



## **ChildVoice Uganda Project Case Statement**

### **Overview**

ChildVoice International is operating a multi-phase humanitarian development project to assist the child victims of war, abduction, and slavery in northern Uganda, including direct relief for the young girls who bore children while still children themselves --child mothers -- and their children; and the master planning and development of a 100-acre village that will provide sanctuary, care, education, and spiritual and emotional counseling for these war affected children, many of whom are severely traumatized because they were abducted and forced to become child soldiers and sex slaves.

### **War and Children**

Tragically, the impact of war on children is escalating into a global problem of unknown dimensions. The changing dynamics of modern day armed conflict has a number of horrific consequences -- killing or maiming of children; recruitment or use of children as soldiers; attacks against schools or hospitals; denial of humanitarian access for children; abduction of children; and the rape and other grave sexual abuse of children.

The traumatizing impact of war on children demands a targeted and comprehensive approach to facilitate successful psychosocial healing and community reconciliation. Of particular concern is the girl child. Increasingly, girls are being exploited at earlier ages and for more brutal uses, such as sexual slavery, chattel for trafficking, and as armed combatants. Tragically, this exploitation of girls often precipitates a two generation impact – the girl herself and the children she bears. The resulting psychosocial and stigmatization impacts require long term, far-reaching attention with a particular emphasis on sanctuary, psychosocial counseling, education, skill building, and reintegration support.

### **ChildVoice International**

ChildVoice International is a Christian humanitarian relief and development organization seeking to restore the voices of children silenced by war. ChildVoice's programs recognize that someone must speak for the thousands of children rendered voiceless by horrifying brutality and unimaginable inhumanity. But more than speak, ChildVoice acts on the conviction that children broken by war can be restored in safe communities with loving care, spiritual and emotional counseling, and effective education and vocational training.

Led by a team of experts with over twenty-five years of experience in improving outcomes for at-risk populations in the US and the Third World, ChildVoice International works in partnership with local NGOs and community leaders to ensure that programs meet the need with efficiency and effectiveness.

## Crisis in Uganda



It is difficult to imagine a nightmare worse than the reality that has been endured by the children and families of northern Uganda. Peace is a memory for some and a dream for most. For the Acholi people in that part of the country, simple agrarian life was lost to fear and bloodshed more than 24 years ago when a rebellion led by Joseph Kony began wreaking havoc on the land. What started as an attempt to overthrow the national government in Kampala morphed into a decades-long reign of terror with indeterminate intent and devastating effect. Kony's marauding band of terrorists combed the countryside for potential victims and targeting the weakest – children and young women. Over the years, the group abducted more than 30,000 children from their homes and forced them to be the

mules, foot soldiers and sex slaves for Kony's cult-like group of increasingly depraved commanders

Kony's group, the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA), claims to be fighting for the formation of a new government based on the Ten Commandments. His ideology, a mix of animism and Christianity, became the banner under which the rogue militia carried out its rampage of terror, slaughtering entire villages and leaving a trail of unspeakable violence. All these years and all this violence, yet no discernible impact on the Ugandan government—certainly no revolution. It is the Acholi people who have suffered the most. Indeed, very few families in northern Uganda have been spared; nearly everyone has lost a relative to death or abduction. Over 80% of the people in northern Uganda were interned in camps (Internally Displaced Person camps, or IDP) by the government, living in atrociously squalid conditions.

Life in the camps was almost as horrific as life in their former communities, with over 1,000 people dying each week of disease and violence. The United Nations characterizes the situation as three times worse than conditions in the Middle East, and it describes northern Uganda as one of the three most dangerous places in the world for children to live.

There is cautious optimism in northern Uganda today even though the latest peace negotiations failed in November of 2008. The LRA is embedded deep in the Congo (DRC), quite some distance from the Uganda border. In December 2008, a multinational military strike against the LRA ended the 18 month ceasefire and precipitated a new wave of killing and abductions in DRC and South Sudan. Despite the escalation of atrocities by the LRA, the Ugandan government is declaring an end to the conflict and is encouraging people to leave the IDP camps and move home. With the uncertainty of the security situation and the challenges of rebuilding a region whose infrastructure is in shambles, the hardships are far from over.



The future is particularly grim for girls who had been abducted or who were raped and abused in the IDP camps. Girls are less powerful socially, culturally and economically. When war burns out and peace returns, they are the ones who melt away and become invisible. Feelings of shame or fear of stigma or retribution keep them from disclosing their experiences. Desperate for help and worried about the welfare of their children, they often cannot escape the veil of shame that prevents them from seeking help.

