



ANNUAL REPORT

GRASSROOTS RECONCILIATION GROUP

20
19



2019 IN BRIEF

PROBLEMS

CHILD SOLDIERS

1 in 3 boys and 1 in 6 girls were **abducted by rebels** during the war in northern Uganda.

WAR TRAUMA

Northern Uganda had the **highest rate of post-traumatic stress and depression ever recorded** globally in post-war populations, according to a London medical study.

IMPACT

- **CREATING ENTREPRENEURS: 153 SMALL BUSINESSES.**

Over 57% of our former child soldiers and refugees **started or expanded small businesses** through our entrepreneurship training. Participants **increased their incomes by 48%**, helping them to feed their families.

- **ENABLING OVER 500 CHILDREN TO ATTEND SCHOOL CONTINUOUSLY FOR THE FIRST TIME.**

- **HEALING TRAUMA, REDUCING VIOLENCE.**

65% of our refugee participants reported experiencing **fewer trauma-related issues, including violence**, following our **counseling and community theater projects**.

- **EMPOWERING WOMEN.**

Our **land mediation projects** enabled refugee women to understand their equal rights. As a result, **74% of women participants were able to access land for farming**, increased from a previous 50%.

RECOGNITION

UNITED NATIONS INTERCULTURAL INNOVATION AWARD

GRG won **2nd place** out of **1,200 applicants** from **128 countries**.

U.S. EMBASSY AWARD

Ambassador's Special Self-Help Program Award to support an innovative livelihood project **for women survivors of war**.

GRG'S BUDGET: \$46,840

This year, GRG directly reached

2,623

refugees, former child soldiers & their host community members.

**1,573 women
& 1,050 men**

OUR BACKGROUND

Grassroots Reconciliation Group (GRG) has been focusing on reconciliation, peaceful coexistence, and economic recovery of former child soldiers, refugees, and war-affected communities in northern Uganda since 2007.

A U.S.- and Uganda-registered NGO, GRG was initially part of a USAID-funded program, the Northern Uganda Peace Initiative (NUPI). When that program ended in 2006, there was still a strong need to address the reintegration of former Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) combatants in the war-affected communities of northern Uganda.

Sasha Lezhnev and Kasper Agger then founded GRG with the aim of implementing adaptive and innovative projects in the most remote, war-torn and hard to reach districts of northern Uganda (Nwoya, Gulu, Amuru and Lamwo).

OUR MISSION

To support war-affected communities, refugees, combatants, and former child soldiers in northern Uganda to help heal their war trauma, rebuild their lives, and reconcile through holistic, culturally appropriate, and locally designed projects

OUR APPROACH

GRG's philosophy is to work with groups that are made up of half former combatants or refugees and half community members. By encouraging war victims and perpetrators to work hand-in-hand for the sake of shared goals, our activities rebuild relationships and trust within the war-torn communities.

GRG uses a bottom-up approach by encouraging the two groups to work together to design culturally-appropriate projects and take the lead on its sustainability, as GRG facilitates the implementation. Today, GRG is an almost entirely Ugandan-run organization which, this year, reached 2,623 refugees and their host communities.

OUR DONORS

We are very grateful to our generous 2019 supporters, including:

- **The Robert Bosch Stiftung**
- **The United Nations Alliance of Civilizations**
- **The Sentry**
- **The U.S. Embassy in Uganda**
- **The Private Sector Foundation Uganda - Skills Development Facility**
- **Soheil Nasseri**

And a number of generous individual donors.

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AWARDS AND RECOGNITION

1

UNITED NATIONS INTERCULTURAL INNOVATION AWARD

We were very honoured to be awarded by the UN Alliance of Civilizations (UNAOC) and BMW-Group 2nd place in the world for the Intercultural Innovation Award (IIA) out of 1,200 applicants from 128 countries.

The award supports grass-roots initiatives that promote intercultural dialogue and understanding, thereby contributing to peace, cultural diversity and more inclusive societies.



UNAOC
United Nations Alliance of Civilizations

**BMW
GROUP**



GRG WILL RECEIVE ONE YEAR OF CAPACITY-BUILDING AND MENTORSHIP SUPPORT FROM UNAOC-BMW TO AID OUR WORK FOR FORMER CHILD SOLDIERS.

AWARDS AND RECOGNITION

2



U.S. AMBASSADOR'S AWARD TO SUPPORT WOMEN SURVIVORS OF WAR

GRG received an award from the U.S. Embassy in Uganda to support an innovative livelihood project for women survivors of war in Lamwo District, Northern Uganda. The support will come through the U.S. Ambassador's Special Self- Help Program.

