



COME OUT AND LIVE AMONG US

*How Zande communities can
influence combatants to surrender
from the LRA.*

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from the LRA.*

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This project is a publication by Discover the Journey (DTJ)

Discover the Journey (DTJ)

DTJ creates research-based localized media to protect children and prevent violence in conflict settings around the world.

DTJ has worked in the Democratic Republic of Congo since 2007, where it has assisted children in armed conflict and communities affected by war through publishing original research, creating localized collaborative film, providing direct services, including psycho-social assistance, and working with local partners to facilitate long-term reintegration of formerly abducted children. DTJ has focused exclusively on the war perpetrated by the Lord’s Resistance Army since 2010.

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Acknowledgements

We would like to thank all of the men, women and children who openly and bravely shared their experiences with us during the course of this project across three countries. We were asked repeatedly to not let what they shared stay stagnant on paper. The goal of this report is to spur creative and effective action aimed at increasing peaceful defections from the LRA in order to bring a permanent end to this enduring crisis. We are committed to following through. This report is dedicated to them.



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“If the LRA defects and we are aggressive towards them, this could get back to the LRA in the bush. It’s better to encourage the LRA to surrender, which could, in turn, encourage others in the bush to surrender too.”

— Hunter, Mboki, Central African Republic

Executive Summary

Joseph Kony’s Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA) renders communities in the tri—country af-fected area of southeastern (SE) Central African Republic (CAR), northeastern (NE) Dem-ocratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and southern South Sudan (RoSS) in a permanent state of emergency. Food insecurity, economic collapse, and restricted access to health and education services are exacerbated by concurrent psychosocial needs and compounded by the grave lack of services.

One of the key strategies to ending this conflict is the utilization of defection strategies. Ongoing efforts by the international community to influence combatants to peacefully surrender, or defect, via these strategies, have been successful. In 2013, 79% of the 58 documented LRA escapees cited current defection efforts as influential in their deci-sion to leave the LRA¹. This research seeks to build off of the momentum of successful defection strategies by highlighting how local Zande, the population group most affected by the LRA today and who currently live in the midst of the LRA’s area of operations, can also play a critical role in defection — and how they are willing to take on that role and be partners in these efforts — but are too often ignored, marginalized, or not fully utilized as partners by international defections actors, in particular MONUSCO.

Past research² has demonstrated that community-level contact with local populations is a key factor for LRA combatants and abductees in determining whether to surren-der. Previous contact between civilians and potential LRA defectors has resulted in two outcomes: it deters defection when civilians are hostile to defectors, or facilitates it. Most recently, long-time LRA combatant Opono Opondo successfully defected on August 21, 2013 due in part to a Zande community member’s encouragement near Faradje, DRC. The following report argues that defection initiatives need to consider local Zande com-munities as resources and partners in defection efforts and that ultimately these efforts could be more successful if the local community is actively engaged. Local populations have the capability to actually encourage LRA combatants and abductees to defect.

This report examines the decision-making and risks faced by would-be LRA defectors, the perceptions of local community members toward the LRA, and outlines recommenda-tions for the active participation of Zande communities in defection efforts. Additionally, the myriad long-term effects of the LRA’s predatory violence on Ugandan communities have been well documented. This report seeks to examine the impact of the LRA’s indis-criminate violence on Zande communities living in the current LRA-affected region

The interviews conducted for this report expose the reality that opportunities to defect do exist, which raises the question, “Why are members of the LRA not taking advantage of them?” This research unpacks the LRA’s perceived lack of will to defect, examines how local populations can influence abductees and combatants’ resolve to leave, and outlines ways local protection forces and the Mbororo in particular can participate in these efforts.

¹ According to the LRA Crisis Tracker, 2013
² “Loosening Kony’s Grip: Effective Defection Strategies for Today’s LRA” July 2013

International, national, and local non-governmental organizations (NGO) and security ac-tors operating in LRA-affected communities must prioritize establishing truly safe places for the LRA to defect to, while working to ensure these same communities are safe from the LRA threat.

Community members across the surveyed region expressed a willingness and even desire for their communities to serve as defection points. These populations articulated sophis-ticated ideas of peace and forgiveness towards the LRA, despite the violence they have suffered at their hands. This understanding of the link between defection and peace en-genders a favorable climate to engage in unique, community-based defection initiatives. In addition, this report shows that sensitization efforts are still needed to reinforce existing positive sentiments, prevent any reprisal violence, and prepare communities for future defection.

As defection messages are currently disseminated throughout the LRA-affected area via local FM radio, fliers and helicopter speakers, ensuring communities are prepared and ready to receive defectors is paramount. Additionally, the LRA has a history of making di-rect contact with local communities – capitalizing and building on this expressed desire to leave the LRA through establishing clear defection protocols in communities and equip-ping them to seize that opportunity to draw the combatant out of the bush is absolutely essential³. Too many defection opportunities have been unrealized due to a breakdown in communication after the LRA makes initial contact. Every opportunity missed extends this conflict.

Calls for peace resonate across the LRA-affected region. The international community needs to continue pursuing dynamic and creative approaches to resolving this enduring crisis. Providing effective humanitarian assistance while developing and implementing both top-down and bottom-up defection strategies is critical to bringing an end to Afri-ca’s longest running war.

³ Between January 2012 and June 2013, the LRA made direct contact with local communities 24 times in DRC alone. 9 of these messages from the LRA expressed a desire to leave the armed group, sometimes asking civilians for assistance to do so. “Mid-Year Security Brief, LRA Crisis Tracker,” June 2013.

Methodology

This project utilized semi-structured qualitative interviews to elicit community experiences and attitudes relating to defection, and psychosocial and security challenges resulting from the presence of the LRA in the region. Qualitative data is well-suited to this type of assessment, as it allows researchers to gain direct insight into the complex dynamics of LRA-affected communities through the community’s own words. Qualitative data allows respondents to elucidate complex dynamics and interrelations between issues and highlights subjects that require further exploration.

The research was carried out in four communities in three countries in LRA-affected Central Africa: Duru, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC); Mboki, CAR; Obo, CAR; and Sakure, Republic of South Sudan (RoSS). These communities were chosen because they are either current Safe Reporting Sites (SRS) or are under consideration to become one. In total, 190 people were interviewed for this project during 58 interviews in three countries. Respondents included civil society and religious leaders, former LRA abductees and their family members, medical and educational service providers, NGO workers, and security sector representatives.

At each field site, community leaders were contacted in advance to explain the intention of the research. These key informants would then offer referrals to those who had been affected by LRA violence, or to other leaders or key informants who were knowledgeable about community issues. A researcher explained the purpose of the project to each potential interviewee and asked whether he or she would be willing to answer questions related to violence, defection, and instability in his or her community. If so, the interviewee was read a formal consent script describing the nature of the research, which emphasized that the respondent could refuse to answer any of the questions and could stop the interview at any time. Following an explanation of how the research would be used and disseminated, and the potential risks associated with attribution, the interviewee was told that his or her responses would be reported as anonymous. All data was de-identified except for general demographic characteristics (age and role in the community).

The research instrument was created based upon previous research conducted by DTJ in DRC, including informational interviews with NGO staff and community members in affected areas, and refined after pilot interviews in Duru, DRC. Below is a list of topics covered in the qualitative questionnaire, with a description of each module. Extra modules were added for former LRA abductees to further examine their experiences with abduction and to better understand their needs.

Question Modules — General	
Community well—being	This module addresses the biggest needs in communities as well as their strengths, including looking at what community members are proud of.
LRA	This module addresses people’s perception of the LRA and its mission, perceptions of the guilt or innocence of the LRA, the LRA’s affect on communities, and local protection mechanisms.
Forgiveness	This module explores community definitions of and sentiments towards the concept of forgiveness; examples of forgiveness, and their ability to forgive the LRA.
Peace	This module addresses community definitions of what peace is, whether it is possible, and how they can participate in bringing peace about.
Attitudes towards former LRA abductees	This module addresses community and family perceptions towards children formerly abducted by the LRA, including manifestations of stigma, their current needs and problems, and the community’s reactions to this population.
Reintegration of formerly abducted children	This module addresses how the respondent defines successful reintegration of children formerly abducted by the LRA, perceptions of how abducted children are affected by their experiences, and how communities are affected by the reintegration of former abductees.
Resilience and protection	This module asks who the respondent turns to in times of difficulty and how the community as a whole addresses threats or challenges. The interviewer specifically addresses protection mechanisms and support systems that may exist.
Community roles	This module asks the respondent what they perceive their role (as teacher, student, leader, religious figure, etc.) to be in the process of both defection and reintegration. This module also addresses whether the respondent feels that they know what to do to assist in defection and reintegration processes.
Gender dynamics	This module addresses how men and women are differentially affected by the LRA. The module also addresses the respective roles of boys and girls recruited into the LRA, as well as how boys and girls are treated as they attempt to reintegrate into communities after escaping from the LRA. The interviewer can probe to find out about pregnancies resulting from time in the LRA and how girls with these pregnancies are treated upon reunification.
Defection	This module explores community sentiment towards defection from the LRA, identifying barriers to and opportunities for defection, exploring perceived mechanisms of support for the LRA, and analyzing whether communities would be peaceful or violent towards defectors.
Defection Programming	This module looks at community perspectives towards various defection initiatives including fliers, helicopter messaging and FM radio, exploring their efficacy and effectiveness and giving community members the opportunity to contribute their ideas to improve these tools.
National and international response to the LRA	This module asks the respondent about their perceptions of the Uganda Peoples’ Defence Forces (UPDF), the US advisors deployed to address the LRA presence, the Forces armées de la République démocratique du Congo (FARDC), the Forces armées centrafricaines (FACA), and MONUSCO.

A translator and one to two researchers were present at each interview. The researchers transcribed the interviews during the interview itself. When more than one set of notes were taken, these were combined for completeness and accuracy.

Due to the exploratory nature of the study, inductive coding was undertaken through close reading of the transcripts. Two research team members generated codes, working independently at first and then refining the codes collaboratively. This process allowed them to identify key unifying themes and relationships between themes. Codes identified as important by two team members defined categories; consistent variations within a category were captured as subcategories. Axial coding was used to examine relationships between categories.

This project was commissioned by DTJ, researched and written by Lindsay Branham and edited by Margaux Fitoussi who also contributed original research. Invisible Children (IC) contributed funding for this project.

Question Modules for Former LRA Abductees	
Self-reporting	This module addresses former LRA abductees’ behavioral difficulties and challenges upon reunification. The module also addresses perceptions of how they are treated within their own families and community systems, including their opinions on what challenges they face as a result of their time in the LRA, and whether they face different treatment in their households and communities compared to their siblings and peers.
Perceptions of acceptance / stigma	This module asks the respondent about their perceptions of how they are treated in their community, social network, and family now as compared to before the abduction. The respondents were also asked to share their challenges as well as their visions of what a “normal” life would look like. Finally, the module asked respondents what advice they would give to others in their position and what their hopes for the future are.

Respondents included: civil society and religious leaders; formerly abducted adults; formerly abducted children and their family members; medical, psychosocial, and educational service providers; local defense forces; international, national, and local security forces; nomadic populations; displaced populations; hunters and fishermen; and women’s groups. For a complete list of interviewees, please see the table below.

