a cheap hotel with an elderly man. "Do you think we are people like you who have everything they need? Where do you think we get the money from which we need to buy

*Child refugees are at least three times as traumatised as their adult counterparts by the time they arrive in the country of asylum. We can only guess what a shock a child must experience when it is uprooted from the relative "security" of its home, for reasons most children are too young to understand.*

food?" she asked me. It turned out that her parents expected each of their three daughters to contribute to the family's food budget, which forced all of them into prostitution. Rasheeda asked me to keep her secret, admitting that this was the only way the family could survive in Kampala.

It would be misleading to assume that children living with their parents are

naturally better off. Some families that arrived in Kampala together have been broken up by the hardships of refugee life. When men can no longer provide for their families, they lose their self-esteem. Women are often unable to carry the burden of looking after the family alone and take up relationships with other men who can better provide for them – and the other way round. As these hardships cause marriages to break up children are left in a vulnerable situation – like Theresa's case illustrates.

The youngest of six children, Theresa dreamt of continuing her studies and becoming a nurse one day. But when her mother suddenly abandoned her father and went off with another man who was to be resettled in Canada, all her hopes were crushed. The father, overburdened with the task of looking after the children and managing the family's life, started drinking. The children lacked care and guidance. When I saw Theresa six months later she had

finished her course, but was pregnant.

## Carrying grown-up responsibilities

There is also another, less visible category of children who do not have their parents with them, either because they are dead or stayed behind. Congolese families for example, prefer to send their children across the next border where they are safe instead of watching helplessly as they are raped, forcibly recruited or even murdered. In order to survive and to support their younger siblings, they have to assume adult roles, though they lack the social and economic skills that such responsibilities demand.

The majority of urban refugee children do not intend to move on or go back to their country of origin. JRS will continue to find ways of supporting them, help their parents sustain the family and live in dignity. ■

Joe Stevens Mande is English teacher in the JRS Urban Emergency Programme in Kampala, Uganda.

## Children's Voices



**STEPHANIE SAYS:** "Children in our situation are likely to become street children because their parents do not have the means or the time to look after them. Girls can become prostitutes because a girl who is a teenager does not want to look bad, when her parents ask her to contribute because they have no money to buy all the things they need. Many refugee children have no peace and are lonely. Many adopt the culture of the host country, losing their own culture. They cannot understand their ethnic languages anymore. Since most of us are hungry, we are given food on the condition that we carry out certain duties such as fetching water. Some become thieves, especially when they see other children who are better off."

**VEDASTE SAYS:** "One problem we face is the language. We have to find our way into an English education system though most of us speak French and other languages. It also makes

it difficult to find friends and talk to other people who could show us around. When we fall sick we suffer because our parents cannot afford the medicine. Some of us do not have enough clothes."

**PAUL SAYS:** "We have no money and we know that our standard of living is likely to improve if we get access to education but many parents cannot afford the school fees. They don't have money to pay for clothes, shoes and food either. How can we survive if our parents have no job?"

**MANI SAYS:** "A refugee child might not get something to eat for breakfast and lunch. You can see children crying all day because they're hungry."



# A Child Overwhelmed with Adult Duties

Jemila is a 10-year-old Congolese refugee living in Addis Ababa. She speaks the official local language, Amharic, fluently. Since her mother died a couple of years ago, she has been forced to assume adult responsibilities, looking after her father who is an alcoholic.

Often times, he would not come home, letting Jemila spend the night on her own, unprotected, in a single dark room he has rented from local residents and where they live together. He also suffers from epilepsy which he sometimes uses as an excuse for staying away over night.

*What he eventually brings home is just the little that remains after spending most of the money on alcohol.*

Every month, he collects his monthly allowance, which is meant to cater for him and the child, from the UN refugee agency (UNHCR). But what he eventually brings home is just the little that remains after spending most of the money on alcohol.

With so much responsibility on her immature shoulders, one wonders about the role a girl child, regardless of her age, is expected to play in African society. Will the fact that Jemila has to carry the burden alone make her run away one day? Or does she endure because the value of the family ranks high on our continent and as a child she is simply hoping to find love and compassion?

Jemila likes to spend her day at the JRS Refugee Community Centre (RCC). It's a place where she can feel at home and be a child again, playing and mixing with other children. One time though, Jemila was forced to spend the night at the RCC because her father did not turn up to pick her from the centre. She was given a place to rest and something to eat and JRS workers told her not to worry.