The project is aimed at strengthening the economic resilience and improving household income of women survivors of war in remote areas of Northern Uganda. The target beneficiaries were chosen by GRG because they face limited access to land and have very few sustainable livelihood opportunities.



The focus of the project will be on beekeeping, since this has been one of the most successful of GRG's livelihoods programs in Northern Uganda to date.

By providing hands-on skills training in beekeeping and equipment to produce high quality honey, and with a focus on value addition and marketing, our beneficiaries will be able to compete favorably in local and regional markets for honey.

Using a Training of Trainers (TOT) approach, beekeeping experts will also provide training and mentorship to local community members that do not participate directly, thereby further expanding the reach of the project. The project will directly and immediately impact conflict-affected and vulnerable women in Lamwo District by boosting their income and overall resilience.

JAMES' JOURNEY TO HOPE



James, one of our group leaders, was born in rebel captivity. Before escaping at age 7, he witnessed mass killings and was forced to mutilate human bodies.

When he returned home, James was bullied by other children who called him a “rebel child.” He dropped out of school, his mother died, and his uncle isolated and disowned him.

We met James two years ago, in 2017. During a trauma counseling session, James broke down in tears and explained how he felt rejected by the world for having been born in rebel captivity, a choice he did not make.

"I NO LONGER LIVE WITH THE ANGER. I FIND JOY IN THIS GROUP AND I AM SEEN AS A PERSON OF VALUE BECAUSE MY GROUP MEMBERS ELECTED ME TO BECOME THE COMMUNITY MOBILIZER."

Now 27, James is a proud GRG Community Mobilizer.

KASARA'S BUSINESS CREATION

Kasara lives in Palabek Refugee Settlement with her family and is a member of one of GRG's VSLA refugee livelihoods groups, *Gen Ki Cwinyi*.

Kasara received training in business development and entrepreneurship from GRG's business mentors, which offer support in terms of new business ideas and Saving With A Purpose (SWAP).



"MY PERSONAL SAVINGS WERE NOT ENOUGH, BUT WITH THE SEED MONEY PROVIDED BY GRG I WAS ABLE TO START UP A BUSINESS."

Borrowing from VSLA seed money and equipped with her new business skills, Kasara was able to build a successful retail business from her own home. At its set-up, the business was worth 200,000/-UGX and Kasara is optimistic about its future expansion.

Through the support from GRG, alongside Kasara's determination to succeed, she is now able to supplement the food assistance she receives to provide a more resilient and independent future for her family.

REFUGEE SITUATION & GRG'S RESPONSE



As of February 2020
54,000 REFUGEES

were staying in Palabek
Refugee Settlement.

With an expected

**200-300 REFUGEES
ARRIVING EACH WEEK.**



Conflicts continue to arise in such areas, where refugee populations from diverse ethnic backgrounds are settling with Ugandan host communities. These communities are themselves still recovering from trauma after two decades of conflict in Northern Uganda.

By working with local leaders and community members from the refugee and host communities, GRG began to identify key issues affecting the steadily rising refugee population in northern Uganda. In time, it became clear that the war-affected refugees suffered from many of the same challenges (in capacity building and livelihoods) and psychological effects as the LRA combatants and wider community.

GRG recognised that the refugee context within Northern Uganda was one in which its existing reconciliation and reintegration projects could be replicated.

These project activities consist of:



Peace dialogues
& mediation



Training in
conflict resolution



Awareness
& sensitization



Community
theatre



Counselling
sessions



Livelihoods
(VSLA)

PEACEBUILDING & TRAUMA SUPPORT TO REFUGEES

PEACE DIALOGUES & MEDIATION

This activity provides a forum to enable potential conflicts within the communities to be identified. With GRG's moderation and technical support, participants can design their own solutions to community issues and spearhead their own development. In 2019, GRG reached almost 2,000 direct beneficiaries through our conflict resolution work.



1,929 DIRECT PARTICIPANTS REACHED, FOCUSING ON CONFLICT RESOLUTION.

SUCCESS STORIES

Following a family mediation with one of the refugee families, a survivor of sexual violence testified that her husband has greatly changed since the mediation dialogues. They no longer have regular fights in their house and are now able to have dialogue about their issues.



"I AM SO HAPPY THAT MY HUSBAND'S LEVEL OF DRINKING IS GRADUALLY REDUCING SINCE THE LAST TIME WE TALKED ABOUT OUR FAMILY ISSUES WITH GRG. HE DOES NOT SELL OUR FOOD ITEMS IN EXCHANGE FOR ALCOHOL LIKE HE USED TO AND HE DOES NOT BEAT ME ANYMORE."