People Interviewed	Mboki, CAR	Obo, CAR	Duru, DRC	Sakure, RoSS
Community and civil society leaders	Mayor Imam Pastor Focus group with six members of the Association of Muslim Men (representatives from Chad and Sudan)	Member of the Youth Association Focus group with five members of the local FM radio station Member of a local association assisting LRA victims Group chief of the 7 districts in the city center	Individual interviews with three local administrators Civil Society President Focus group with five men (carpenter, catechist/cook, two farmers, catechist, hunter)	Focus group with five church leaders Focus group with six local leaders
Service providers (medical, psychosocial, and educational service providers)		English teacher at the secondary school Individual interviews with two psychosocial facilitators Midwife at local hospital		
Parents of former abductees	Focus group with three parents of formerly abducted children	Mother of female abductee with child from LRA Uncle and guardian of a male abductee		
Formerly abducted adults	Focus group with five male victims Focus group with two leaders within the Victims’ Association (VA)	Focus group with three male victims VA leader		Focus group with five male victims
Formerly abducted children	Two 17-year-old boys 14-year-old boy 13-year-old girl 6-year-old girl	16-year-old girl 15-year-old girl 14-year-old girl	15-year-old girl 18-year-old boy	16-year-old girl 14-year-old boy
International, national, and local security forces	Focus group with UPDF Major and Lieutenant Focus group with three members of the local defense group	UPDF Major FACA Captain Focus group with three members of the U.S. Special Forces (in the cu) Six members of the local defense group		Focus group with four local defense groups

People Interviewed	Mboki, CAR	Obo, CAR	Duru, DRC	Sakure, RoSS
Nomadic populations	Focus group with 27 Mbororo — both those who live in town and those who live in the bush	Two focus groups with 16 Mbororo		
Displaced populations	Focus group with nine Congolese refugees			
Women’s groups	Focus group with 14 members of the Association of Women Focus group with six members of the Association of Muslim Women	Focus group with four members of the Association of Muslim Women		Focus group with seven women
Hunters and fishermen	Focus group with four hunters and three fishermen	Focus group with four hunters		Focus group with four hunters

Limitations

Qualitative data has certain inherent limitations. The prevalence and scope of the issues investigated cannot be determined solely based on the interviews conducted. In addition, this data cannot be generalized to the entire population in the LRA-affected region. Rather, this project aims to provide insight into experiences from individuals who have witnessed and survived the consequences of the LRA in their own communities. While every effort was made to include a diversity of experiences, perspectives, and backgrounds, due to the time constraints of this project, the focus remained on those voices that were the most outspoken or the easiest to access. To attempt to address this, the reported results have been triangulated from a number of different respondents. This approach helps ensure that the dynamics described in the report are representative of the community experience. The report clearly notes instances where respondents’ opinions significantly differed.

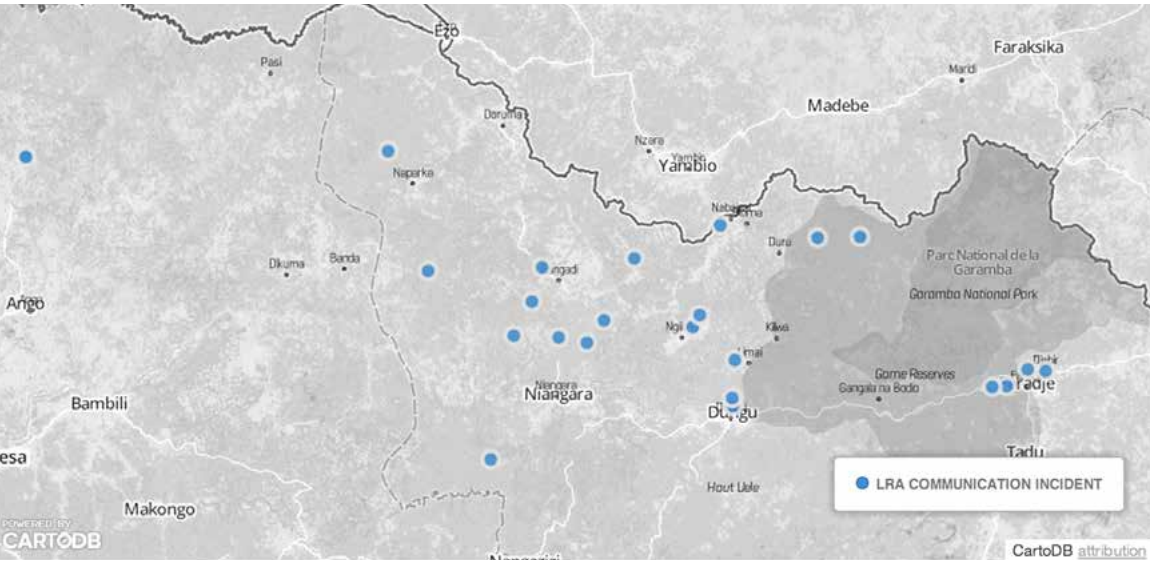
Data was collected at one point in time, which provides a “snapshot” into respondents’ reflection on the impact of the LRA over time in their communities. Data collection was undertaken over a period of twenty-three days from March 8 to March 11, 2013 and from May 31 to June 18, 2013.

This research focuses on the ways in which Zande communities currently living in the LRA-affected region can influence LRA (Ugandan or Zande) to peacefully surrender. Although out of the scope of this particular project, it is paramount for the international community to design a collective regional reintegration strategy to address the ongoing psychosocial needs of Zande escapees once they return home as well as the reintegration challenges for Ugandan returnees. Both areas are not extensively addressed in this report and further analysis is necessary.

Maps

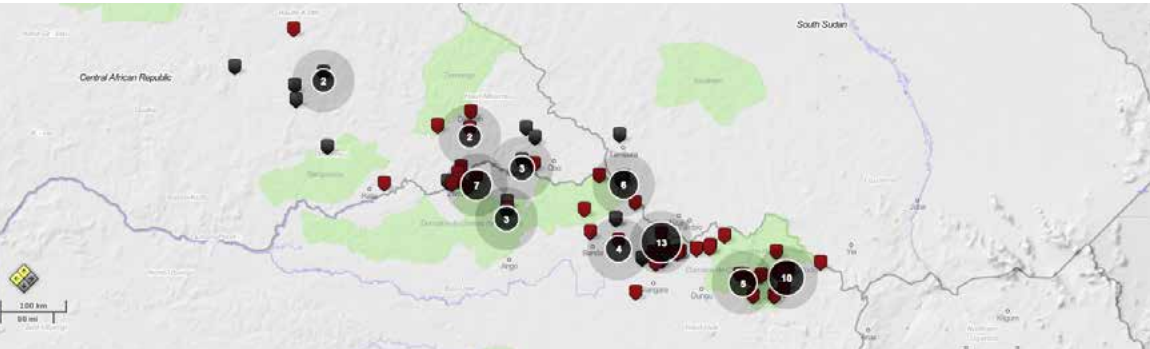
LRA Members Communicating with Local Populations in Congo

Illustrates frequency of LRA contacting local communities from January 2012 through June 2013.



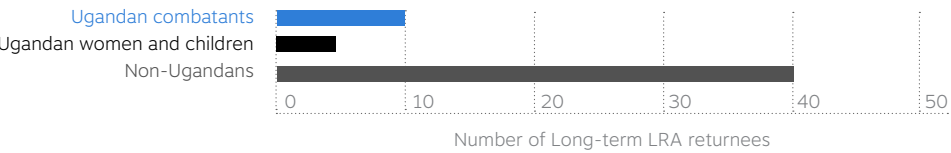
LRA Crisis Map

Illustrates all civilian deaths and abductions for 2013 in the current LRA-affected region



Defection Chart

Illustrates a loss of nearly 5% of the LRA’s Ugandan combatant capacity, based on estimates of 180-200 current Ugandan combatants comprising the core of its fighting force.



*Note: Non-long-term LRA returnees consist of returnees from the LRA who spent six months or more with the rebel group.

Discouraging Defection: The Zande Experience in the LRA

The LRA uses witchcraft and indoctrination systematically to discourage defection and prevent escape. This section sheds light on the experience of non-Ugandan Zande LRA escapees and defectors in order to better understand how to shape community-based defection strategies in the currently-affected region. The research found that in order for defection efforts to be the most effective, they must be able to counter the damaging affects of the LRA’s indoctrination process as well as capitalize on defection opportunities created by new LRA behavior, including the relaxation of rules and regulations.

LRA magic

“When they [abductees] are in the LRA they forget their civilian spirit and take on a military spirit.”

– Member of the Victim’s Association, Obo, CAR

Zande respondents explained that they received LRA “magic” (also referred to as “witchcraft”) at multiple points during the abduction event, as well as at critical points while in captivity, including the transitional period from abductee to combatant. The magic served four functions: as a mind control method, given to abductees as a way to make them “forget home”⁴; as an indoctrination tool, convincing abductees that it will “make them brave enough”⁵ to commit atrocities; as a method to dehumanize the enemy; and as a means to prevent escape.

The application of LRA magic

A formerly abducted girl in Sakure, RoSS, who spent five years in the bush, described how the LRA “smeared my face and my hands with the magic . . .and this was to make me not think of going home.”

Several Zande interviewees explained that sometimes the LRA uses different kinds of powders in the “witchcraft,” but otherwise did not know what went into the “magic.” A formerly abducted girl in Obo, CAR, under the command of Odhiambo, said; “In Nabanga we were given some witchcraft – necklaces, bracelets and also some water with medicine inside and we drank this and then we put some on our bodies like cream.”

⁴ According to a member of a Woman’s Association, Mboki, CAR

⁵ According to a formerly abducted girl, Obo, CAR



Duru, DRC Research revealed alarmingly high levels of trauma, depression and even suicidal ideation among Zande survivors of LRA violence. There were a few cases where respondents mentioned that their quality of life was so bad upon return that they actually wanted to re-join the LRA.
© Lindsay Branham / DTJ



Respondents spoke of having to “take” the LRA magic in several ways: in pill form, by smearing or being washed with it externally, by injection, and by being cut with razor blades. Former abductees also mentioned the witchcraft being placed specifically on their heads, knees, and ankles and sometimes being drawn on their faces like a cross, placed on their stomachs, worn in necklace form or put in a tea to drink. Former abductees said they were never told why they were being given the magic; they were just forced to accept it.

LRA magic as a tool to break down familial bonds

The abductees said they were specifically told that the witchcraft would “erase” their idea of returning home, and that the LRA could read their minds if they even considered escaping. This generates a heightened sense of fear and panic.

“The goal is that they must not think about returning home. They have to consider the bush like their town,” said a member of the Association of Muslim Women in Obo, CAR.

Respondents noted that they believed there is an inherent power in the LRA “magic,” and due to this, there

could be psychological acquiescence to the ideas the LRA. The LRA uses the medicines, lotions, creams and liquids as physical symbols to convince abductees of their power, creating a layer of paranoia that this might actually hold true.

Additionally, former abductees believe Joseph Kony possesses potent spiritual and magical powers. Individuals in all three countries revealed their fear that Kony could “transform himself into a piece of wood or a snake and disappear.”

LRA magic as an indoctrination tool to perpetuate violence

Witchcraft is also used by the LRA to inaugurate the transition from abductee to combatant. Zande abductees who are selected to become combatants are taught to believe that LRA witchcraft will “change their mind”⁶ so they become willing to kill, loot, and abduct.

“We were told that the witchcraft would make me brave and to not be scared to do things like killing people,” said a formerly abducted girl in Obo, CAR.

When asked if the magic was effective, this same girl responded: “Until now, I think I am affected by this witchcraft. Even last week when the Sudanese attacked, I felt something inside me telling me to go find out what was happening while other people were running away.” She described what this “something inside” was as a “spirit talking to me.”

This “bravery” or “willingness” gained through traumatizing the abductees is taken a step further to include deliberate attempts to dehumanize the “target” and induce a psychological shift in the abductee towards a willingness to participate in violence.

LRA magic as a method of dehumanization

The LRA consistently uses various forms of manipulation to dehumanize abductees and blur the line between human and animal.

“For example, we were told that they are vaccinated on their arms and feet as well as the eyes so that when you see someone they are seen as animals. Even if they mistreat you, if you need to kill someone you see them as an animal instead of a human being – in order for you to mistreat them.”

– Association of Muslim men, Mboki, CAR.

Furthermore, the LRA uses ritualistic methods to warp the way abductees see others.

“When the LRA takes you, two days after they abduct you, they sit you down and give you medicine [LRA magic]. They ask you your name. Then they put a person in front of you and give you medicine – they ask you if it’s a human or an animal. They ask you this until you see and say that what is before you is an animal. And then you are ready to kill that thing.”

— Formerly abducted boy, Mboki, CAR.

Zande respondents shared that these rituals terrified them and instilled intense fear towards the higher-level LRA leaders who were administering them. By creating a firm hierarchy based on fear and terror, the LRA is able to hold abductees captive.

LRA magic as a means to prevent escape

The LRA “magic” generates a great fear of even attempting escape, blocking abductees from trying. Abductees are told that the LRA magic will allow commanders to track and find the escapees, at which point they would be severely punished.