## TESTIMONY

The Story of Jemila, 10 years



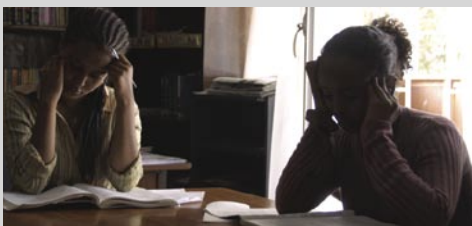
The daycare centre at the JRS Refugee Community Centre in Addis Ababa hosts around 50 children

After her case was repeatedly reported to UNHCR the agency is now looking at it, trying to improve Jemila's situation. At the same time, a counsellor is trying his best to help her father change his behaviour. ■

Jemila's story was recorded by Neway Alemayehu who works as a counsellor at the JRS Refugee Community Centre in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

## Helping Traumatized Children Regain their Coping Skills

By Birekenesh Gobena, JRS Ethiopia



At the JRS Refugee Community Centre in Addis Ababa children can spend their time in a meaningful way

Children who have been affected by conflict often feel insecure and many do not receive the necessary care and affection to recover from their trauma. They suffer from a deep rooted fear without knowing the reason. Some have lost their parents and do not have a place to stay. As a consequence, they lose confidence and hope.

The JRS Refugee Community Centre (RCC) in Addis Ababa offers love, care and psychosocial support to children who have been affected by conflict in various countries. It runs a daycare centre where children, who have been abandoned, raped or who have mental disabilities receive protection and care. The centre also offers informal education courses and recreational activities. These activities help the children recover from their trauma, regain basic life skills such as tolerance and mutual acceptance and set their eyes on the future.

Birkenesh Gobena is an instructor and social worker in the daycare centre which forms part of the JRS Refugee Community Centre in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

# Unaccompanied Minors in an Urban Setting

By Jennipher Amanio &  
Susi Moeller  
JRS Uganda

In forced migration parlance, an unaccompanied minor is a child under 18 who crosses international borders with no guidance from a relative or any older person.

The majority of unaccompanied minors follow the masses fleeing their country of origin, but once they enter the host country they find themselves alone as siblings or individuals. In Uganda, unaccompanied minors on arrival have to follow the same procedures of registration procedures as adults, hence the difficulty in determining the exact number of minors registered. They are then directed to the Office of the Prime Minister (OPM) refugee desk which tries to find a foster family for them.

Foster families have to meet certain conditions and are usually not easy to find. They have to be registered as refugees and settled in one of the designated camps. Ideally the family should belong to the same tribe and should have children of the same age range as the foster child. Although families receive support in form of food and non-food items from the UN refugee agency (UNHCR) few are willing to welcome a stranger in their midst, whom they have to look after and take responsibility for. Nonetheless, most minors do find foster parents although many will later run away because they cannot adjust to the new life while others claim to be mistreated by them.

## Left alone, with many challenges

“These children face a range of challenges,” says Stephen Kuteesa, programme assistant in the JRS Urban Emergency Programme in Kampala. “Many of them lack basic necessities such as food, shelter, clothing and medical care. Often, they have no physical protection and no access to education. The girls, in particular, are exposed to sexual abuse or harassment

and easily get involved in commercial sex. Since many children are idle they start taking drugs. Others are subject to forced labour by older persons who take advantage of their vulnerability.”

The Ugandan government and UNHCR support unaccompanied minors on the condition that they live with a foster family in one of the designated camps. This has worked well for those who accept to live with foster families. However, others who due to lack of information or because

*Most minors do find foster parents although many will later run away because they cannot adjust to the new life while others claim to be mistreated by them.*

they do not want to live with a foster family or refuse to move to one of the settlements, find themselves trapped in an urban setting like Kampala. This group is basically left unattended, forced to rely on themselves and make a living on their own.

