

**A Report on
Displaced Children and Orphans Fund
Programs in Gulu and Kitgum**

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By Catherine Savino

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I. Introduction

Cathy Savino of USAID's Displaced Children and Orphans Fund (DCOF), Randolph Harris of USAID/Kampala's Special Objective for the Reintegration of Northern Uganda and Ann Fleuret, USAID/Kampala's Monitoring and Evaluation Specialist traveled to Kitgum and Gulu from September 27 to 30, 2000 to visit four grantees receiving DCOF funds: Save the Children/Denmark and its sub-grantee, Gulu Support for Children Organizations (GUSCO) in Gulu, Associazione Volontari per il Servizio Internazionale (AVSI) and its sub-grantee, International Rescue Committee (IRC) in Kitgum.

II. Background

The DCOF began in 1989 as a Congressional earmark within USAID's Office of Health and Nutrition to address the needs of especially vulnerable groups of children. The Fund receives approximately \$13 million per year. Currently operating in 14 countries, the Fund works through NGOs to assist children in three main categories, children affected by conflict, children orphaned by HIV-AIDS and children living or working on the street.

First Lady Hillary Clinton visited Uganda in 1998 and learned about the conditions of children in the North. A rebel movement called the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) has for the last 14 years carried out attacks on the civilian population in the North, primarily in Gulu and Kitgum districts. These attacks included the abduction of at least 10,000 children who have been forced to fight with the rebels or become unwilling sexual partners of commanders. Mrs. Clinton pledged to support these children and their families. USAID/Kampala invited DCOF to conduct an assessment and a team (John Williamson and Cathy Savino) visited in July 1998. The assessment affirmed that there was an urgent need to address the psychosocial health of children, their families and communities by providing assistance that helped children return to their families as soon as possible once they were released or more likely escaped from the LRA. All agreed that the needs of these children and those affected by the conflict had to be community driven, holistic and culturally appropriate.

That visit resulted in the award of two grants, to Save the Children/Denmark for \$1,352,155 (from April 99 to April 01) for work in Gulu and to AVSI for \$1,467,919 (for the period covering August 99 to August 01) for work in Kitgum. The AVSI grant also included a large sub-grant to IRC. The Save/Denmark grant includes a large sub-grant to GUSCO and smaller grants to other local NGOs. Both grantees were working in the given areas, had connections to local groups and demonstrated success in implementing programs. Because of the insecurity at the time, the team was allowed only a short visit to Gulu and no travel to Kitgum was permitted at that time.

III. Scope of Work

In September 2000, USAID/Kampala and DCOF agreed to revisit the programs, assess the situation and plan for the future. The scope of work included looking at existing activities and their results, exploring possible links with other groups, discussing the impact of HIV/AIDS, and examining future needs. Because both grantees were planning internal evaluations, no additional team members were included pending the results of those reports. (Save/Denmark's mid term review was already in progress and the team met with its members to discuss relevant issues. AVSI's mid term review is planned for November but details are not confirmed.)

While the team was in Kitgum, it was announced in the national newspaper that (further) progress had been made towards implementation of the Sudan-Uganda Accord signed in Nairobi in December 1999, brokered by the Carter Center. Two weeks before the visit, an international conference in Winnipeg highlighted the concerns of war-affected children in Northern Uganda and called for renewed efforts to end the conflict. The Carter Center also has been involved with brokering peace. All these considerations plus the team's anecdotal information about mortality associated with HIV-AIDS make it seem that the future of Northern Uganda will be different than the past, requiring different, more development-oriented approaches. Given USAID's revised and unified strategy, these considerations will be important in the development of any future projects.

IV. NEXT STEPS

- Ensure transfer of \$820,074 to USAID/Kampala for mortgages owed Save/Denmark (\$352,155) and AVSI (\$467,919). Note that \$2,000,000 was initially sent to fund these grants, but the funds were not received as quickly as needed. Thus, the Mission incrementally funded both grants using only \$1,625,000, leaving a balance of \$375,000. This sum will be added to the next set of modifications.
- Address separate accounting issue. Discussions were held with Contracting Office director John Lord regarding co-mingling of funds. In Save/Denmark's modification number 1 dated 10/28/99, an additional 125,000 was added for a reconciliation program funded out of Kenya. The budget increases each line item making it difficult to separate out DCOF funds from any others. Save/Denmark does separate reporting on the activities but as additional monies are added, it is important to keep track of the funding source (If only to keep track of what mortgages are owed by whom.) Mr. Lord agreed to try to work out an equitable solution.
- Review Save/Denmark's mid term evaluation (funded by DANIDA) to determine if USAID concerns are addressed
- Await AVSI's scope of work for November mid term review; provide comments. If unable to adequately address USAID's programmatic considerations, make recommendations for alternate assessment.
- Include mechanisms to address HIV-AIDS issues in any follow-on activities.
- Based on USAID/Kampala's revised strategy, which in turn is based on the government of Uganda's Poverty Eradication Action Plan, coordinate with USAID/Kampala on future plans.