“In our camp we had a traditional medicine witchcraft –

and this medicine would be put on our tracks and it would bring us back to the LRA and they would then kill us,” said a formerly abducted 17-year old boy in Mboki, CAR.

If an abductee does attempt escape, respondents across the surveyed region described ceremonial-like events where the abductee would be placed in a circle and the other abductees would be forced to either kill or severely injure him or her. Of course, this kind of forced violence further ingrains a sense of fear-based respect towards LRA commanders and deepens a resolve not to escape because of the consequences if caught.

The secrecy and mystery that shrouds the LRA’s witchcraft holds abductees paralyzed. Reintegration interventions must take into account the communities’ perception of the strength of LRA witchcraft. Additionally, defection messaging should consider how the LRA uses witchcraft to entrap its members. Since the LRA witchcraft is given so much credit for singlehandedly “turning the minds” of abductees from “normal” to “abnormal”, tapping into this line of rhetoric could provide insight into how to target the LRA with defection messages.

Additionally, community members seem to see a clear linkage between the strength of LRA magic and the perceived power of individuals to defect.

“So defection really depends on the witchcraft. Most of those coming out of the LRA is a result of the witchcraft not working on them. You will see the difference between those who have witchcraft and those who don’t – its obvious if it’s working.”

– Local leader, Obo, CAR

Inside the LRA: Indoctrination Process

The intention of the indoctrination process is simple: to influence abductees to choose to remain in the LRA, because they are convinced that any attempt at escape would bring about their sudden death. Thus, when abductees begin choosing to stay in the LRA, the indoctrination process has effectively done its job. LRA indoctrination techniques destroy people’s sense of purpose, shattering any idea of life “after” the LRA. The toxic com-

⁶ According to hunters in Sakure, RoSS.

bination of isolation, warped value systems, and reversed authority structures convinces abductees that choosing to stay in the LRA is their only option for survival.

The LRA also manipulates people’s belief in God to by forcing them to not acknowledge the existence of any kind of God. The LRA uses threats to prevent abductees from praying, thereby creating paranoia around the act of praying at all. Abductees spoke of secretly praying “in their hearts,”⁷ and that this small act of rebellion and slim faith that a God may exist kept them alive and fostered their courage to escape.

Forced separation from belief or faith in a God serves as a psychological tool to isolate the abductees and undermine any sense of independence or hope. Lacking a belief system, the abductees become more willing to adopt the structure within the LRA. They then grow dependent on following the rules within the LRA and obeying the LRA command structure in order to secure their survival.

Indoctrination enables a climate for LRA abuses to occur unchecked. Respondents across the region described the variety of ways the LRA abuses people while in captivity, including using young girls as sexual slaves, forcing children to witness and carry out atrocities, walking long distances, forced starvation, beatings, mental abuse, etc.

Although most of these types of abuses have occurred profusely throughout the history of the LRA conflict, in the past few years, LRA patterns of abduction have evolved, including more frequent use of short-term porters. The LRA abducts Zande men, women and children for a short time span and uses them as porters to carry looted goods a certain distance; at that point they are either released or find a way to escape on their own. This characteristic is not unique to the Zande experience within the LRA, but is used widely today.

A formerly abducted man in Mboki, CAR explains his experience:

“When I was walking, I thought it was the end of my life; I was just waiting for death. My wife fell down because of the heavy luggage, I tried to help her and they forbid me to do so, they said it was hers to carry only. After these incidents, and the heavy wood I carried, I no longer have my health.

⁷ According to a formerly abducted girl, Sakure, RoSS

When I start to walk, I can’t – it’s like I have nails in my knees. How can I work to help my kids and wife? I’m not in enough health to help them — I’m an invalid. What can I do to heal myself?”

The psychological impact sustained by porters is often overlooked when considering psychosocial assistance for victims. This research revealed that men and women of any age group who underwent an abduction and were forced to act as porters are at high risk for depression and even physical injury. For example, all five formerly abducted men from a focus group in Mboki, CAR who spent varying amounts of time in captivity, said they cry frequently and easily without reason, are restless, and are living in constant fear. Some even reported suicidal ideation. All of these men served as porters, none of them became combatants, and some of them were in the LRA for as little as 24 hours. This subgroup is not necessarily at more risk than other subgroups affected by LRA violence, but they are often overlooked in mental health treatment due to the false assumption that short-term portering experiences are less psychologically distressing than longer-term abductions.

Recognizing the LRA

Zande respondents in Sakure, RoSS said the LRA can be recognized because they have not bathed; they have rasta hair and worn out clothes and guns; and they speak various languages. Their footprints can be tracked because they wear worn out gum boots and travel in small groups, which leave behind some barefoot footprints that belong to the abductees. A formerly abducted boy in Sakure, RoSS described Joseph Kony’s appearance as “fat and tall”. Visual recognition of the LRA in comparison to other armed groups operational in the region is important. Additionally, recognizing someone who is indeed attempting to surrender or defect is paramount in order to capitalize on that moment to ensure defection happens peacefully.

The relaxation of rules and regulations

Respondents repeatedly mentioned that the demand to adhere to certain longstanding rules and regulations within the LRA has been relaxed, including a growing oc-

currence of men having sexual relations with women not considered to be their own “wives.”

“Most of the ones who escape, especially LRA combatants, escape because they have slept with women they don’t have a right to sleep with and they were punished,” said a UPDF representative in Obo, CAR. He went on to explain; “The LRA of the olden times is not the LRA of today. They are somehow relaxing their laws.”

This manifestation of “new” behaviors has led to an interesting opportunity for escape. Combatants who sleep with other men’s wives are beaten and punished; the threat of extreme punishment has compelled some of these men to flee from the LRA “voluntarily.”

An increase in the frequency of the LRA engaging in elephant poaching activities shows an evolution in LRA behavior. In the past, the LRA did not engage in poaching ivory. Despite operating in savannah grasslands and forests with easy access to elephants, rumors of LRA poaching elephants did not surface until mid-2011 when Kony himself reportedly “ordered fighters to kill elephants and harvest their tusks.”⁸ Over the last three to five years, external support for the LRA has significantly reduced, slowly depleting the LRA of resources. Researchers speculate that the depletion led the LRA to engage in poaching activities as a way to supplement their financial deficit.

In Sakure, RoSS, respondents specifically mentioned observing the LRA poach elephants. These included eyewitness accounts of and personal participation in the killing of elephants, which were then used for meat consumption and tusk removal. “My nephew was trained to shoot the elephant and bring the tusk to the LRA commanders,” said a local hunter in Sakure, RoSS.

Interviewees described seeing tusks on the ground or hidden inside holes dug in the ground in strategic locations around Garamba National Park on the way to RoSS, and explained how people would be notified of the locations of the tusks and would then come to retrieve them.

Additionally, respondents said LRA witchcraft is used to stun the elephants so they can kill them faster. The interviewees also spoke of spies in commercial centers like Dungu, DRC and Sakure, RoSS facilitating these poaching transactions.

⁸ “Loosening Kony’s Grip: Effective Defection Strategies for Today’s LRA” July 2013, pg. 17

Understanding where the financial support for the LRA comes from and cutting it off is strategic to increasing the willingness of combatants to defect. As their financial reserves wane, desperation for survival may incite a willingness to peacefully surrender.

Defectors provide the most pertinent intelligence on current LRA movements, especially the locations of LRA commanders. Respondents reported that LRA commanders have started using code names in order to make tracking by counter-LRA (C-LRA) groups more difficult. However, from interviews with UPDF personnel in CAR, it seems they are overcoming this hurdle through physical descriptions of commanders and by learning what code names have been assigned to what commanders. This is why showing the Mbororo, hunters, and fishermen images of the LRA leadership is so important, instead of relying on name recognition alone.

Additionally, the LRA has become increasingly more fractured. According to a UPDF representative in Obo, CAR, Kony has not been able to meet with some of his commanders for as long as two years. The tyranny of distance and lack of freedom of movement has prevented more frequent meetings, which has most likely created fissures in the once tight authority structure of the LRA.

“The pressure we have given him prevented him from meeting his commanders. This would make someone lose hope and they begin relaxing. This breakage in close supervision by Kony is giving them time to relax the laws.”

— UPDF Representative, Obo, CAR

The relaxation of rules and regulations within the LRA could create timely openings to capitalize on defection opportunities. The next section analyzes communities’ perceptions of defection and the Safe Reporting Site (SRS) concept.

Community Sentiment Towards Defection and Safe Reporting Sites

There have been copious theories around what Zande community members in the currently-affected region actually think about defection: Do they support it? Do they not? Will they be hostile or peaceful towards an LRA defector? What is the community's understanding of peace and forgiveness? Are they amenable to SRS principles or are they fearful? Although each community has different expressions of these answers, and certainly each country has varying prevailing sentiments, on the whole, this research revealed that non-Ugandan Zande community members in LRA-affected areas are supportive of LRA defection. Synthesizing participant interviews illustrated a peaceful, non-violent posture towards defectors, a desire to see defection occur, and furthermore, a willingness to participate in any efforts to make defection successful. However, this attitude hinges on the communities' confidence that the LRA will indeed surrender and will not come out and abuse the population.

There has been a prolonged hesitancy on behalf of MONUSCO DD/RRR, for example, to actively establish SRS or begin more aggressive defection activities, blaming their delay on a potentially violent response from the community. This research has illustrated MONUSCO DD/RRR's lack of understanding of local sentiment. Although there are exceptions, communities across the region continue to exhibit a highly sophisticated and well-developed understanding of peace and forgiveness. During interviews, participants eloquently spoke of the importance of defection to bringing an end to the LRA, despite what they had been through themselves.

"If all of them [LRA] come out they will go back to their home and it will make us to be free," said a formerly abducted boy in Sakure, RoSS.

However, continued sensitization around these issues is still necessary. Continuing to reinforce these sentiments remains absolutely paramount. The next section will unpack community sentiment towards defection, including community members' fear of the LRA feigning defection, as well as community acceptance of the SRS and defection point concepts. Additionally, this section will look at a variety of community perceptions: towards the LRA, of forgiveness and peace, and of the LRA's guilt and innocence. Understanding these community perceptions will strengthen any community-based programs and the overall success of the SRS project.

Mboki, CAR Henrietta, a 13-year-old girl formerly abducted by the LRA, recounted her abduction: "In 2010, at 4:00 AM in the morning, while we were sleeping, people arrived with flashlights and abducted my family." She said, "amongst the LRA, there are those who innocent and those who are not, but they should all surrender and not be killed."

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Fear of LRA Feigning Defection

Zande respondents stipulated that they would be open to receiving defectors if they knew they were indeed surrendering and not feigning defection in order to kill, abduct, or loot. Interviewees across the surveyed region spoke of the fear that the LRA could use defection as an opportunity to trick them and cause harm.

A member of the Victim’s Association in Obo, CAR described this predicament. “But if he [LRA] comes out, the population can be afraid because they don’t know what is happening behind them – sometimes they [LRA] come close to the village and someone else can come in and try to hurt the population.” The specific stories and examples interviewees gave illustrating these “fake defections” seem to be most likely rumor and not fact, as these incidents cannot be verified. However, the strength of the rumor is nearly as powerful as fact, and has been disseminated throughout the community enough to produce a widespread sentiment that the LRA could and might fake defection in order to take advantage of the individuals trying to help them.

It is imperative that this fear of “fake defection” be addressed in sensitization efforts. A useful tool might be employing a circular sensitization model, i.e. communicating to the community what is being communicated to the LRA in defection messages while communicating to the LRA what is being communicated to the community. This would explain to the community that the LRA is being encouraged to come out “peacefully” and “non-violently” and would explain to the LRA that they will be peacefully received if they do surrender. Circular sensitization could dispel fears on both sides while building both the LRA’s trust in the community and the community’s trust that the LRA is serious about surrendering.

In addition, it is the job of the regional militaries and all C-LRA forces to ensure the LRA really does defect peacefully, as it would only take one negative incidence to destroy all credibility around the SRS model as well as any trust between community members and C-LRA forces.



As a local journalist in Obo said, “The problem is that the LRA doesn’t always tell the truth – they say they want to surrender but then take the people in the field there and put luggage on their head and take them to the field again.”