Since JRS started assisting urban asylum seekers and new arrivals in Kampala in 1998, the organisation has assisted a number of unaccompanied minors. In July 2009, JRS accommodated Jean-Paul (12) and Justin (16), two brothers from Congo who had fled to Uganda after surviving an attack on their family by unknown soldiers. Before approaching JRS, they had been staying in a local church community for four months until the difficult circumstances forced them to leave and look for a place to stay. Right from the time they arrived, the OPM and UNHCR were trying to find a foster family for them but did not succeed. By the time JRS was approached to help with temporary accommodation, the two brothers were in a very desperate and vulnerable condition. While the OPM hastened their efforts to find a foster family, JRS accommodated them for three weeks. The safe and quiet environment along with intense counselling sessions enabled them eventually to calm down. They also received medical treatment and after the three weeks were over, both brothers were transported to a refugee settlement in south western Uganda where a foster family had been found for them. ■



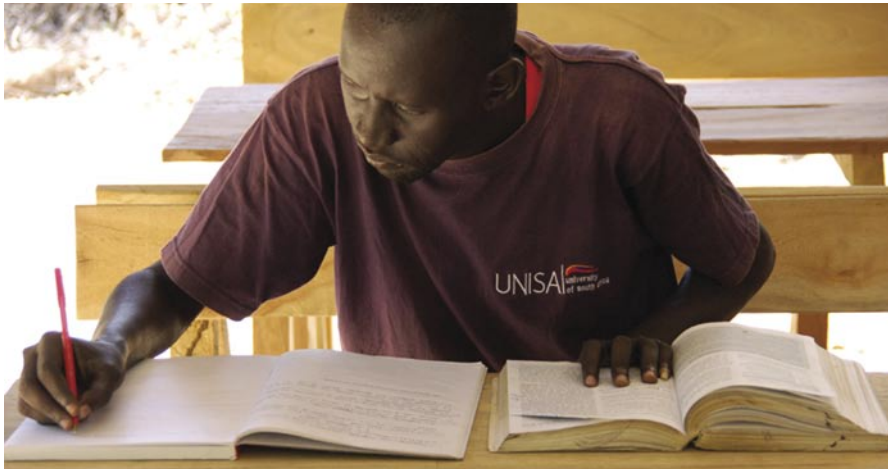
Many unaccompanied minors lack basic necessities such as food

Jennipher Amanio and Susi Moeller are programme assistants in the JRS Urban Emergency Programme in Kampala, Uganda.



# Urban Refugee Children and Education

By Virginia Mumo  
JRS Kenya



In Kakuma, young refugees can take part in the distance tertiary education programme with the University of South Africa

Education is and has been one of the greatest tools for building and rebuilding life. Through education most nations have been able to leave poverty and inequality behind and promote development. While the millennium development goals stipulate universal primary education for girls and boys alike by 2015, most children living in countries wracked by war and conflict do not have a chance to go to school.

This is mainly because during war school activities are disrupted, teachers are displaced or killed and children are forced to flee and end up as refugees, asylum seekers or internally displaced persons (IDPs). Others are abducted or recruited as child soldiers or mistresses.

Once in exile, schools provide a safe haven for children who come from a war environment as they give them the opportunity to meet their peers, to learn and grow with them. However, it is not easy for refugee children to get access to education after arriving in the host country.

## Education ranks last on priority list

In Kenya, for instance, asylum seekers must be registered with the UN refugee agency (UNHCR) to obtain official recognition as refugees and be

granted access to social services in the country, including education.

In an urban setting such as Nairobi, refugee children have no access to education during the refugee status determination process, which can take up to nine months. Parents or guardians will first concentrate on obtaining refugee status in order to get food and shelter for the family before they start thinking about the children's education.

*I was happy to finally go to school but I felt miserable because, unlike all the other children, I had no school uniform and sometimes I had to go to school hungry*

Even after obtaining refugee status, refugee families have very limited resources and priority needs like shelter,

food, medical assistance and protection are more urgent to be catered for than the children's education. Thus, if parents can afford education for their children at all, many children will join schools at an older age than their peers in the same class given they are admitted to the already overstressed public schools.

Jean-Paul from Burundi, whose parents had fled to Kenya in 1994, was only able to join pre-school in 2000, when he was already eight years old. "I was happy to finally go to school but I felt miserable because, unlike all the other children, I had no school uniform and sometimes I had to go to school hungry," he recalls. In the meantime, in spite of these challenges, Jean-Paul has completed his primary education and has recently joined secondary school.

Compared to children like Jean-Paul, whose family has sought refuge in a city, children who stay in refugee camps have slightly better opportunities because they usually have free access to pre- and primary education provided by relief agencies.

## Children are the future's ambassadors for peace

In Nairobi, JRS has been instrumental in assisting urban refugee children gain access to quality education. Through the provision of scholarships, the organisation has enabled refugee students from different countries to access different levels of education, ranging from pre-primary to tertiary level. In 2009, JRS supported 100 students. Besides the payment of school fees, assistance also includes a subsistence allowance and the provision of uniforms, stationary, mattresses and pocket money.