In Palabek, a couple were struggling from separation due to conflict, neglect of children and food insecurity. The father had left home due to feelings of guilt and shame that he could not provide for his family. After several successful family mediation sessions, both couples were able to improve their relationships. In fact, after the sessions the father moved back into the family home.

PEACEBUILDING & TRAUMA SUPPORT TO REFUGEES

TRAINING IN CONFLICT RESOLUTION

Conflict resolution training provided by GRG offers basic conflict resolution skills-development to participants that become Peace Ambassadors. The training addresses the principles and effective mechanisms of peace-building and enables participants to discuss

the differences between conflicts and disputes as well as the causes, results and transformations of conflict. The trained Peace Ambassadors continue to operate and train members of their own community, using the training provided by GRG.



**100 PEACE
AMBASSADORS
TRAINED DURING
A THREE DAY
SESSION**

AWARENESS RAISING & SENSITIZATION

In April 2019, GRG worked with other protection partners in the refugee settlement to deliver an awareness and sensitization

session that focused on alcohol abuse and SGBV. The topic of sensitization on sexual offences was particularly highlighted. The session successfully reached 160 refugees and their host communities.



**160 REFUGEES
REACHED FOR
AWARENESS
CREATION ON
SGBV.**

COMMUNITY THEATER PERFORMANCES

Community theatre is a powerful tool that GRG has successfully used for many years within former-LRA communities. Its replication into refugee communities has produced similar successes. The

performances enable participants to understand situations and events from alternative perspectives, and provides an outlet and space for voices that are otherwise silenced. Four performance shows took place during 2019.

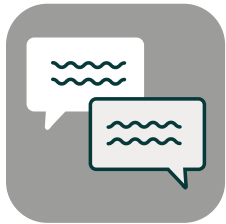


**460 DIRECT
PARTICIPANTS
PERFORMED ON
SGBV, ETHNIC
TENSIONS,
PEACEFUL
COEXISTENCE AND
ALCOHOL ABUSE.**

PEACEBUILDING & TRAUMA SUPPORT TO REFUGEES

COUNSELLING SESSIONS

GRG organized counselling sessions consisting of either individual, group or family counselling. These take the shape of explaining trauma, in terms of the immediate and long-term effects on the body, and providing coping mechanisms. The group sessions provide



an opportunity for participants to relate to one another and identify issues that are experienced by more people than just themselves. The sessions typically focus on topics such as alcoholism, SGBV, land conflict and ethnic tensions.

THIS YEAR, 201 PARTICIPANTS WERE REACHED THROUGH INDIVIDUAL, GROUP AND FAMILY COUNSELLING SESSIONS.



SUCCESS STORIES

One client who received individual counselling from GRG reported high levels of alcoholism at initiation of the sessions. Over time, the client reported that she had stopped drinking and has now set clear goals for her family. She aims to start a small-scale vegetable production business.

After family counselling, one couple reported great improvement in parental care and resource management within the family, such as finances and food. They reported that domestic violence used to be 'routine' as both would dishonestly sell food items to acquire money for drinking which subsequently led to violence. After GRG's family mediation sessions, however, they experienced a reduction in the once routine domestic violence within their home.

PEACEBUILDING & TRAUMA SUPPORT TO REFUGEES

LIVELIHOODS (VSLA)

2019 has seen an overwhelming demand for Village Savings and Loan Association (VSLA) activities among refugees in the Palabek settlement.



VSLA provides members with group materials such as lockable savings boxes & record books. The groups learn how to lend, borrow, and repay money, as well as to how to keep the accounts. It provides members with a safe and convenient place to save money.

**THIS YEAR, 90
REFUGEES FROM
GRG'S THREE
LIVELIHOODS
GROUPS WERE
SUPPORTED
THROUGH VSLA.**

Due to limited opportunities for livelihoods, and the need to supplement on settlement handouts, GRG is supporting three groups within the refugee settlements, each comprising 30 members. Training has been provided in Group Dynamics, VSLA Operation and Entrepreneurship.



Our refugee groups have witnessed both the direct and indirect contributions VSLA has made to the lives of their host communities, not only by increasing their income levels but also in supporting war survivors to build trust. Thus, VSLA remains a bonding activity, particularly between the different communities of war survivors.

However, weekly savings have remained a challenge given the harsh living conditions in the settlement. There are limited resources, such as insufficient farming land and lack of capital for starting businesses. Due to this, members have struggled to engage in income-generating activities.