Thus, those involved in the SRS project have an ethical responsibility to make sure communities understand the risks involved. The SRS model essentially requires community members to potentially be placed in proximity to the LRA (i.e. through a defection point). Therefore, everything possible must be done to avoid a situation where the LRA abuses the welcoming posture of the community.

“The community just wants to be ensured that the LRA is being sensitized that if they come out to not harm the population,” said a local leader in Obo, CAR.

Simply streamlining the defection process could help reduce fear. This could include standardizing visual cues of defection (i.e. waving a palm branch, hands up, gun up, gun behind the back, etc.), and then communicating these standards to the community so they know what to look for in order to trust that a defection is indeed taking place. These suggestions are outlined in the Regional and Sectoral Recommendations section.

“They had cut the branches of a tree and waved them around to let us know they

weren’t going to do us harm. But, if they carried arms [guns] in their hands and they didn’t wave around the branch, we would have run away.”

— Hunter, Mboki, CAR.

Acceptance of SRS/Defection Point Concept

Multiple participants in all of the research sites mentioned having personally seen a defection in their communities, and expressed pride that this occurred peacefully.

A woman’s association in Duru, DRC said: “The LRA has already made a defection here – seven LRA came out. The chief brought them to FARDC. According to me there is no problem between the population and the LRA who leave the war.”

In Mboki, a Women’s Association described how the community contributed their own food and money to a group of nine LRA who defected. The community “collected these items and gave it to the mayor so that she could help feed and clothe them,” said a representative from the association.

In Obo, respondents demonstrated an understanding of the defection process, explaining that these individuals needed to be brought to the UPDF. A member of an association for Muslim women in Obo recounted a defection that had occurred:

“When the LRA element came out, a man was coming from the field and met the LRA — he said to him, ‘don’t be afraid I will not hurt you, just call the UPDF to come and take me.’ After that, the man called the UPDF who came and took him.”

Additionally, Zande community members stated that if they do not welcome the LRA peacefully, this news will reach the LRA and prevent future defections; this shows a sophisticated understanding of behavioral consequences and implications.

A hunter in Mboki, CAR, summarized this viewpoint by saying, “If the LRA defect and we are aggressive towards

them, this could get back to the LRA in the bush. It’s better to encourage the LRA to return, which could, in turn, encourage others in the bush to surrender.”

Respondents also noted that the idea of revenge had faded from the population, replaced by a stronger desire for stability and peace.

“We think most of the people have given up the idea of revenge so everyone is ready to welcome the LRA back,” said a local leader in Obo, CAR.

Zande community members seem to have come to the conclusion that defection will indeed be a more expedient path towards peace.

“And the LRA is in the empty place. So at the beginning I thought it would be better to go and fight them in the bush there but we also know that there are our relatives who were taken and if they go there with guns they will kill everyone, even the innocent. So it’s very difficult to suggest something — so defection is maybe the better way.”

– Secondary school teacher, Obo, CAR

There is recognition of the LRA’s humanity, despite the violence perpetrated in communities. It is this shared virtue that encourages community members to see the LRA’s inherent value and worth as fellow human beings, and produces openness to defection.

As a formerly abducted girl in Obo, CAR, explained, “We don’t want them to stay in the bush and to continue living in the bush like animals.”

Each community said they would be willing to allow their community to become an intentional defection point. Of the research locations, all except Duru in DRC have received previous sensitization around the defection/safe reporting site principles, which suggests that the USSF has done an effective job of disseminating information throughout these communities⁹. There seemed to be a high level of understanding of what constitutes a defection point, its purpose, and the greater good it serves, i.e., ending the war. These mentalities need to be continually reinforced through sensitization efforts.

⁹ Community members in Duru reported being sensitized by DD/RRR even though Duru is not an official SRS, but did not share the same widespread viewpoints as community members sensitized by USSF in Obo, Mboki and Sakure.

However, the USSF should not place any images of LRA commanders or leaders in permanent places in town, as these may serve as trauma triggers for victims. In Obo, CAR, one formerly abducted girl saw the photo of the LRA leaders in town, took a stick and started beating the photo, yelling: “You! You said I could not go home! Now I am at home!”

Since it is important that community members are able to visually recognize top LRA leaders, community meetings could be a more appropriate forum for showing images of their faces.

Despite openness towards defection, there were respondents who expressed fear or concern that if they were forced to physically look at an LRA combatant in their community, it would terrify and could re-traumatize them. This is why a long-term sensitization plan is important. In conjunction with SRS sensitization, it is crucial to provide psychosocial assistance to prepare communities in case of a confrontation with some of these very real potential triggers.

Across the surveyed communities, this research revealed that young men in particular are the most likely to respond violently towards an LRA defector. Young men are often active in local defense groups and/or are hunters or fishermen. As a result, they have a higher likelihood of encountering LRA. Respondents described a higher level of aggression in formerly abducted young men than in any other sector of society. This combination of higher levels of aggression plus possible contact with the LRA creates a plausible problem scenario. Thus, it is critical to specifically target young men in any sensitization effort.

Despite the fact that there is willingness and openness from communities to accept LRA defectors and not an overriding sentiment of violence or aggression, there remains a variety of potentially negative consequences that could develop if a defection attempt went awry. It would only take one incident to frighten community members enough to reject the SRS project out of fear for their safety. Thus, measures must be employed now to ensure that LRA defectors will be peaceful, that there is a way to visually recognize and differentiate between a defection and an attack, and that communities are prepared when an individual does defect.

Additionally, being chosen as a defection point/SRS site gives the community the impression that the end of the LRA is possible and that action towards its completion is underway. On a very basic level, populations understand that if defections occur, there will be fewer combatants in the bush and less subsequent danger to their communities. This association is a positive thing for community morale and openness towards the SRS concept.

Lastly, community members already seem to view the SRS sites as “safe” places for various reasons. Mboki, Obo and Sakure are all protected by international C-LRA military contingents, have experienced an active reduction in LRA attacks, and are focal points for refugees and IDPs seeking safety. Thus, community members already see their communities as “safe.”

Community perception of the LRA

Although respondents in the currently-affected region expressed a strong dislike towards the LRA due to violence perpetrated against them, community members also see the LRA as a dichotomy. Respondents describe the LRA as violent, ruthless perpetrators of mass violence. On the other hand, they also see the LRA as their brothers and fellow Africans. Parents of formerly abducted children in Mboki, CAR said; “The LRA are our brothers, even if they come to my house I will give them water.”

Perspectives on the LRA are commonly steeped in witchcraft and super-spiritual ideologies, and the personality cult of Joseph Kony remains strong. A formerly abducted girl in Obo, CAR described Kony: “I think Kony has bad spirits and usually in the night when something is going to happen he sees it in a dream. In the morning he informs his soldiers what will happen.” This fear of Kony and the powers he holds are another reason people stay in the LRA.

There is an overall sense of bewilderment surrounding the unpredictability of LRA attacks across all three countries. This has resulted in a sense of paralysis: economic and agricultural activities have been severely restricted.

Respondents described their frustration, anger, and even rage in response to the horrifically difficult circumstances in which they live. In SE CAR for example, the compound-

ed effects of extreme poverty, additional insecurities caused by the Seleka rebels, and the ongoing effects of LRA violence leave communities in this area especially vulnerable. They are suffering not only from ongoing political insecurity and violence, but also spiking food prices, impassable roads and economic channels that are completely cut off, severely restricted access to health care of any kind, and a cessation of international aid, since most international agencies have been evacuated from this part of the country. Although international organizations are slowly trickling back in, there remains a major vacuum of need that is unparalleled in its intensity. CAR remains in a state of absolute emergency.

“It’s an emergency to put an end to the LRA. It’s an emergency.”

— Local journalist in Obo, CAR.

Despite the violence the LRA has committed and the state of emergency communities are forced to live in, respondents still maintained an interest and desire to see defections happen even in their own communities. Simply put, everyone wants the war to end, and respondents expressed that reducing the numbers of LRA combatants via defection efforts is a proactive way to work towards that end.

Additionally, community members recognized that the LRA may be scared to defect because of what they have done. As a parent of a formerly abducted child in Mboki explained, “If we see an LRA coming out and they want peace, ok, fine. They can come out – we know they are scared that the village won’t accept them and that is why the LRA stays in the bush.”

A local leader in Sakure, RoSS said; “To tell you the truth, the LRA could have come out. But they fear because of what they have done. Killed innocent children and people in vain. They fear that the local people or hunters will shoot and kill them.”

Furthermore, respondents said they know the LRA is not happy with the conditions in which they are living and want to defect, and are willing to accept them if they do so.

Community perspectives on forgiveness and peace

“Forgiveness frees the anger or the wound from the heart.”

— Local leader, Mboki, CAR.

Community members in the currently-affected region across the board provided eloquent, sincere and heart-rending definitions of peace and forgiveness, despite all they have personally lost. They also exhibited an understanding that defection is both a way for peace to be realized and a way to experience a kind of forgiveness.

“Without defection peace is impossible. Defection is absolutely integral for peace,” said a local psychosocial worker in Obo, CAR.

Another respondent added, “I can accept Obo to be a defection point because coming out means asking for forgiveness and they have done bad things with the people of Obo and if they come out it means they are asking for pardon.”

One respondent in Obo, CAR went so far as to link a willingness to accept LRA defectors as a requirement for peace to become possible.

“If the population really wants peace, open your hands with open hearts. If the LRA accepts voluntarily to leave, we need to be ready to accept them and our suffering will end.”

– Focal point for local association, Obo, CAR.

Participants described forgiveness as choosing to intentionally forget what has been done, adding that it “frees the anger or the wound from the heart,” as described by a religious leader in Mboki, CAR. Every respondent said that forgiveness is not only important, but essential.

“Forgiveness is important. The LRA has killed people, they’ve abducted people, they’ve looted our homes, they’ve looted our motorcycles, they’ve burned our vehicles, but this is in the past. If you want to look towards the future, you have to forgive. This forgiveness will somehow bear fruit in the future – it will encourage those in the bush to come out.”

– Local hunter, Mboki, CAR.

Respondents said that forgiveness is important, because, as a member of the Victim’s Association in Obo, CAR, explained, it “prevents the future violent acts”; moreover, “it brings peace in your mind, peace in your heart, peace in the society and in the way of living.”

In addition, as a formerly abducted boy in Duru, DRC described, “forgiveness is important because when you forgive someone you free yourself.”

When asked specifically if respondents could forgive the LRA, a mother of a formerly abducted boy in Mboki, CAR said this:

“Sometimes they are scared of us and scared to come out because they know the harm they’ve caused. They’ve done bad, but when you accept them with love, they realize you will not hurt them.”

The population seems to understand that its willingness to accept the LRA is a precursor to peace in their communities and country more broadly and, furthermore, that the act of defection is the LRA’s way of asking for forgiveness.

In Sakure, RoSS, respondents mentioned they are very proud of their community because they are the first dio-

cese in the area to actively discuss forgiving the LRA with the population.

The research aimed to tease out feelings of revenge, understandings of peace, and whether any residual anger would be present if people were faced with defection as an active reality in their communities. Although there are extremely high levels of trauma and overwhelmingly negative effects of LRA violence, populations seem highly in favor of forgiving the LRA as their path to freedom and peace.

Community perspectives of guilt and innocence

Non-Ugandan community members’ perceptions surrounding the guilt or innocence of the LRA influence their willingness to forgive the LRA, and consequently their willingness to accept their particular community as a defection point or not.

Respondents repeatedly mentioned that once they realized that there are currently Acholi LRA combatants who were at one point also abducted against their will like the Zande, and that they therefore share a common pain and a common story, this realization became a key turning point in their willingness to forgive. Recognizing the LRA as “innocent” or as “victims themselves” dissolves the inflexible barrier between perpetrator and victim. When community members can recognize that everyone is a victim to some degree, offering forgiveness seems a much more feasible option.

As one respondent in Duru, DRC, said: “Some of the LRA are innocent. Because the LRA is killing us they forget they have a body like us and because of the ‘gris-gris’¹⁰ that they do this and can kill us without thinking that we are a person as they are.”

There is often a distinction made between “real LRA” and “abductees.” Real LRA are those who became combatants, particularly those of Ugandan origin, and furthermore who were most often the perpetrators of violence.