In order to make a living in Nairobi, young refugees have to be creative and use their skills

mary education is mandatory in order to be admitted to primary school, JRS is now offering scholarships as well as support with school uniforms and educational materials for children at pre-school. Pre-school education can cost up to 225 Euros per year which is almost impossible to afford for refugees who are not permitted formal employment.

Quality education will always play an important role in promoting peace. Children who are victims of conflict and war but have access to education today are likely to be tomorrow's ambassadors of peace. ■

Virginia Mumo coordinates the JRS Scholarship Programme in Nairobi, Kenya.

While JRS previously offered assistance at tertiary level, the programme has recently changed its focus,

responding to the unmet needs of refugee children in Nairobi. Since in Kenya the accomplishment of pre-pri-

## Fact File

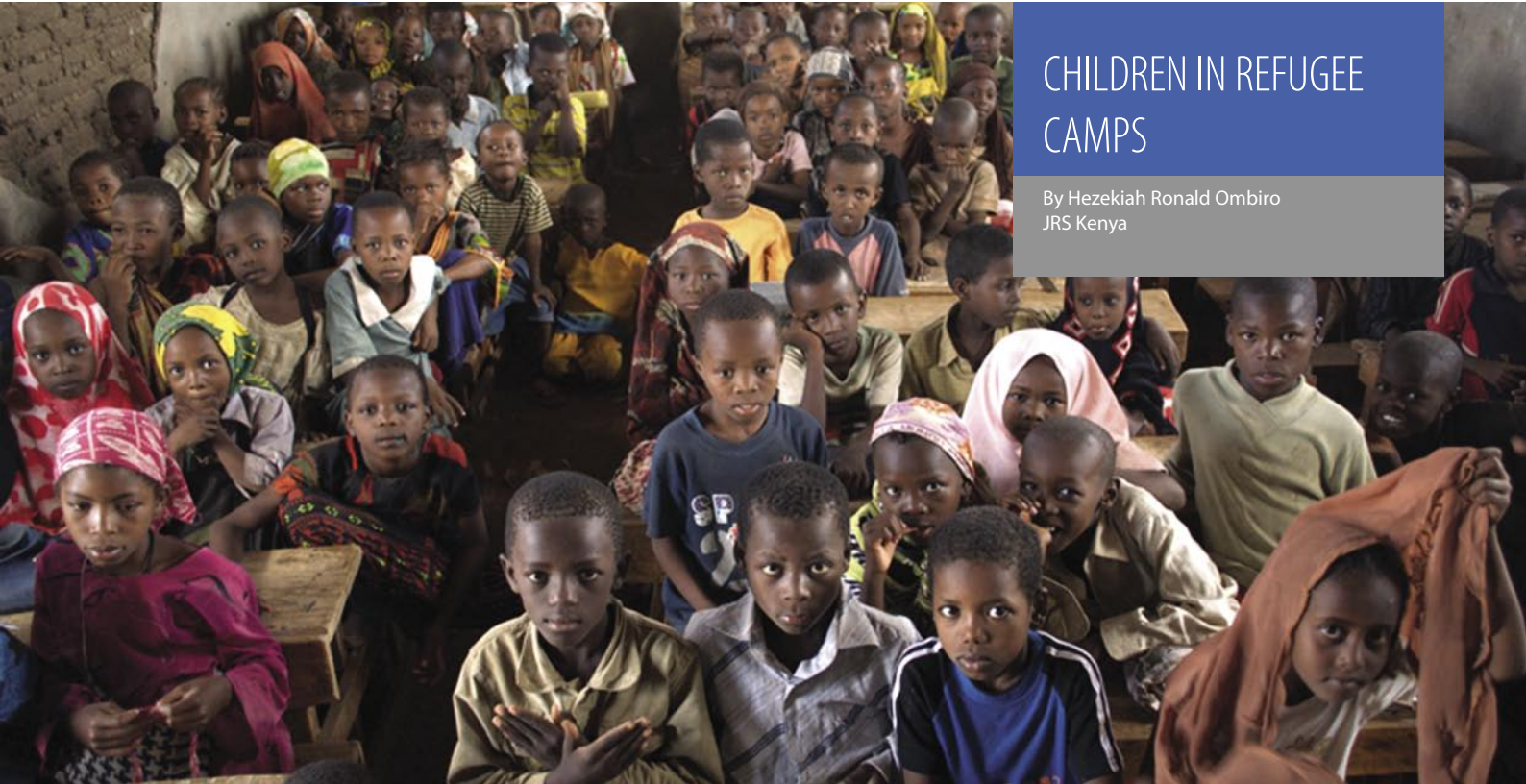
### Millennium Development Goals Goal 2: Achieve universal primary education