In response to this, GRG distributed a cash grant of 700,000/-UGX to each group. This support was met with great appreciation and members expressed their eagerness to improve their businesses and engage in different ventures. To their success, the groups managed to save 15,500,00/-UGX over one year.

FORMER LRA-COMBATANT SITUATION & GRG'S RESPONSE

HISTORY OF GRG'S PROJECT

GRG's work with former Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) combatants, child soldiers, and their host communities, provides a forum to exchange and hear one another's voices, ultimately reestablishing a sense of community and trust, combined with livelihood projects.

GRG's first cycle of groups on the project resulted in 95 percent of participants reporting improved relationships between the former LRA-combatants and community members, as well as 91 percent reporting improved relationships with the broader community.

GRG works with a number of former LRA-combatant groups to facilitate a range of livelihood projects.



VSLA

150 participants were reached through GRG's microfinance project, under the SGBV project.



BEEKEEPING

175 participants from five groups were reached in Palabek Gem with GRG's apiary project.



ANIMAL HUSBANDRY

175 goats were distributed to five new former LRA-combatant groups & their host communities.

LIVELIHOODS SUPPORT TO FORMER LRA-COMBATANTS

VILLAGE SAVINGS GROUPS

This year GRG has continued to provide close field monitoring to former child soldier groups within the host communities. Particularly the five groups under the Welfare Fund (*Lubanga Layab, Nyeko Pelonyi, Dii Cwinyi, Ket Can Itic and Opota Matugu*). Our staff were able to document a significant saving and fantastic use of the funds.



Over the course of a year, the direct participants of the SGBV project managed to save a total of

32,850,100/-UGX



6,352,000/-UGX

was raised through constant borrowing and interest on the 5,000,000/- cash grant, given by GRG as a revolving loan to provide a steady income for borrowing.

All participants were elated at their achievements, using the money to meet their needs, such as paying school fees, setting up or expanding businesses and boosting agricultural activities by purchasing animals.



Additionally, most met their SWAP savings targets, which GRG introduced at the beginning of their savings cycle, and many groups have already opened another cycle with the hope that their savings will continue to increase.

LIVELIHOODS SUPPORT TO FORMER LRA-COMBATANTS

BEEKEEPING

In September of this year, GRG was fortunate enough to secure the U.S. Embassy's Self-Help Grant to enable the continuation of its Livelihoods project, which focuses on beekeeping.



The project started because of its importance in boosting and diversifying incomes. 175 beneficiaries across 5 groups were mobilised, and sites were identified in five parishes of Palabek Gem, Lamwo district.



100

Traditional beehives

25

Kenyan top bar hives

++

Bee suits & smokers

were provided by GRG for a project that is now supporting **175 beneficiaries**.

"I DECIDED TO BUY MORE HIVES SO THAT I CAN CARRY OUT THE PROJECT ON A LARGER SCALE, SINCE THE DEMAND FOR HONEY HAS BECOME GREAT, ESPECIALLY WITH THE ARRIVAL OF REFUGEES FROM SOUTH SUDAN."

One of our 2018 beekeepers

GRG's aim is to support the economic empowerment and reconciliation of marginalized communities by providing a combination of resilient equipment and effective training that encourages co-operative and sustainable hive management.

While monitoring previous projects this year, GRG reported that some groups, like Paco Ber, have already harvested around **100KG** of honey and are now packaging and selling.



LIVELIHOODS SUPPORT TO FORMER LRA-COMBATANTS

ANIMAL HUSBANDRY

During the conflict that affected northern Uganda, farmers were unable to successfully herd animals or destroyed. As these threats diminish, animals can once again provide war-affected communities with healthy profits and the chance to participate and spearhead the planning of their own sustainable futures.



northern Uganda, farmers were for fear of them being stolen. As these threats diminish, animals can once again provide war-affected communities with healthy profits and the chance to participate and spearhead the planning of their own sustainable futures.

GRG recognizes the potential of animals that are treated effectively. Thus, this year, GRG has continued to provide Animal Treatment Training to five new groups.

175 GOATS DISTRIBUTED.
30 OF WHICH WERE NANNY GOATS.
99% TREATED SUCCESSFULLY.

By March, GRG received great news that there were

**NO REPORTED CASES OF DEATH OR SICKNESS
AND MANY OF THE NANNY GOATS HAD DELIVERED OFFSPRING.**



THIS HIGHLIGHTS THE IMPORTANCE AND VALUE OF ANIMAL TREATMENT TRAINING AND FOSTERS HOPE THAT THE ANIMALS WILL CONTINUE TO PROVIDE A SOURCE OF INCOME AND SECURITY FOR THE FIVE COMMUNITIES.