A formerly abducted girl in Mboki, CAR illustrated this phenomenon when she said that, “amongst the LRA,

there are innocent and the real LRA, they should all surrender and not be killed.”

Since there is a strong view that anyone who was abducted is innocent, it is urgent for all those innocent people currently with the LRA to be welcomed home.

The way forward

Overall, communities in the currently-affected region have an incredible propensity for forgiveness and acceptance. They just want an end to LRA violence and to live in peace again.

However, the need for sensitization in this area remains for several reasons: to build community-wide cohesion and solidarity by emphasizing common pain and common hope, which can help people forgive and to realize “I’m not the only one”; to reinforce existing community sentiment and openness towards participating in peaceful defection; and to serve as a preventative, rather than reactionary, measure, in preparation for potentially larger defections in the future.

A psychosocial worker in Obo, CAR made a plea for continued sensitization: “Keep sensitizing the community to accept the LRA because then if there are less LRA how can Kony or Odhiambo continue on?” A local leader in Obo, Car, took this sentiment further by adding,

“If they come out and leave the war, they will become members of the community. There will be no more war and we will be together.”

¹⁰ “Gris-Gris” or LRA “magic”

The Long Journey Home for LRA Defectors

The top two reasons for Ugandan and non-Ugandan LRA defection for combatants and non-combatants most commonly cited by respondents, are: 1) men being forced to leave the LRA because they have broken LRA rules and had sexual relations with a “wife” not their own, and 2) pure exhaustion and disillusionment with the LRA mission.

During the course of this research, the underlying question was: how can defection be more successful, and what is the community’s role? Currently, low numbers of LRA defections are not just due to a lack of opportunity for escape but due to lack of will to escape. This lack of will is a result of certain barriers, according to interviews with formerly abducted Zande boys, girls, men and women who were privy to the perspectives of those in their groups, as well as the commanders leading them. In contrast, most abductees who have not yet been turned into combatants await only the right opportunity to escape although both combatants and abductees seem to be affected by the same barriers outlined below.

A psychosocial worker in Obo, CAR explained, “There are LRA that want to leave the bush and return back. They have the desire to leave but they are so controlled and they are waiting for the right time to escape.”

Those who escape often take advantage of chaotic situations created by clashes with military groups. On some occasions, they escape when no one is guarding them. For example, while commanders are asleep or while the abductee is sent to gather yams, water, honey or other kinds of food. As one formerly abducted boy in Mboki, CAR, said, “I was waiting for a moment to escape.”

Furthermore, former abductees stated that Kony continues to promise an ultimate fulfillment of the penultimate LRA mission, and that this lures people to stay.

“Kony informs the commanders who then share with the other soldiers and abductees, that no matter what the conditions, Kony will take over Uganda. He says that the planes the US Forces and the UPDF are using, they will be for you. You will have all villas, planes, cars, when we return to Uganda – this encourages people to stay.”

– Formerly abducted men, Mboki, CAR.

However, there does seem to be considerable opportunity, every day, for people to escape. This points to the strength of deeply held beliefs and fears about what would await potential defectors if they did leave their group. The LRA has

Near Mboki, CAR A defection flier that communicates through graphic illustrations and multiple local languages that if the LRA surrenders they will be peacefully received. These fliers are dropped from the air over areas of known LRA movement, and have proven to influence combatants to choose to surrender.

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methodically indoctrinated its members and manipulated them to the point that their “will to leave” has been replaced by high levels of fear brought about by violent control. The ability of abductees or abductees-turned-combatants to regain their will to defect by overcoming these additional barriers to defection is key to success in the defection space. The reality is that any attempt at defection or escape is a deliberate choice to risk their own lives. If they are caught, regardless of the specific circumstances, they will most likely be severely punished or killed. Therefore, their will to leave must be strong enough to trump the fear of their own deaths, or at a minimum to lead them to believe that their chance of survival is actually greater if they come out, rather than continuing to risk a life in the bush.



The research identified four barriers to defection of Ugandan and non-Ugandan combatants: fear the community will attack defectors, not knowing how to escape/defect or where to go, fear the UPDF will attack defectors, and fear about their quality of life upon return.

Fear the community will attack defectors

This fear was outlined in the previous section on *community perceptions of the LRA*. In essence, abductees are told that local communities will attack them if they come out, because of all the violence they have perpetrated. This fear maintains a firm grip on those within the LRA.

In Obo, CAR, respondents explained how the LRA has actually tested the safety of community reception in the past by sending out defectors in waves. Therefore, regardless of whether the community really will harm them or not, the LRA holds fast to the belief that they will.

An Mbororo representative in Obo, CAR explained his sentiments on why the LRA do not defect, saying, “the Acholi seem like traumatized people. If you ask them to come out, they don’t want to. Even with the messages of peace, they don’t come back to the community.”

As a local hunter in Obo, CAR explained, “The LRA fears what will happen to them if they come out,” which is both logical and believable given what LRA abductees are told by their captors. Even still, conditions in the bush can be so difficult that people decide to escape anyway, regardless of the fate that might await them.

A young girl in Mboki, CAR who spent five years in captivity with the LRA explained that:

“Looking at all what I have said, when you are in the LRA and if you decide to escape it’s also to die. Because if they find you they will kill you. But I was suffering too much, walking every day, so that’s why I decided to escape.”

A local hunter in Obo pointed out the extent to which this fear is unjustified by explaining what the community’s position is:

“For me, the LRA has done very bad things and now the LRA is afraid to come out, thinking that the community will do bad things to them. But we are ready to forgive them to allow them to come out.”

Solutions to overcoming the fear that the community will attack LRA defectors

Overcoming this barrier is a two-fold process: 1) prove to the LRA that Zande communities will indeed safely receive them and 2) ensure that these same Zande communities will indeed peacefully receive them and are simultaneously protected from any further attacks.

In order to prove to the LRA that Zande communities will not attack them, a more direct line of communication needs to be established from the community to the LRA, in order to build trust directly and diversify the source of defection communications, which right now is solely coming from the “outside” in current FM and HF radio and leaflet drops. And although this has a very important purpose, i.e. to act as a form of pressure, establishing communication and a line of trust from the Zande communities themselves is critical. This can be achieved through existing and new defection tools.

Introduction of a goodwill token to win trust:

A physical token used as a show of goodwill, to reinforce the principle that if someone chooses to defect they will be peacefully received. The content and nature of this item should be determined by local communities.

Helicopter loudspeaker messaging:

Ensure helicopter messaging directs LRA to geographical SRS points with cardinal directions including river and geographical landmark references as well as including any community-based defection signals as points of recognition and extensions of trust from the communities.

Defection fliers:

Equip communities to create their own locally produced defection messages, including local printing and distribution. Amending language on current defection fliers to reflect community sentiment is also important. Messages from the local community could be as rudimentary as hand-written notes, to more replicable (printed) materials.

Reinforcing existing sensitization messaging as well as implementing the following ideas could serve the purpose of ensuring that the community will not attack the LRA if they do defect.

USSF:

Continue disseminating sensitization messages and holding meetings in all SRS locations.

SRS signage and images:

Create consistent visual recognition across all SRS locations via flags, boards, or logos. This could foster community buy-in and create standardized ways for LRA to recognize “safe places to defect.”

Sensitization fliers within the community:

To reinforce SRS principles, create visual/graphic fliers directed at the community itself instructing peaceful reception of defectors, including images of what surrender looks like (hands up, waving a branch, etc.), and place these on trees and in the town center around the SRS site.

Establish community defection committees (CDCs) in each SRS:

Community defection committees, trained and run by local partners in each currently-affected country, will serve as a focal point for community-based defection initiatives, information flow on defection from the community to C-LRA groups, and the dissemination of messaging back to the community.

Mobile Cinema screenings and workshops in each SRS:

Tied in locally with existing mechanisms, these screenings embedded in a workshop would serve the dual purpose of reinforcing peaceful reception of LRA defectors and reducing psychological distress within the community. Mobile Cinema screenings would be run by local partners in partnership with the CDCs in each SRS.

Fear of not knowing how to escape or where to go

Zande respondents noted that current members of the LRA are scared to escape because they are unclear how to and do not know where to go if they do defect.

A formerly abducted girl in Obo, CAR, explained that, “Some LRA are thinking of surrendering – but the way to do that they don’t know how and they have stayed with LRA for long – especially to those who have tried to escape.”

There are also cases of people escaping and then having to spend months wandering in the bush trying to find a city center or place to come out in. This provides a pivotal opportunity to direct defectors to SRS locations as well as reinforces the importance of community members’ understanding of how to recognize a defector and what the protocol is if they come across a defector to avoid missed defection opportunities.

Solutions to overcoming the fear of not knowing how/where to go

Creating messaging that both has explicit directions to SRS locations and clearly outlines defection protocol could ease some of these fears. This could include instructions on what surrender looks like (again, waving a branch, hands over the head, etc.) This could give a potential defector some level of confidence that they are not running into the unknown and facing potential danger that could prove a greater threat than staying in a place they already know. In this way, the shroud of mystery cloaking the process of defection could be dissolved.

Fear of UPDF attack

LRA commanders consistently tell those under their command that if they defect or escape, the UPDF will kill them. Since they most likely have come into contact with the UPDF in the past and had violent interactions, this would not be difficult to believe. The UPDF is, of course, actively pursuing the LRA.

A formerly abducted girl in Obo, CAR noted that, “The Zande stay with the LRA because they are scared to escape. The Zande are scared because they are told the UPDF will catch them.”

Another formerly abducted girl in Obo, CAR explained her story: “When I was in the LRA, if there was an attack of the UPDF the LRA told us the UPDF would kill us – I didn’t know what was true and we were afraid by what we were told.”

Additionally, in Mboki, CAR, formerly abducted men explained that the LRA informed them that the UPDF would differentiate between abductees and real LRA, and that the abductees are the ones at risk: “There are not a lot of defections because the LRA advises us that if there’s an attack with the UPDF, it’s the UPDF who will kill you, the abducted. They won’t kill us [LRA], they are our brothers.”

This manipulation constitutes yet another barrier for potential defectors.

Solutions to fear of UPDF attack

A potential solution is to utilize messaging directly from UPDF commanders in defection messaging; their voices would lend credibility. They could, for example, address potential defectors directly via existing channels, HF, FM and fliers, and ensure their safety if they surrender. This messaging could elaborate on how the mission of the UPDF is to help the LRA come home, whether that is home to Uganda, Congo or CAR, and not to kill them.

Fear of the quality of life upon return home

Members of the LRA know that there are challenges to be faced in returning home. Since this research was focused on the Zande experience, the challenges identified include the disparity between quality of life at home versus in the bush, and the differences in resettlement packages provided by the different countries of origin. In Mboki, CAR, formerly abducted men complained that they see Ugandan LRA who defect being taken back to Northern Uganda to a special welcome center, where they receive

resettlement packages and more, but that they themselves receive nothing.

“But we the victims, we are innocent. You go into the bush and you are abandoned, nobody takes care of us. There’s a special center for the Ugandans, why do we treat them better than other nationalities?”

– Formerly abducted men, Mboki, CAR.



The majority of respondents, however, explained that they were unsure of what happened to defectors once they returned to their country of origin; they just knew that the UPDF took them home.

Any promises made during defection messaging or allusions to promises need to be fulfilled, or these false promises will backfire. Moreover, returnees are experiencing increasing dissatisfaction with life in their communities, and if investment is not made into reintegration services, returnees might either re-join the LRA or join the Seleka movement (if in CAR). Although these sound like far-fetched options, multiple respondents throughout the course of this research cited examples of both of these things happening.

Narratives of successful defection as a result of defection programming

Defection fliers and helicopter messaging have been successful. During this research, several examples were shared that highlight the need to continue these efforts.

Defection messages seem to fulfill several purposes: They expose the lies and manipulation of LRA commanders, provide courage and hope that a life after the LRA is possible, and create reminders of and connections to home, family, place, and belonging.

Those in the LRA’s command risk their safety to read the defection fliers. A local leader in Obo, CAR said that the punishment for being caught reading a defection flier is 50 lashes. However, former abductees said they knew there were important messages for them on the fliers and went as far as to hide them, risking punishment in order to know what they said.