- In sub-Saharan Africa, the net primary school enrolment ratio has only recently reached 71 per cent, even after a significant jump in enrolment that began in 2000. Around 38 million children of primary school age in this region are still out of school.
- Projections suggest that without further acceleration, 58 out of the 86 countries that have not yet reached universal primary education will not achieve it by 2015. In all regions, inequalities in access to education are a major barrier to reaching Goal 2. The children most likely to drop out of school or to not attend at all are often girls and those from poorer households or living in rural areas.
- Achieving universal primary education means more than full enrolment. It also encompasses quality education, meaning that all children who attend school regularly learn basic literacy and numeracy skills and complete primary school on time. In sub-Saharan Africa, for instance, substantially more children of secondary school age attend primary rather than secondary school. For children to reach their full potential and countries to develop, the gains made in universal primary education must be replicated at the secondary level. At present, less than 55 per cent of children of the appropriate age in developing countries attend secondary school. In sub-Saharan Africa, only a quarter of children of secondary school age are in secondary school
- Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, Mozambique, Tanzania and Uganda have abolished school fees, which has led to a surge in enrolment: in Kenya, enrolment of primary school children increased dramatically, with 1.2 million additional pupils in 2003 alone; by 2004, the number had climbed to 7.2 million, of which 84 per cent were of primary school age. But the surge in enrolment after abolition of fees has brought huge challenges in providing sufficient school buildings and teachers.



Source: UN Department of Public Information, September 2008





## CHILDREN IN REFUGEE CAMPS

By Hezekiah Ronald Ombiro  
JRS Kenya

# Being a Child in Kakuma

Kakuma refugee camp is located in north-western Kenya and was founded in 1992. It currently hosts a population of 58,000 people, most of which are Somalis. Living conditions in the hot and dry camp environment are harsh.

The camp restricts the movement of the refugees and does not allow them share resources such as land for growing crops with the host community. Thus, refugees depend on humanitarian assistance. Many refugees have lived in Kakuma for years, hoping that a solution to their situation will be found one day, but many have given up and from time to time suicides are reported.

Of the current population 88 percent are young people below the age of 26. All of them are victims of conflicts in various countries. Those worst affected are children with special needs, children with high protection risks and orphans.

Children with special needs, including those with mental or physical disabilities, often have difficulties in getting along with their fellow refugees who may not understand their situation. In

some cases, they are forbidden from playing with other children because parents are afraid their "disease" might be contagious. In other cases, they are physically abused, for instance when they use other people's property unknowingly.

Many children are in danger because cultural practices make them vulnerable to early marriages or pregnancies and their families which, in many cases, have fallen apart, cannot provide them with adequate protection. Between January and August, 20 cases of child abduction and forced marriage were reported to the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) gender and child protection office. Cases of rape and theft particularly targeting young girls are on the increase.

There is also a significant number of orphaned children in Kakuma, looked

after by foster parents who are either relatives or members of their community. Although these families have volunteered to accommodate an orphan, they are often unable to offer real love and care to the child who, all too often, is physically assaulted and eventually either becomes frustrated or chooses to run away.

A small percentage of the youth in the camp is involved in sports activities like soccer or basketball in the evening. Unfortunately these activities are only open to boys and girls are excluded. Following the global economic crisis, aid organisations were forced to scale down their activities

*Those worst affected are children with special needs, children with high protection risks and orphans.*

due to the lack of funds. Agricultural training programmes and literacy classes for young camp residents were closed down. As a consequence, most young people are idle and having nothing to do in their communities easily indulge in illicit relationships and start drinking. The camp with its

restrictions does not offer sufficient opportunities for them to spend their day in meaningful activities which can further develop their skills.

Children in Kakuma also face major challenges in the area of education. After a tripartite agreement signed between the governments of Sudan, Kenya and the UN refugee agency (UNHCR) stated that time had run out for Sudanese refugees to return home, access to education was significantly restricted for Sudanese children. Only one secondary school and five primary schools are still running with one primary class now accommodating up to 135 pupils. Since many Sudanese refugees are reluctant to return home, their children have been severely affected by this policy, which restricts their access to sufficient educational services and deprives them of the possibility to acquire the skills and knowledge necessary to shape their own future successfully. Many teachers at the camp schools have never received proper training and girls are likely to drop out of school because their parents prefer them to be married. At present, only five girls are enrolled in secondary school.