For Gulu

- Given that school construction and other community-based activities have been slowed down by insecurity, its expected that Save/Denmark will request for a no cost extension through July 2001.
- As the project moves into more income-generating activities and vocational training, it would be useful to carefully plan and document its efforts. It would be important to see what happens to the current classes of carpenters, tailors and other skill learners. Efforts to link up with existing income generating grants or activities are encouraged.
- Lack of other services (providers) along with increasing needs is moving the project into many new roles. In the event of a follow-on grant, it will be important to try to bring together a variety of resources to meet those needs.
- Education continues to be one of the primary needs.

For Kitgum

- Given the insecurity, and the limited progress in results, it is expected that AVSI will request a no cost extension. It's unclear whether IRC will be underspent.
- The insecurity of the area has forced the project to develop in ways that were unanticipated. At the time the project was designed, based on their proposals, AVSI and with IRC as its sub-grantee, complimented rather than duplicated efforts. It is unclear whether that continues to be the case.
- Additionally, efforts do not appear to be very coordinated. It's expected that this is an area for further development and continued support will look closely at this issue of coordination.
- HIV-AIDS appears to be responsible for much of the mortality of adults. The issue of aids orphans, especially manifested by child-headed households or inappropriate caregivers, is growing. This too may be an important issue in the event of a follow on project.

V. Observations

A. Kitgum

AVSI

AVSI, an Italian NGO, has been working in Kitgum District since the 1970's. It has long-standing ties to the community and is involved in a variety of activities. Under the USAID/DCOF grant, its objective is to provide social support to war affected vulnerable persons. AVSI works with the local government through the community development officer, Mr. Olaa Ambrose. It supports that office with technical and administrative resources. Working through CVC, (community volunteer counselors), teachers and tutors, and most recently, community advisory committees, AVSI trains these leaders to identify, and assist, in limited fashion, the most vulnerable children and their families.

Mr. Oloo Ambrose talked with the team at length about the history of the conflict and its impact on the people there. He discussed the trauma to the community and how it has affected every facet of daily life. He discussed the need for culturally appropriate Achioli responses to the problems. Using Community Volunteer Counselors (CVC) is one of those components. CVC fall under the Community Development Assistants who are paid employees of the district.

Volunteers

CVC are chosen on the basis of their community influence (they are nominated by the community and asked to volunteer). Often they are traditional birth attendants, traditional healers or other community leaders. There are 3 volunteers trained per parish and at least one must be a woman. Currently there are 133 volunteers who “support children and families in addressing their own needs by promoting initiatives.”

Additional training is provided to teachers, who are taught the psychosocial process and how to model behavior that children can follow. Tutors (Centre Coordinating Tutors or CCT) are trained in psycho social support to assist the teachers and lastly efforts are underway to incorporate this approach in the curriculum of primary teachers colleges.

It’s important to note that these are all existing structures. The training is designed to strengthen and educate under the coordination of the Ugandan government. One challenge has been the time necessary to get things done. Other concerns involve the limited nature of volunteerism. Without their getting paid, its difficult to place demands on volunteers who already have numerous other requirements.

It has also been said that the volunteers are less inclined to help other NGO’s who want to use their skills to follow up on children who have been returned. In response to this, AVSI has said that unless the CVC are officially advised that there is some specific action that needs to be done, they may not be so inclined to act quickly. Also, given their volunteer status, they often do not have the time to drop everything on short notice. On the other hand, IRC, as a sub-grantee of AVSI, is designed to care for returning children at the Kicwa center, and follow up their re-integration into their communities. They need to provide timely and accurate information on the follow-up of these children.

Gulu and Kitgum differ in the degree of their displacement. In Kitgum, about 20% of the people live in IDP camps, compared to 80% in Gulu (based on 450,000 total population for both districts.) In Kitgum, people move in and out of camps during the day to farm the fields (dig their gardens), returning to the camps for protection at night. In Kitgum, it is said that the LRA is not able to stay in an area for more than a week, given the increased military presence. When the LRA leaves, the population moves back to the fields and people stay as long as possible to cultivate the land. Using this information, the project is designed to reach as many communities as possible and link with the traditional framework.

The insecurity in the area since the latest major LRA incursion in December 1999 has caused many other ripple effects. Because of it, not as many children have escaped. Both AVSI and IRC implemented the main objectives of the grant but adjusted it to the changing environment.