Regarding helicopter loudspeaker messaging, community members stressed that this is the most important method because, as one local leader in Mboki, CAR, put it, “the LRA can close their eyes but they cannot close their ears.”

The following narrative is from a formerly abducted girl in Obo, CAR, who was under the command of Odhiambo:

“I saw fliers when I was in the LRA and I even knew one of the people in the photo. I saw the fliers by Djemah. I just found the fliers on the ground but we were forbidden to take them to read or see the photograph. I found it on the ground and I took it and hid it in my bag and then when we arrived at a place and we took a rest I hid myself behind a tree and tried to have a look at this paper. I also had a girlfriend there with me in the LRA from Rafai and we read together what was written on the paper. It was written in Acholi.



Sakure, RoSS Lucia, a 16-year-old girl, describes peace in the local language, Zande. "Zereda (peace) is when you are being comfortable and nothing can disturb your mind -- that is the thing we call peace."
© Lindsay Branham / DTJ

The flier was red and on it there was a photo of a family – a man and his wife and a child and it is this family that was with me in the bush and I knew them very well. That is why when I saw it, even though the LRA had told me this guy was killed, I realized they had lied to me and the family was alive so it was at that time I started to have the idea of escaping.

This flier gave me hope and courage.

I threw the flier away after I read it so no one would catch me with it and hurt me. Because if they found me with it, I would have been beaten.

Me and my friend – we both were encouraged to escape and my other friend also was able to escape – I heard her voice on the radio here so I know she is also safe."

This narrative is an example of the importance of every attempt at communicating with the LRA. The defection flier in this example tipped the balance for this young girl towards courage, and this courage eventually brought her home and to her family.

Flier distribution and consequences

Local Zande hunters and fishermen in every community except Duru, DRC had seen defection fliers, knew in essence their purpose, and had been asked to place them on key routes¹¹. Mbororo in Obo and Mboki had also been asked to do the same. However, due to retaliation against Mbororo for placing defection fliers, they are now hesitant to place these fliers in the bush. This will be discussed further in the Mbororo section.

In every community, those who had been asked to distribute the fliers did not fully understand them. There should be more intentional explanations of the content on defection fliers to the local community, so as to reduce any room for rumor or assumption on content.

¹¹ In Duru, DRC, respondents had seen the fliers, or seen DDR place them, but had not been asked to participate in this effort.

Community-Level Resources In Defection

Local defense groups (LDG) and the Mbororo have an important role to play in both defection and community self-protection efforts. These two groups are great assets for existing and future defection efforts. If the challenges of community perception towards them can be navigated and if they can be collaborated with more fully, they could potentially play even more pivotal roles in reducing the number of LRA combatants and ensuring the success of SRS locations.

Local defense groups

The presence of local defense groups in Obo and Mboki, CAR was said to provide direct psychological reassurance to the local population, helping to create an overall sense of security. Some respondents said the groups' presence actually helps them sleep at night. However, in both communities, these groups are under-equipped and although they did receive some support from the community initially, they have not received any support lately. In Sakure, RoSS, the Arrow Boys (also called Home Guard), are respected by the community, but complained that the community is not helping to support them now. The Payam Administrator in Sakure actually asked the community to contribute food or small amounts of money to them but to date, no action has been taken. The Arrow Boys said their patrols are limited to several times per week and though they used to go on several night patrols down to the Congo border area, they have ceased this activity since the government of the RoSS asked them directly not to cross over into DRC.

In Duru, DRC, there was a local defense group that had enough structure and organization to actively pursue a group of armed LRA as recently as October 2012. During this event, they successfully rescued several children who had been abducted. As a result this local defense group was punished by the FARDC and disbanded, and the chef de poste was arrested and sent to another town. There is immense frustration in Duru because this now loosely organized local defense group wants to assist with defection efforts and to protect the community, but is not allowed to.

Ownership of the mission to protect

"Local defense is still here but not working because FARDC forbids them," said a hunter in Duru, DRC, who led the local defense group in their pursuit of the LRA in 2012. He went on further to explain, "The problem is for us to contribute to peace — the government doesn't allow us . . . we are willing to contribute but

Mboki, CAR A leader of the local defense group, comprised primarily of civilian hunters and fisherman who have dedicated themselves to protecting their community. Their activities include monitoring LRA movements nearby, relaying information to security actors and bringing a sense of security to the local population. In the past this particular group has made direct contact with the LRA in violent and non-violent clashes.

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the government is not helping out or allowing us.” The same hunter stressed, “We know everywhere where the LRA are and we could help to fight them . . . it’s the local people who know where the snake enters the house and it’s up to the local people to kill that snake. So the government should give us the power to do something about them.” DRC presents a complex climate for the operations of local defense groups since they are prohibited to operate by the government, while in CAR and the RoSS, they are allowed to operate more freely.

All of the local defense groups expressed a high level of ownership over their mission and responsibility to protect their communities. Local journalists in Obo, CAR described them in the following way: “The local defense are brave people and are engaged to protect the community. They just need to be given materials for their work.”

In both Obo and Mboki, CAR, local defense groups described themselves as primarily information couriers, taking reports of LRA movements or incidents to the UPDF, who then act on the information.

“Our first mission is to protect, we seek out security information to bring back to town. To bring back the peace, it must come from us, members of the community. We verify information and check what is happening in the ‘dark’ to bring clarity to those in charge of protecting us. If we, the local defense groups, had means, it should be us combating the insecurity around our community. As we don’t have these means, it’s up to us to seek out and verify information in order to inform the military forces.”

— Local defense group member, Obo, CAR

Ill-equipped but firmly resolved

Currently, the local defense groups use artisanal guns (double zero bullets), knives, machetes and arrows. They are ill-equipped not only in terms of weapons, but they lack communication devices and equipment that could assist with patrols and operational activities, such as raincoats, flashlights, batteries, gumboots, food rations, etc. The local defense group in Obo, CAR, comprising 91

active members divided into six groups, reported that: “We have difficulties in our work because nobody supports us. Our attempts at advocacy have not borne fruit.” They went on to say, “We are angry and we want to fight the LRA.”

In Mboki, CAR, the local defense group, interestingly, is composed of Chadians, Sudanese, and Zande representatives. They proudly described how they single-handedly drove the LRA out of Mboki in July 2009, killing three LRA. They displayed photographs of the disfigured corpses of LRA combatants to prove what they had done and also to stress their resolve and seriousness in actively fighting the LRA. Despite this resolve, there remains a need for better training and understanding of humanitarian law by local defense forces in addition to more resources.

This particular group stressed their precarious legal status in Mboki, asking explicitly for identity badges to highlight their role as “protectors of the community,” which they said would allow the FACA to give them more freedom in their patrols and movements. Currently, they are legally recognized as a group but not as individuals. They said, “The FACA will respect us when they see our badges.” They explained that they would be more than willing to put themselves at risk, increase the frequency of patrols and try new defection methods if they had this legal recognition: “We would go follow up with the defectors, we are here because of this problem. We have our wives, our children, our families to defend. This is our locality. Even 15-60 km we will go by foot.”

Furthermore, this particular local defense group said they wanted to conduct a peace mission to actually attempt contact with an LRA group, confident they could convince them to defect.

“We will have a white flag to hold in our hands, we won’t fire on them. We would present ourselves, and say, ‘we are here to help you’. We would give them some food, and say, ‘leave your camps and come with us. We are here to protect you, the community won’t harm you.’ Those who accept will come with us, those who don’t will stay in the bush.”

– Local defense group, Mboki, CAR

When asked why they would be willing to do this, they responded;

“We tell you, we are not afraid. Those who don’t risk anything, gain nothing. We can do it because we are engaged, they are our brothers.”

The Mboki group asked explicitly for food support and Thurayas (satellite phones) to assist in their efforts, saying food insecurity is an enormous problem in Mboki and they are struggling to feed their children. Additionally, they stressed the following: “Haut-Mbomou is an abandoned area – if we have the support of the international community we are ready to stand up and fight.”

Local defense groups are an invaluable asset for defection efforts. They are committed and familiar with LRA movements and have a vested interest in protecting their families and communities.

THE MBORORO

Mbororo groups living in and around Obo and Mboki, CAR may also constitute an invaluable asset. Mbororo come into contact with the LRA far more frequently than any other group of people, because they share their cattle paths with the LRA and their camps are in close proximity. Therefore, the Mbororo are in a position to provide timely intelligence on LRA movements as well as strategic access to LRA groups.

The Mbororo are particularly vulnerable to LRA attacks, due to their nomadic lifestyle and their possession of cattle, a highly valued asset. Additionally, due to tensions between certain Mbororo groups and local communities, they are also less likely to receive humanitarian aid in concert with other Zande abductees. According to the



Mbororo in Mboki, CAR, “When an Mbororo who was abducted comes out no one helps them and we don’t know why.”

Additionally, the Mbororo are exposed to LRA violence because of their constant movement in remote areas.

“The Mbororo cover a massive zone. There are two principal axes that the Mbororo use – Digba-Mboki and Banda-Mboki. The LRA know these routes very, very well. When they’re hungry, they just wait on these paths because they won’t have to wait more than two to three days before some Mbororo will pass.”

— Imam, Mboki, CAR

The Mbororo group in Mboki, CAR, described how the presence of the LRA has affected them:

“For the past three years, we have been living in insecurity . . . we as herders, we are not used to cultivating. But now,

we are constrained to cultivate. Our tradition, generation, after generation, it is our culture to herd . . . We are slaves, we are imprisoned, we don't know where to go, when will this end. We can't abandon Mboki to go nowhere."

Although the Mbororo are not seen as part of the local population like a Zande, they consider themselves Central Africans and have a bond and commitment to place beyond the definitions of tribe.

"We are born in the Central African Republic, we grew up in this country, and we circulate within the country from town to town. We don't know our origins, but amongst us there are people from Niger, Nigeria, Chad, Sudan, and Cameroon. Our parents and grandparents came here, were married here, and died here."

— Mbororo, Mboki, CAR

The Mbororo stressed that their men are the ones most exposed to LRA violence because they are living in the bush, buying and selling the cattle.

Mbororo and the LRA

In general, in both Obo and Mboki, CAR, the population accuses the Mbororo of colluding with, supporting, helping or even harboring the LRA. This sentiment is much higher in Obo than Mboki. This seems to be rumor-based and exacerbated by the more remote nature of the Mbororo lifestyle, i.e. camps that are outside city centers, etc.

A hunter in Mboki, CAR, for example, accused the Mbororo of being angry about being attacked and subsequently concealing information about LRA movements as a way to take vengeance on the population. He said that because of this, "we fall into their ambushes." These

kinds of tensions could potentially be reduced by better inclusion of the Mbororo in local defense groups and in community leadership.

However, it does seem likely that certain Mbororo groups have worked out "deals" of some sort with LRA groups, allowing them safe passage to execute trade and commerce in exchange for cattle or food. This does not mean that Mbororo do not still suffer attacks, which they do, but in order for them to survive, it is likely that some sort of arrangement exists, particularly for Mbororo moving between DRC and CAR via Mboki and RoSS and DRC via the Sakure area. In the rainy season, when grasses are high, LRA use the exact same paths the Mbororo use on their trade routes. This sharing of movement corridors may be reduced during the dry season when the grasses are not so high and there are other options to move from place to place.

The Mbororo and defection efforts

Both Mbororo groups in Obo and Mboki, CAR said they had actively placed defection fliers on LRA paths, but that recently they had been threatened by the LRA when caught with the fliers: "The head of the LRA told us that if they find us with these fliers again they would execute us with knives." Due to these threats, both Mbororo groups expressed great hesitation to continue placing defection fliers. "Since that incident we are scared to give the LRA the fliers, to endanger our families," said an Mbororo representative in Mboki, CAR.

In addition, an LRA group told an Mbororo individual in Mboki that:

"We don't ever want to see you with these fliers again. Tell the Americans, they see us, they know us, and they should bring us the fliers themselves. Tell the Americans that they should bring them [the fliers] themselves, not you."