## JRS offers counselling, care and protection

In order to support children with various disabilities, JRS runs three daycare centres, established in 1998. They currently host 80 children who, through various activities, gain social, communication and pre-vocational skills which help them to cope with the demands of the community and prepare for their future lives. Some acquire basic gardening skills while others are trained in counselling, mental health care, massage or reflexology. The knowledge gained helps them later to find meaningful employment in the camp. John, for example, a Sudanese refugee, who was mentally retarded and suffered from hyperactive behaviour has just completed his training in basic mental health and now works in one of the daycare centres.

Daycare staff also conduct home visits which help them understand the children's living conditions in their respective communities and develop individual treatment programmes in order to address their specific needs. Through counselling, JRS staff help

families overcome the trauma and stigma that goes with bringing up children with mental or physical disabilities. Moreover, ten children are currently being offered special needs education in specific schools across Kenya which opens up a new perspective for them. Peter, for example, who was diagnosed with a hearing impairment a couple of years ago was assisted in joining a special needs school and is now a teacher at the special needs education unit in Kakuma.

*Only one secondary school and five primary schools are still running with one primary class now accommodating up to 135 pupils.*

JRS also runs one of the three protection centres at Kakuma refugee camp which care for and help children at risk because of cultural practices. The so called "safe haven", which was set up in 2000, currently hosts 29 children with their mothers who are victims of gender based violence.

Many children are victims of conflicts within their own families. Whenever families are about to break up and parents are quarrelling, JRS counsellors intervene and help them to reunite while also offering guidance at community level to prevent such problems and help parents make the right decisions for their children. Parents who decide to split up are assisted in learning to deal with their new lives. Children who are victims of sexual abuse or have escaped forced marriage within their families receive counselling to help them deal with their trauma and are offered education at boarding schools outside the camp. Currently, seven girls who have escaped early marriage are attending Kenyan boarding schools far away from the reach of their families who are still at the camp. ■



The JRS protection centre "safe haven" in Kakuma currently hosts 29 children with their mothers

Hezekiah Ronald Ombiro is the JRS project director in Kakuma, Kenya.



# Education -

## Hope for the Children of Southern Sudan

### RETURNEE CHILDREN

By Andebo Pax Pascal  
JRS Southern Sudan

**"I am happy to be home again after being in exile for 16 years. This is where I feel I belong," says Charles, a 29-year-old returnee.**

Many share his feelings as they return to Southern Sudan, where a peace accord ended the 22-year civil war in 2005. Almost all the children who have since returned were born in exile and started their primary or secondary education in countries like Uganda or Kenya.

Emmanuel (16), Esther (16) and Joyce (14) came back in early 2009 and immediately enrolled in Olikwi primary school, a temporary structure at that time. At the end of May 2009, they moved to a new four classroom block which the community had constructed with JRS support.

Although the three pupils are happy with their new school, they are quick to point out that it is not big enough to accommodate seven classes. However, an additional classroom block will soon be constructed. Compared to other students in Southern Sudan, Samuel, Esther and Joyce are lucky to have such a comfortable learning environment.

At the moment, there are 26 primary schools accommodating almost 14,800 pupils in the three payams (districts) of Nimule, Mugali and Pageri. Another six secondary schools accommodate 1,100 students. Only half of the primary schools are housed in semi-permanent or permanent structures. Many operate under trees and in temporary shelters. They were started by parents who found there were no schools close to the homes they returned to. Many other schools destroyed during the war are in urgent need of repair. Others were used as military barracks or for storing ammunition. Compared to other regions of



Demonstrating their resilience and desire to start anew, students attend class outside their destroyed school in Nimule. Parts of the school are still used as ammunition deposit.

Southern Sudan the three payams are well catered for although clearly more needs to be done.

### Quality education – the basis of a society's future

Education is an important tool in rebuilding the war-torn region and helping people recover from traumatising experiences. "It enhances human dignity and helps people reach their full potential, improve their quality of life and become politically mature citizens," says JRS Regional Director Fr. Frido Pflueger SJ. It also promotes peace and gives young people a perspective for life. Quality education is the key to development and the foundation of future society. There are, however, numerous challenges.

