

## CONCLUSION

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Examining what is meant by reintegration necessitates clarification on two fronts. The first is the practical reality of trying to define the type of family, community and environment into which children are being re-integrated. It has been argued that prolonged warfare has meant that in many cases children have been born, raised and abducted from war effected areas where the vestiges of 'normal' society ceased to exist a long time ago. Reintegration occurs in the context of family relationships that are conducted under a state of social uncertainty within a political state of emergency. Furthermore none of the services and infrastructure, no matter how rudimentary these may be, could be considered as functional. Schools have ceased to function in many areas, water supplies are constantly disrupted and transport networks are contingent on the security situation and thus unreliable. The economies have been shattered and linkages to the greater region highly disrupted, if not completely severed. Even in soil-rich northern Uganda subsistence agriculture has come under pressure as people have been squeezed into ever decreasing spatial entities as a result of voluntary or forced relocation to IDP camps or towns. Where remnants of 'normality' exist, they operate under conditions of extreme stress. Ex-abducted children and youth are being re-united into environments that are fundamentally different to those they may have left behind. Current reintegration strategies are largely aimed at reunification into a family and community putting their energies into dealing with trauma and forgiveness. What is not adequately addressed is the question of whether ex-abductees are simply expected to resume their lives from that point at which they were abducted or whether the returnee is a changed person unable (or unwilling) to slot into a pre-determined role. An element of reintegration programmes that addresses these economic, and therefore social reintegration, is that of skills-training and income generation. Sadly, these elements of one project's reintegration programme are under threat of being discontinued for funding reasons.

A second ground for examining reintegration concerns local meanings of what 'reintegration' means. In northern Uganda, concepts of reconciliation and forgiveness are placed central to reintegration, promoted not only by the

psychosocial programmes, but also by religious leaders and other community-based organisations, among which the Concerned Parent's Association are prominent. Reconciliation and forgiveness support are not in conflict with traditional cultural beliefs nor can they be dismissed because traditional society has broken down. Reconciliation and forgiveness forces abductees and their families, as well as other families who have suffered losses of children and other community members to face their deeply painful personal histories and initiate a healing process. It recognises many of the psychosocial traumas that the ex-abductees have suffered are not theirs alone, but have been shared by their fellow community members also. A core factor in meaningful reintegration is trying to understand what this means to each of the stakeholders. While families are joyous that their children have survived, they are filled with apprehension because their children's experiences in the bush have been so opposed and cut off from them and their community and they fear continuing dislocation and what impact that this may have on the remaining members of the family.

Furthermore, and not surprisingly, in spite of the culture of peace and discourses of forgiveness and reconciliation, there are real tensions around reintegration and reconciliation in a locality to which ex-abductees return. Experiences within the LRA may have fundamentally altered the manner in which ex-abductees function as members within a family or constituents within a community and are possibly changed forever. Community members have concerns that this may be negative, and that ex-abductees may be aggressive or violent as a result of the violence they themselves were exposed to. However, teachers and community's leaders noted another side of this, that some of these children who returned were stronger and more confident than children who were never abducted and their experiences in the bush coupled to the success of escaping gave them a newfound confidence and leadership qualities. This offers both opportunities and threats for Acholi society. This newfound confidence that may find expression in both civic and political matters, could potentially bring ex-abductees into conflict with the rest of their society. Alternatively, this confidence would be harnessed in a political forum of peace-building and social development. Although little empirical evidence exists to suggest which outcome is more likely, it highlights the complex role of reintegration in being the seeds of future conflict-or in contributing to future peace.