WORLD REFUGEE DAY

In June, GRG's *Women Help* group participated in World Refugee Day celebrations by performing a cultural dance themed 'Peaceful Co-Existence'. The performance involved members of seven different tribes living within one community.

The dance portrayed the conflict management and social cohesion reached between the different tribal members, as a result of GRG's Village Savings Groups.

SGBV ACTIVISM

Including 16 Days of Activism against SGBV and a Focus Group Discussion assessment organized by UNHCR in order to apprehend the general conditions of the refugees.

ACHOLI CULTURAL FEST

Additionally, GRG participated in the 3rd Acholi Cultural Festival (ACF), which took place in Kitgum District. During the celebration, an Acholi group from Palabek Refugee Settlement performed a cultural (Royal) dance. The Acholi Cultural Institution treasures this event, which was under the theme, "My Heritage, My Strength," as it enhances peaceful co-existence.

"THE REGION HAS UNDERGONE TURBULENT TIMES, THEREFORE, WITH PREVAILING PEACE, THE ACHOLI PEOPLE NEED TO UNITE USING THEIR TRADITION TO STAY TOGETHER."

Oryem Okello, External Affairs Minister and Chua East member of Parliament

This year, GRG participated in World Food Day celebrations which took place at Lokung Sub-County, Lamwo District. World Food Day is celebrated annually in Uganda to promote worldwide awareness and action for those who suffer from hunger, and to advocate for universal food security and nutrition.



Africa
68.6%

East Africa
31.4%

This is particularly important, as East Africa accounts for over 30 percent of those who suffer from hunger in Africa.

Almost 25% of East Africa's population goes hungry every day.



WORLD FOOD DAY 2019

Moreover, according to the 2017 UNHCR Food Security and Nutrition Assessment, Palabek Refugee Settlement had the highest prevalence of acute malnutrition within the West Nile Settlements in Northern Uganda, at 12.3%.

GRG RECOGNISES THIS NEED TO ADDRESS FOOD SECURITY WITH MORE EFFICIENT AND SUSTAINABLE APPROACHES.

Throughout the year, GRG has continued to construct solar dryers and facilitate training in both Padibe West and Ngomoromo.

One host community group from Ngomo Oromo, *Peko Rom*, presented their solar dried products during World Food Day celebrations. Their project captured the attention of many due to its unique nature and its ability to efficiently improve the quality of the product. *Peko Rom* were awarded with four watering cans, four farming gumboots and two pairs of hand hoes at the end of the celebration.



GRG WELCOMED TWO NEW BOARD MEMBERS IN 2019, MICHAEL “MICK” MULROY AND ERIC “OLLY” OEHLERICH.

“As two former US-government employees, we had the opportunity to serve globally while attempting to help end conflicts we were involved in. Over the course of a couple decades, following exposure to multiple conflicts we’ve acquired a deep appreciation for those caught in the middle of violence regardless of their personal views or stance. They were simply swept up in events much larger than them, yet those individuals end up paying the price, in certain instances those paying are children. It’s deplorable.

Mick and I decided to use our experiences and talents to help end the use of child soldiers globally. It is a lofty goal, but we’re used to tackling high hurdles. Being steeped in Joseph Kony’s Lord’s Resistance

Army we decided that the Grassroots Reconciliation Group (GRG) was a natural fit. We are 100% dedicated to helping end the use of child soldiers, GRG is 100% dedicated to helping those children exploited by Joseph Kony during the insurgent war in Uganda.



**Mick and Olly in Rwot Obilo village,
northern Uganda, in 2015.**

As two board members for this phenomenal non-profit organization, we are nested within the team effort to help integrate former child soldiers of the Lord’s Resistance Army.”

ACTIVITIES SINCE BECOMING BOARD MEMBERS:

- 4 x Lakalawtwe screenings.
- 5 x publications to include Foreign Policy and the Middle East Institute think tank.
- Have filmed, but not released, for an ABC nightline special on the story of Anthony Opoka.
- Working with a well-respected book author to write the story of two LRA child soldiers.

Details	Amount Spent (USD)
Livelihoods	\$13,547.67
Community Microfinance	\$4,533.61
Trauma Support & Counselling	\$4,865.64
Peacebuilding	\$18,767.20
Administration	\$5,126.30
TOTAL	\$46,840.42



www.grassrootsgroup.org / info@grassrootsgroup.org

In U.S.:
2914 Linden Lane
Falls Church, VA 22042

In Uganda:
Plot 43 Mama Cave Road
Pece, Gulu