## A Village of Refuge

The imperative of the ChildVoice village is to renew Uganda's hope for a bright future. In restoring children broken by war, ChildVoice will be developing the leaders and workers of tomorrow. A country shaken by a long-running rebel war cannot emerge from its dark past free of scars; yet those scars need not be debilitating. Investment in the healing and teaching of children damaged by war will produce a foundation of young adults equipped with the skills and competencies to lead Uganda toward a new era of peace and economic stability.

ChildVoice is therefore creating a sustainable, replicable long-term village of refuge and care for Uganda's child victims of war. The village will include a boarding school, non-traditional educational programs, a vocational center, and spiritual and emotional counseling for the former child soldiers and other children who have been affected by this war who need long-term care and cannot return to their families.

Driven by their desire to bring healing and reconciliation to their region, the local village elders and district government leaders have entrusted more than 100 acres of land near the communities of Lukodi and Kulubel to ChildVoice International for the construction of a long term residential facility for children affected by war. Ironically, Lukodi, located north of Gulu, was the site of one of the worst LRA massacres in May of 2004.

## Community Development

With cautious optimism about the potential for lasting peace, the government of Uganda is encouraging people to leave the IDP camps and move back to their home communities. The transition is expected to test the capacity of a people to meet the needs of its most vulnerable. While conditions in the IDP camps are deplorable, the homes awaiting the returning refugees are similarly lacking. Medical care, mental health resources, schools, electricity—even clean drinking water—are absent in the region. Years of war have left the area's infrastructure decimated, and the national government is slow to respond with aid and services. Into this void return the people of Lukodi and Kulubel villages, many of whom are traumatized by death, injury, rape, and the horror of witnessing or taking part in killing. To ensure short-term healing and long-term viability of this population, ChildVoice is actively facilitating the resettlement of these communities,



**Health Care.** Although a medical clinic was built near Lukodi and Kulubel in 1998, it was never opened because of the war. In June 2007, ChildVoice opened and now operates this clinic to provide accessible and affordable health service to these two villages and the surrounding communities. In the first 24 months of operation, over 27,000 patients were seen by our team of local health professionals. A new maternity ward opened in the spring of 2008 to accommodate the needs of the many young expectant mothers in the region.

**Education.** ChildVoice constructed a new primary school in Lukodi in late 2007 for the children of Lukodi. This school opened in February 2008 at the start of the new school year, providing education for an estimated 500-700 children – many of them attending school for the first time. In the first year, ChildVoice also provided food for a feeding

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program for the new school. As the children of the girls in the residential program reach school age, they also attend this school.

## Pilot Program

The former Lukodi Primary School has been renovated to provide immediate housing for 30 girls and their infants in a secure environment with access to clean water, sanitation, and land to grow food and raise livestock for themselves and their children. The first group of 15 girls moved in the first week of October 2007 and since then, 45 additional girls and their children have matriculated at Lukodi Centre. With minimal infrastructure development and staffing, this comprehensive pilot program provides education programs, income generating activities, and early childhood development programs for the girls and their children.



The design and development of program components for the pilot program are based on research on children affected by armed conflict and best practices from other long-term residential care facilities for at-risk youth in Africa, including the Mully Children's Family in Kenya and the Rafiki Village in Uganda. Outcome evaluation of these components in the pilot will guide the long term development and implementation of program components for the permanent facility and the replication of the program in other conflict zones around the world.

## Permanent Facilities and Program

The master plan will guide the development of permanent facilities on the land, with the business plan directing the development and integration of all the key components of the program including education, vocational training, psycho-social and spiritual counseling, and management and staffing. The program development and facility construction will be done in phases as funding and resources become available.



In keeping with the desire for a sustainable infrastructure (i.e., energy, agriculture and food, water resources, habitat design), ChildVoice will seek out and apply cutting edge applied technology to construct energy systems, water and sanitation systems and buildings for the village.

Children living at the village can stay as long as they need to – until they obtain an education and the necessary life skills that empower them to be self-reliant and able to live on their own in the community.

Partnerships with local churches and other local NGOs will facilitate the transition back to the community. Trained mentors will assist children in their reintegration to their communities by providing friendship, coaching, and support as they continue with school or begin employment.

## **Global Expansion**

Best practices and lessons learned in the implementation of the northern Uganda project will guide the replication of ChildVoice's concepts and programs in other conflict zones around the world. Assessments have begun in South Sudan and DRC to determine the first replication site.

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