However, the Mbororo are well placed to be an asset for defection processes. As the Mbororo group in Mboki, CAR, said: "We see them every day . . .we know their locations." In Obo and Mboki, CAR, they act as "runners" to

provide information on LRA movements. "Our only tool is information. We see them, they loot from us, and we go and inform others," said the Mbororo group in Mboki.

Mboki is an especially interesting location because it is a commercial hub. People from the Republic of Congo, Chad, Sudan, DRC and Niger come to buy cattle in Mboki at what is called "the park". There is trade, active circulation of money, and more development than in other parts of the region. Additionally, Mbororo from various areas travel to Mboki to buy pharmaceuticals for their cattle. However, Mbororo stressed that with LRA activity, their trade is drastically impacted and if this continues, they will all have to leave the region.

"We just want peace. Please advocate for us, we really want peace, we want to sleep in peace, we want the farmers to go to their fields, we want, as herders, to house our animals and to move freely to allow them to graze. We live only in the bush, this is our history, but now it's dangerous in the bush."

— Mbororo, Mboki, CAR

In Obo, Mbororo expressed frustration that they were not allowed to be part of the local defense group and said they wanted to be. In Mboki, the local defense collaborates openly with the Mbororo, and said the missions are always mixed between Mbororo, Zande and Arab.

Overall, the Mbororo seem to have developed resilience systems and support networks, allowing their highly mobile and transitional lifestyles to survive. Recommendations to enhance Mbororo participation in defection activities include: teaching Mbororo some basic Acholi, encouraging local defense groups to work in closer collaboration with the Mbororo, and reducing community stigma towards them.

Defection Actor’s Rapport With Zande Communities

“For us, the LRA has to be fought by soldiers – this is the only way to make them come out.”

– Hunters, Obo, CAR

There are varying Zande community sentiments towards the different military groups active in C-LRA operations. Below is a brief snapshot of the dynamics between the community and these armed groups. Overall, community members expressed immense gratitude towards the various armed groups operating in the region. A religious leader in Obo, CAR said that the security forces have made it “possible to have peace.” However the most tense relationship between the community and a C-LRA group is with MONUSCO DD/RRR in DRC.

Determining effective and mutually respectful ways for C-LRA groups to work together with Zande communities in defection efforts is critical to both increasing the numbers of defections and ensuring communities are ready to receive these defectors peacefully. The sections below are framed through the lens of both the current relationships and dynamics respondents expressed between Zande communities and each of these entities as well as how to improve those relations for enhanced collaboration around defection.

UPDF

Protectors

In CAR and the RoSS, interviewees expressed high levels of gratitude towards the UPDF for their efforts to stop the LRA, attributing their current safety and improved quality of life directly to their presence. Some respondents went so far as to say that without the UPDF, their community would have been attacked already or would have ceased to exist.

“We also think that their presence here gives us security – not only concerning the LRA but also concerning other enemies who might come to our country,” said a local leader in Obo, CAR. He went on to say, “we think the UPDF is the savior here.”



Near Mboki, CAR Border crossing between Central African Republic and Democratic Republic of Congo where fisherman say they often see the LRA.
© Lindsay Branham / DTJ

In Sakure, RoSS, a local leader also compared the UPDF to their “savior”, stating:

“We consider UPDF as Jesus. Because Jesus came to die for the world. They [UPDF] have done good work to fight for the poor people in a country not their own. If the UPDF was not here, no one would be here – this area would have been deserted.”

Slow response time

In general, communities across the surveyed region appreciate the UPDF’s presence; however, there is an undercurrent of dissatisfaction with the UPDF’s response time to LRA movements, and the UPDF’s treatment of the Mbororo.

The Mbororo group in Mboki, CAR commented on the delayed response time, saying,

“Sometimes they [LRA] come and take ten of our cattle – we send our children to inform the gendarme or UPDF, but we see no follow through. You inform, no follow through. You inform, and no follow through. We are tired of doing this. We are discouraged.”

Questionable motivation

Regarding motivation, a local leader in Obo, CAR explained that the “UPDF wants to fight in a passive way not an active way.” There is additional sentiment that the UPDF will respond immediately if there is a defection, but not if there is an attack. Multiple respondents attributed the difference in response time to the fact that the UPDF and the LRA are both of Ugandan origin; this collusion is described as natural since the UPDF and LRA are “brothers.”

Several interviewees questioned the UPDF’s motives – are the UPDF making financial gains by prolonging the capture of Kony? A member of the Central African army based in Obo, CAR said, “this money makes the officers in Uganda chase the LRA – this is like a honey for them.” He then asked, “Are you sure that the UPDF is really, really tracking the LRA?”

Harassing the Mbororo

Lastly, Mbororo in Obo and Mboki, CAR accused the UPDF of stealing their cattle, even going so far as to equate their predatory behavior to that of the LRA.

“For us, the LRA and the UPDF – there is not much of a difference. The UPDF take our cattle. The LRA take our food, our supplementary food, our shoes, and clothes. This is the difference – but all are thieves.”

— Mbororo, Mboki, CAR

Despite these accusations, a generally positive perception of the UPDF was apparent across the surveyed communities. A local leader in Obo, CAR summed up the sentiment best:

For me the UPDF must stay here until they finish with the LRA war because even when I was in the bush I noticed that the LRA is only scared of the UPDF and they don’t fear the FACA. If the UPDF was not in Obo, the LRA would have already come to Obo again.

Therefore, the continued presence of the UPDF to continue pursuing the LRA was said to be desirable by the communities surveyed.

USSF

Community members expressed similarly positive sentiments towards the USSF, including a sense of gratitude for the USSF’s commitment to bringing peace to the region and for the sense of security their presence has provided.

“We welcome the US advisors – we need competent, qualified people to bring an end to the LRA,” said a local journalist in Obo, CAR.

A religious leader in Sakure, RoSS noted, “When the US Advisors came people feel free in their minds and think Kony will be arrested.”

This perceived sense of security is powerful and must be handled appropriately. Community members do not fully understand USSF activities and objectives, and there is confusion and mystery surrounding the USSF and their activities. Increased transparency would easily fix this public relations issue and boost the community’s confidence in USSF’s mission even further. “We thank the US advisors; that’s why we are here — when we see them we are proud,” said a local leader in Sakure, RoSS.

FACA

FACA forces remain underequipped to adequately respond to LRA movements. Their current role in C-LRA operations remains ambiguous. Community members, when asked about FACA, responded with sighs and laughter. The population perceives their national armed forces as having no real ability to protect the population, much less pursue the LRA. This sense of insecurity was exacerbated by the coup d’état and the FACA’s inability to halt the Seleka takeover. A teacher in Obo, CAR said, “FACA is here but most of the time they say they have no equipment, no money to buy food.” Community members requested the UPDF to work more closely with the FACA – supplying and equipping the national army so that they could actively participate in pursuing the LRA.

Additionally, the government’s lack of support for current FACA troops in the region complicates C-LRA operations. There is very real potential that the FACA could desert SE CAR and return to Bangui where many of their families are based. A local leader in Obo, CAR said this is a feasible option for them, “because here they don’t have anything to eat.”

On a more positive note, the overwhelming majority of Central Africans do not perceive their national army as predators i.e. as harassing the local population for food and money.

FARDC

Extensive research has been conducted on the FARDC’s predatory habits and human rights abuses against the population it is in charge of protecting. The LRA-affected region is no different. Respondents in Duru accused the FARDC of being worse than the LRA – referring to the FARDC’s continuous harassment and intentional desertion of their responsibility to protect the community. Furthermore, the FARDC reportedly neither collaborates well with MONUSCO nor allows local defense groups to exist. These two realities are sources of great frustration for community members.

A formerly abducted boy in Duru, DRC summarized the general sentiment:

“Really we suffer a lot with FARDC – they treat us even like LRA – when you reach FARDC barricade they make you go fetch water and then drink it. If you go to market, they will make you pay 1,000fr to go or come – even if you just buy soap – they open everything and check and say they are looking for ammunitions. Really we suffer a lot. There is no big difference between them and LRA.”

More pressure and advocacy is needed on the Congolese government to deploy equipped, professional soldiers to the LRA-affected region that are capable of actively pursuing the LRA. Additionally, these forces must be held accountable so that they do not prey on the local population.

MONUSCO DD/RRR

There are very high levels of frustration, disillusionment, and anger towards MONUSCO, according to respondents in Duru, DRC. Community members said they think MONUSCO has no real will to pursue the LRA and accused them of colluding with or supporting the LRA, as well as willfully ignoring community members’ requests for collaboration. Community members also expressed that they feel disrespected due to MONUSCO’s blatant disregard for including them in any kind of strategic planning regarding defection.

“First, MONUSCO is doing nothing. They are just sitting in their places. When they hear the LRA has come out they go with the vehicle – but you can’t get into the bush with the vehicle – are they protecting civilians? They are doing nothing. So maybe they are just helping LRA. There is nothing they are doing.”

– Local leader, Duru, DRC.

Community leaders said they have repeatedly informed DD/RRR they are willing for Duru to become a defection point, but that no action has yet been taken. Despite this lack of follow-through, respondents said DD/RRR repeatedly returns to the community to ask the same questions regarding community attitudes towards the defection point idea. The local leader went on to say, “We don’t believe MONUSCO can put an end to this war.”

The breakdown of trust between the community and MONUSCO, and to a slightly lesser extent DD/RRR, is serious. Concerted and deliberate efforts are needed from MONUSCO and DD/RRR to re-build this trust with the community.

Despite the fact that the FARDC openly harasses and steals from the local population, respondents said that they actually prefer the FARDC to MONUSCO, because

they trust them more. “We trust that FARDC is trying to do something on defection more than MONUSCO,” said a formerly abducted boy in Duru, DRC. This clear disintegration of trust should sound a warning bell to the international community, highlighting MONUSCO’s failure to collaborate effectively with the local population. “There is no respect – we don’t feel respected by DD/RRR or MONUSCO,” said a local leader.

Furthermore, some respondents said that MONUSCO often disposes of expired food items improperly in the community, and that children who are hungry find and consume them. Respondents stressed that the community feels dehumanized, as though “they are making a mockery of us,” said a local leader in Duru.

This complete breakdown of trust creates a variety of challenges in the defection space in DRC. For example, there is now a growing unwillingness from the local community to work with MONUSCO at all regarding defection.

When asked what community members would want from MONUSCO, they replied that they would like to see them run more joint missions with FARDC. At the time of the interviews, respondents said joint missions were not underway. The population felt this would be a show of collaboration and dispel accusations that MONUSCO is helping the LRA, but above all, respondents said the community “want(s) transparency – we want them to be very clear.” Regular communication between MONUSCO and DD/RRR with the local population would ameliorate this tense situation. One local leader said, “most of the staff of DD/RRR are Congolese and they talk to us, but MONUSCO does not. DD/RRR now is like a black MONUSCO.”

Central African Republic The Lord’s Resistance Army’s current area of operations includes the dense forests of southwestern Central African Republic, northeastern Democratic Republic of Congo and Southern Sudan.
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Conclusion

“The bad winds are blowing but this will pass.”

– Local journalist, Obo, CAR

Communities throughout LRA-affected areas continue to strongly echo one desire: a lasting end to the war. “Our last message is that we want peace,” said an Mboro-ro representative in Mboki, CAR. The need for the international community to immediately respond with dynamic and creative approaches to providing assistance and support for defection efforts cannot be stressed enough. People are living in a state of constant insecurity, experiencing high levels of fear and trauma.

A formerly abducted man in Mboki, CAR, recounts his experience, saying: “They killed everything that moved.”

Community members urged that the LRA’s notorious leader Joseph Kony be captured immediately, and that all LRA come out of the bush. “Since Kony is the source of this movement bringing fear into our hearts, what shall we do?” asked a local leader in Sakure, RoSS. “Now Kony is not just a threat to Uganda but to all of Africa,” said a formerly abducted man in Mboki, CAR.

Communities are exhausted from being obliged to live in perpetual insecurity.

“We have used all the means to bring peace — we go to church to pray, we’ve fasted, etc., but peace did not return. We were told that it’s important to form a local defense group, we did it, and that didn’t work. The UPDF came to chase the LRA far from the town, and it didn’t work. The FACA came and that also didn’t work.”