Kicwa Center

The team visited the Kicwa center, comparable to the Gusco center in Gulu, though not as comprehensive, nor as organized as that center. Kicwa is intentionally a transit stop not meant to be any more permanent than necessary. It is the place where children are transferred after capture by the military or after escape from the LRA. On the team's visit, about 20 adolescents, all but one boys, were resident at the center. (The one girl had arrived the day before from Sudan.) The center was a welcoming place, with friendly staff, lots of colorful artwork on the huts and upon arrival, the residents were taking a break from a puppet show to sing and dance. (The team's arrival compelled everyone to complete silence.)

The sub-grant with IRC was meant to build on their strength in resettlement and working with adolescents in the camps but because there were fewer children escaping, (and thus the Kicwa center was under utilized), and because of the insecurity, it made sense to adapt to the changed environment. The camp activities became less necessary as the population moved in and out of camps and yet, the insecurity made it impossible to provide sufficient follow up.

Other objectives under the AVSI grant include community mobilization, training in specific capacities in counseling, vocational training and income generation, peace initiatives, and coordination at regional and the national level. There was not enough time to explore these objectives in depth.

B. Gulu

The USAID grant in Gulu was awarded to Save the Children/Denmark with a large sub-grant to GUSCO, the local NGO that manages the children's center. Save/Denmark had broad experience in the area of psychosocial support to children in Gulu as well as in other Ugandan communities.

Save/Denmark works in 8 of the 23 sub-counties in the district. The 8 sub-counties were chosen because they had the highest number of abducted children. The grant provides for services to monitor the reintegration of formerly abducted children with their families. It also focuses on getting children back to school. Because the rebels destroyed so many schools, the grant included a provision to reconstruct 9 schools. This was the most requested intervention by both parents and children in initial community surveys but their support is a key component of the building process. The grant also has the capacity to provide sub-grants as part of its capacity building strategy.

Local residents of Gulu formed GUSCO in 1994 in response to needs among the formerly abducted children. DANIDA has funded GUSCO Center through Red Barnet in the past and is expected to continue to do so. The Gusco Center has had to revise their mission in light of fewer children escaping the LRA. The center held as many as 300 children at one time but currently there are only 55 residents. Gusco has adjusted staff accordingly, moving social workers into positions in other areas, like follow-up and vocational training. This flexibility provides them with good opportunities to see what's needed in both the long and short term. GUSCO was the logical sub-grantee to provide for follow-up services.

In Gulu, the team concentrated on seeing activities in the field since permission to travel had been secured. The team met with LC V Walter Ochora who accompanied the team on the trip to Pabbo camp. The team traveled with armed military escort to Pabbo, a camp that was built in 1994. The camp holds between 45,000 - 50,000 residents, approximately 9,800 households. It was instructive to see how debilitating camp life can be...water is hard to get, there is one health clinic, huts are very close together and residents, especially young men, sit around seemingly without purpose (and with lots of brewing materials).

Pabbo Vocational Training

The team visited a vocational training center in Pabbo. There, six young men are being trained in rudimentary carpentry. While the young men can be said to be enthusiastic about their education, its unclear to what end the training will be used. The team discussed the need for some clearly defined parameters in terms of what can be offered or expected by these boys. Its not that it is not necessary nor that carpentry is not a useful profession, but evidence of market surveys and links to employment opportunities also need to be part of the planning. Save/Denmark recognizes these issues and is documenting their efforts.

Abera Primary School

The team visited a newly constructed school in Abera. Built with the help of the community who provided 5,000 bricks, sand and other materials, the school still needs a water supply, desks and chairs for the students and housing for the teachers. Those details are still being resolved.

Role of Government

The grant in Gulu does not have the strong government component that was seen in Kitgum. On the one hand, this allows Save/Denmark to get things done relatively quickly. Conversely, they do not have the long-term sustainability outlook that has potential in Kitgum.

LIST OF CONTACTS

AVSI	Hillary Haworth Farida Khawaja Jeanne Annan Alice Achan Donato Okumu Aloyo Caroline Obonyo Florence Ringe	Country Director Kitgum Coordinator Kitgum Field Support PSS worker PSS worker PSS worker Business skills
	Ochieng Phillips	CVC (volunteer)
Gov. of Uganda	Walter Ochora Ambrose Olaa Michael Ogweng Major Francis Ochoka	Chairman LC V (Lt Col)/Gulu Community Development Officer/Kitgum Community Development Assistant Civilian Military Cooperation
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Save/Denmark Plot 39 Nakasero Rd Box 11857 Kampala	Richard Young John Reinstein Richard Onecka	Country Representative Program Manager/Gulu Program Officer
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Save/Denmark evaluators	Elisabeth Jareg Patrick Okumu Peter Crawford	
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