A huge number of young people and adults have completely missed out on an education and schools have not got the capacity to absorb the large number of returning refugees and internally

displaced persons (IDPs). Only seven percent of teachers have received formal training. While 48 percent have participated in in-service training, 45 percent have received no training at all. The process of developing a unified syllabus is slow and currently three different curricula are taught throughout Southern Sudan. English is meant to be the teaching language, yet many students only speak Arabic. Others, who have been in exile in francophone states like the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), know little English. Universities that were relocated to Khartoum during the war are slowly moving back to the south, facing their own challenges as they start anew. The number of secondary schools and post-primary training institutions is insufficient to meet the demands of the population. On top of all these challenges, the Government of Southern Sudan (GoSS) has slashed its education budget by more than 25 percent in 2009 which will adversely affect the quality of education services.

*Proportionately fewer girls than in any other country in the world go to school in Southern Sudan.*

Those who are unwilling to put up with an education system “under construction” and can afford to study abroad, leave for Uganda or other countries and complete their education there. While this may be an option for the privileged few, the most have remained, hoping for a durable solution in the country they have just returned to.

### Many girls drop out of school

Although school attendance rates in Southern Sudan have tripled in the last four years, attendance rates for girls are still much lower than those for boys. Economic hardship, in addition to socio-cultural values and practices, such as early marriage, continues to

prevent girls from attending school. According to Tim Brown, the UN refugee agency’s education officer in Yei, proportionately fewer girls than in any other country in the world go to school in Southern Sudan. “Less than one per cent of the girls enrolled complete primary education and only one school child in four is a girl,” he says. In Nimule, 224 only, out of a total of 950 students enrolled in the three secondary schools JRS supported in 2009, are girls. Thirty-seven girls have dropped out during the course of this year. In the primary schools the situation is similar. More needs to be done to convince parents and communities of the value of education for girls; otherwise gender-based discrimination will become further entrenched.

There is, however, hope. UN agencies and NGOs, such as JRS, support the Government of Southern Sudan in rebuilding the education system. The involvement of the local community is

encouraged in the form of parents and teachers’ associations (PTAs) which are meant to promote democracy, reduce inequality and build capacity in local education authorities and among community leaders. Education institutions in rural areas receive particular support to avoid a concentration of schools in urban centres. Efforts are also directed towards training more teachers, developing an appropriate curriculum for Southern Sudan and defining third-level education policies.

Esther would like to be a nurse, Emmanuel a teacher and Joyce wants to work with the traffic police. The three children reflect the hopes of many others depending on an education system needing to be restarted from scratch. Those in charge of developing the system have to bear in mind that any progress made will bring these children closer to the realisation of their dreams. ■

Andebo Pax Pascal is JRS secondary education coordinator in Nimule, Southern Sudan.

## Key to a Better Future

In April 2004, less than a year before a peace accord ended the 22-years civil war in Sudan, I left the refugee settlement in Adjumani District, northern Uganda and headed for my home village in Kajo Keji County, Southern Sudan.

I was accompanied by my grandmother who has been my guardian since my parents together with other refugees were abducted by the Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA). I do not know if they are still alive.

After travelling about 75 km on foot and spending the night near the border, I arrived in Kajo Keji where I managed to continue my primary education. By crushing stones and selling them, I raised money to pay school fees, buy a school uniform and scholastic materials. Three years later, I passed the leaving examinations with good results but I discontinued my education because I had no funds.

While buying groceries I caught sight of the JRS office. I told them that I would like to continue my education because it is like a substitute for my parents. I felt that having access to education would help me stop missing them. In February 2008, I was granted a scholarship and I am now attending the second year at secondary school.

I am grateful for the support I have received because I know that the knowledge and skills I obtain at school will improve my life. Once I complete my secondary education, my future will offer much better perspectives than before. ■

### TESTIMONY

The story of Samuel, 16 years



Education is the biggest dream of many children in Southern Sudan



# Child-headed Families and Abandoned Children

By Aling Margreth & the JRS Lobone Team  
JRS Southern Sudan

The two decades of civil war in Southern Sudan along with the insurgency caused by the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) in northern Uganda, have had long lasting negative effects on the political, socio-economic and cultural situation on both sides of the border. They also had a major impact on a whole generation of children.

"I remember that almost all children were hungry. We had no food for more than two days and in this hard and unprotected environment, many of us fell ill," says 17-year-old Joseph, who looks after his siblings and is currently a form three secondary student in Lobone. Like Joseph, many children were separated from their parents and became orphans. During the war, they were forced into internally displaced persons (IDP) camps where they had to look after themselves while trying to survive.