– Formerly abducted men, Mboki, CAR

A local leader in Sakure, RoSS framed it this way: “The only thing is the man called Kony — if he is going to be arrested that means peace can come. And the war of Kony can end.” He went on to explain how the community would respond if this happened: “The man Kony, the man Kony. This man — if we hear he is arrested we will jump, shout, laugh — our happiness — we don’t know how it will end.”

As defection messages are disseminated throughout the LRA-affected area via local FM radio, fliers and helicopter speakers, ensuring communities are prepared and ready to receive defectors is paramount. Additionally, the LRA continues to



Mboki, CAR The children of the mayor of Mboki who explained her perspective on defection: “There are LRA who leave their group in the bush to surrender. They come, they drop their weapons and surrender. We don’t want them [the LRA] to stay in the bush and to continue living in the bush like animals.”

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make contact with local communities – capitalizing and building on this expressed desire to leave the LRA through establishing clear defection protocols in communities and equipping them to seize that opportunity to draw the combatant out of the bush is absolutely essential. Too many defection opportunities have been unrealized due to a breakdown in communication after the LRA makes initial contact. Every opportunity missed extends this conflict.

Pursuing community-level defection strategies remains a vastly underexplored and yet necessary component to drawing current LRA combatants out of the bush. The less active combatants there are, the higher the likelihood of splintering, draining, and reducing the LRA's strength. Community members living in the current LRA-affected region are the linchpins for the success of defection efforts.

Defection initiatives will be more effective with full community participation: local populations have the capability to actually encourage LRA combatants and abductees to defect. Therefore, actively soliciting, including and working with the Zande populace as partners in defection efforts should be a high priority among all actors working on defection activities in order to pursue an end to Africa's longest running war.

Obo, CAR Marlene, an 18 year-old girl who spent several years with the LRA, most of that time with Kony himself, describes the stigma she experiences and her response. "One day after I came back from the bush I was playing soccer and this girl said, 'you are from the bush,' and I was angry but I realized maybe this girl doesn't understand because she hadn't gone to the bush herself so I just forgave her."

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Recommendations to the International Community

To Come Home message actors

Saturation of defection messaging | Local FM Radios, Uganda Broadcasting Corporation (UBC), Fliers, and Helicopter Speakers

- Integrate descriptions of the rewards for justice program.
- Diversify the sources of defection messaging, for example by drawing on sources other than the African Union (AU) (for example local Zande communities) so the LRA feels they are being inundated with messaging from multiple avenues, thus increasing the credibility of the message.
- Include instructions on how to surrender so defectors can be received peacefully: waving a palm branch, holding their gun above their head or behind their back, etc.
- Include western Sudan as a target geographical area in all defection messaging.

Local FM Radio

- Create an episodic radio series illustrating the daily life of defectors to demonstrate that they are still alive and that their lives are improving over time. This could be produced in Uganda as well as through local FM Radio stations.
- Increase frequency of FM Come Home Messaging throughout the current LRA-affected region.

Helicopter Speakers

- Create messaging with specific cardinal directions to SRS locations to prevent defectors from getting lost.
- Record the mayor in Mboki/Obo and community leaders in other SRS sites in defection messaging as a sign of goodwill from the SRS community itself.
- Add Foulbe (the language of the Mbororo) and Arabic to defection message languages in CAR and DRC.
- Increase frequency of helicopter speaker missions.

Community sensitization

- Develop innovative sensitization tools and work with local partners and Community Defection Committees (CDCs) to encourage community members to peacefully receive LRA defectors by reinforcing existing positive sentiments, preventing reprisal violence and preparing communities for future defections.

- Equip communities with clear guidelines on how to recognize defectors: waving a palm branch, holding their gun above their head or behind their back, etc.
- Ensure defection protocol, as determined in each community, is clear in all SRS locations to facilitate peaceful reception and handover of all defectors.

To Donors

- Establish Community Defection Committees (CDCs) via local partners in each Safe Reporting Site to facilitate information exchange, enhance the transparency of the defection process, and educate the community on the importance of accepting defectors.
- Provide training to local health professionals on trauma symptom recognition and relaxation techniques to equip them to provide basic trauma first aid and reduce psychological distress.
- Fund a regional reintegration strategy that takes into account the severe psychosocial needs of former abductees and includes both children and adults.

To UPDF troops and US military advisors in eastern CAR and South Sudan

- Maintain constant and continued military pressure to keep the LRA moving and to sap their strength.
- Homogenize defection methods and strategies across the LRA-affected region.
- Follow-up to ensure that the UPDF and the USSF are transparent with the Mbororo and hunters regarding the potential risks of distributing fliers (i.e. retaliation by the LRA).
- Increase the frequency of helicopter speaker missions and maintain the upgraded levels.
- Increase UPDF’s logistics support to react to information on LRA movements faster (they currently face the challenge of mobility) and potentially provide them with alternative food support to allow for more mobility.
- Provide or facilitate training to the UPDF on human rights and specifically on how to engage children in combat, which could improve the safety and protection of child combatants.
- Ensure all Safe Reporting Site locations have a military presence to facilitate defection and community protection and work in coordination with CDCs.

Community Sensitization

- Remove any public displays of Joseph Kony and LRA commanders in town centers and show community leaders images of LRA commanders during community meetings only – there are cases of these images re-traumatizing victims when placed in public.
- Conduct regular community meetings in order to increase information flow between the community and the security forces, and dispel the notion that the latter are inactive.
- Communicate the coverage of “safe zones” to encourage the population to extend their cultivation perimeter. For example, farmers in Obo can now push out to 10-15km from the center of town.
- Seek to improve relations between the UPDF and the Mbororo, including addressing the UPDF’s reported theft of Mbororo cattle and UPDF accusations regarding Mbororo collaboration with the LRA.

To MONUSCO DD/RRR and peacekeepers

- Increase the transparency of MONUSCO/DDR in order to de-mystify their activities and reduce community frustration, for example by holding more regular meetings and community forums.
- Collaborate more openly with the local population, including brainstorming defection messaging ideas and concepts together.
- Cease disposing of any expired food items in the community.
- Resume joint patrols and missions with the FARDC in order to re-build the confidence of the local population in their efforts.
- Explore alternative defection processes, including reception by the FARDC instead of MONUSCO, since the population is convinced that MONUSCO will re-arm defectors.

Appendix A

Partie Cinq: Événements de trauma

Des Événements de Trauma (12 Questions)

Ci-dessous se trouve une liste de questions posées aux gens après qu’ils aient vécu des expériences difficiles par rapport à le LRA. Après que j’ai lu une question, il faut me dire si le problème vous arrive.

Kusende ene anagbia asanahefuguhabolo nga aguyo na gbia nyanyakiapay be vula nga ga LRA.Tifo gida gi asanahe le tinahida mugumba a guapai na gbialo.

	Événement	Oui (√) au Non (X)
1	Vous êtes enlevé par le LRA soi-même? A LRA dila kunvonyo mgaueme?	
2	Est-ce-que un membre de votre famille a été enlève? Yada agumeloni ngaume?	
3	Est-ce-que le LRA a tué un membre de votre famille? A LRA digumelo ngabaume?	
4	Est-ce-que vous avez vu la mort d’un membre de votre famille par le LRA? Yamiweha oniabingo gumelonisa a LRA ki imini?	
5	Est-ce-que le LRA a torturé un membre de votre famille? Yamiweha a LRA amangingo gumelonisa gbegbele kuti bangiloni?	
6	Est-ce-que le LRA vous a blessé? Yamiweha a LRA ahogongaloni?	
7	Est-ce-que vous êtes déplacé(e) après une attaque d’LRA? Nyamu onia onlonga be vula nga ga LRA?	
8	Est-ce-que les biens de votre famille ont êtes pillés par le LRA? Yami a LRA agbunga ga gumeloni a he?	
9	Est-ce-que votre maison a été brûlée par le LRA? Yami a LRA azonga goni bambu?	
10	Est-ce-que vous avez peur d’une attaque de LRA dans l’avenir? Yami gunde belewe kpotoloni yo be vula nga ga LRA?	
11	Est-ce-que vous avez reçu le gris-gris par le LRA? Yami we a LRA agbanga loni na gahi nguha?	
12	Est-ce-que vous avez vu un massacre d’LRA? Yami oniha bingo imahabolo nga ga LRA?	
13	Est-ce-que vous avez survi la violence sexuelle d’LRA? Yami a LRA alanga namo nbga umehe?	
14	Est-ce-que vous avez la grossesse d’LRA? Yami mugbia vuse nga ga LRA?	

Photography Captions

COVER	Local fisherman say this exact pathway is frequently used by the LRA to traverse into DRC after raiding civilians in neighboring CAR to avoid the pursuit of the UPDF which is currently not allowed to operate in DRC. Near Mboki, Central African Republic.
PAGE 7	Communities continue to ask for one thing: peace. Mboki, Central African Republic.
PAGE 21	Duru, DRC Research revealed alarmingly high levels of trauma, depression and even suicidal ideation among Zande survivors of LRA violence. There were a few cases where respondents mentioned that their quality of life was so bad upon return that they actually wanted to re-join the LRA.
PAGE 22	A 16-year-old girl who was formerly abducted by the LRA said, “it is very difficult because if you try to escape and they catch you, you will be killed.” She said she saw defection fliers and knew they were promising safety. This flier, she said, gave her the courage to risk her life and escape. Obo, Central African Republic.
PAGE 26	Henrietta, a 13-year-old girl formerly abducted by the LRA, recounted her abduction: “In 2010, at 4:00 AM in the morning, while we were sleeping, people arrived with flashlights and abducted my family.” She said, “amongst the LRA, there are those who innocent and those who are not, but they should all surrender and not be killed.” Mboki, Central African Republic.
PAGE 28	A womens’ association explained their perspective on defection: “Even if they come out one by one, it’s not enough. We want Kony to come out so that there is a mass defection. We are ready to even accept Kony in our community if it’s going to help the others come out.” Mboki, Central African Republic.
PAGE 35	A defection flier that communicates through graphic illustrations and multiple local languages that if the LRA surrenders they will be peacefully received. These fliers are dropped from the air over areas of known LRA movement, and have proven to influence combatants to choose to surrender. Found near Mboki, Central African Republic.
PAGE 36	If LRA combatants do escape, how they are received in local communities will determine the overall success of defection efforts. Mboki, Central African Republic.
PAGE 39	Thousands of families like this are currently awaiting the return of their children who were abducted by the LRA years prior. Current defection strategies to bring these children home need community-based complements to ensure peaceful reception of those who surrender. Obo, Central African Republic.

PAGE 40	Lucia, a 16-year-old girl, describes peace in the local language, Zande. “Zereda (peace) is when you are being comfortable and nothing can disturb your mind -- that is the thing we call peace.” Sakure, South Sudan.
PAGE 42	A leader of the local defense group, comprised primarily of civilian hunters and fisherman who have dedicated themselves to protecting their community. Their activities include monitoring LRA movements nearby, relaying information to security actors and bringing a sense of security to the local population. In the past this particular group has made direct contact with the LRA in violent and non-violent clashes. Mboki, Central African Republic.
PAGE 45	A young girl takes care of her younger sister. Access to education is severely limited in southwestern CAR, exacerbated by ongoing insecurity perpetuated by LRA violence. Mboki, Central African Republic.
PAGE 49	Border crossing between Central African Republic and Democratic Republic of Congo where fisherman say they often see the LRA. Near Mboki, Central African Republic.
PAGE 52	The Lord’s Resistance Army’s current area of operations includes the dense forests of southwestern Central African Republic, northeastern Democratic Republic of Congo and Southern Sudan. Over Central African Republic.
PAGE 55	The children of the mayor of Mboki who explained her perspective on defection: “There are LRA who leave their group in the bush to surrender. They come, they drop their weapons and surrender. We don’t want them [the LRA] to stay in the bush and to continue living in the bush like animals.” Mboki, Central African Republic.
PAGE 56	Marlene, an 18 year-old girl who spent several years with the LRA, most of that time with Kony himself, describes the stigma she experiences and her response. “One day after I came back from the bush I was playing soccer and this girl said, ‘you are from the bush,’ and I was angry but I realized maybe this girl doesn’t understand because she hadn’t gone to the bush herself so I just forgave her.” Obo, Central African Republic.