## Forced to assume adult roles

Families headed by children often face health problems, they lack the necessary food and most of them are too young to plant crops and cater for themselves. They are vulnerable to attacks from thugs and other criminals because nobody protects them. Many of them have no access to education because they have no one to guide or support them and lack the necessary funds. Often, abandoned children in conflict areas become victims of sexual abuse or harassment, rape, physical assault and psychological torture, especially if they live in isolated areas. With little or no legal protection in place, girls are usually more vulnerable. They get pregnant at an early age and consequently drop out of school. Those living in larger cities or border towns are particularly exposed to HIV/AIDS.

"We lost our parents in 2000 and I had to look after my two siblings

*I have to split my attention between school and the household and have to meet the demands in both places which often leaves me very exhausted at the end of the day.*

while we were staying in a camp near the border to Southern Sudan. When the LRA attacked the camp in 2004, we crossed the border and fled to Lobone," says 16-year-old Grace who now goes to primary school there. Unlike other girls, Grace is able to

continue her education while taking care of her siblings. But it is not easy for her. "I have to split my attention between school and the household and have to meet the demands in both places which often leaves me very exhausted at the end of the day," she says. Every morning she looks after the garden where she grows crops before going to school. Sometimes she and her siblings take on casual jobs to raise money for school fees and uniforms. Sadly, Grace did not pass her primary leaving examinations last year. "All this extra work affects my performance at school, that's why I am now repeating class seven," she adds.

The situation of Grace and her siblings is not exceptional in Southern Sudan. Most children in child headed families have to look after four to six siblings. Since they cannot manage big plots they grow crops like maize, beans, sesame and vegetables in small quan-



In Lobone, JRS supports 475 girls with scholarships

tities. It helps them to get on with their lives and to support their families. They have to assume adult roles and responsibilities in order to survive.

## Some families offer support

In some cases, community members voluntarily provide support to children in such situations, offering protection, counselling and guidance. In Lobone, five child headed families are looked after by their neighbours. If there is sufficient information on the whereabouts of parents or other family members, community leaders can sometimes help children reunite with their families. However, there are other examples of children who are denied food or are mistreated by their carers.

In order to provide concerted support to child headed families and

*Abandoned and lonely children who are often desperate and without support gain confidence and hope while gathering with other children to dance, share and pray.*

abandoned children and to respond to their basic needs, the Government of Southern Sudan (GoSS), with the support of the UN children's fund (UNICEF) and a number of other child welfare organisations, has started child rehabilitation initiatives that promote children's rights and are meant to improve their quality of life. They are integrated in the government's social welfare framework.

Since 2001, JRS provides education to children in Lobone through eight nursery, seven primary and two secondary schools, reaching out to over 3,200 students. Through the affirmative action programme which aims at promoting girls' education, JRS provides 475 girls with scholarships and sanitary materials.

JRS also supports children through its pastoral programme. "Abandoned and lonely children who are often desperate and without support gain confidence and hope while gathering with other children to dance, share and pray," says Fr. Richard O'Dwyer SJ, JRS pastoral coordinator in Lobone who coordinates a children and youth group with over 30 members. Regular participation enhances their self-confidence and gives them a deeper sense of belonging," adds Fr. Richard. ■

*Aling Margreth coordinates the JRS Affirmative Action Programme in Lobone, Southern Sudan*



Almost 80 percent of the few schools in Southern Sudan are in temporary structures or under trees. School attendance rates for girls are much lower than those for boys.





## *A Story to Tell*

*We have a story, a story to tell  
A real story that we need to share  
With the people who care  
With those who are here  
Address all our needs*

*I have a story, a story to tell  
Real story that I have to share*

*My sister was raped  
My brother is lost  
My parents were killed  
Because of hatred  
My house got destroyed  
No place to call home  
I alone survived witnessing these all*

*All the cruelty, the brutality  
The tyranny, humility  
The self hatred, loss of identity  
The feeling of insecurity*

*We have a story, a story to tell  
A real story that we need to share  
With the people who care  
With those who are here  
Address all our needs*

*I came all the way, miles away,  
Looking for shelter, for support and care  
But who will be near,  
My problems to share,  
To make me secure*

*We came all the way, miles away  
Looking for shelter, for support and care  
We need protection, and education  
But who will be near  
Our problem to share,  
To make us secure*



