

‘TODAY YOU WILL UNDERSTAND’



Women of Northern Uganda speak out

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Dear Reader,

In 2006, the German Embassy received a request from IRIN to finance a radio project aimed at supporting the peace talks in Juba between the Ugandan government and the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA). IRIN's assumption was that the more people in the northern Uganda knew about the peace process, the stronger their support for it would be. And the better the chances of the implementation of a peace agreement yet to be signed. I share this assumption, and it was therefore an honour for me to enable the realisation of the project.

One of IRIN Radio's initiatives is a collaborative project with the Uganda Women Writers Association, FEMRITE. Five female writers from FEMRITE made their way from Kampala to Acholiland to interview women affected by the consequences of the conflict, mostly still living in IDP camps. The testimonies they recorded were aired by local radio stations. Broadcasting people's war experiences is one of the best ways to bring attention to the conflict. It shows us how difficult life is without peace and it makes the victims feel that they are not alone with their worries. The project strengthens solidarity among the Ugandan people and helps spread knowledge about the conflict in Northern Uganda. I appreciate particularly that it expresses the engagement of Ugandans from Kampala with Ugandans in the North. This solidarity, and the common striving for peace, are essential for the final settlement of the conflict.

As radio programmes are very short lived, IRIN decided to document the work. Now all the women's testimonies have been transcribed and this unique information about life in the North during the conflict will last longer and reach more people all over Uganda. It is an honour for me to introduce this booklet to the public. I appreciate the courage and motivation of all those involved in this project and hope that this booklet will find many readers.

It deserves to attract a lot of attention.



Reinhard Buchholz  
German Ambassador to Uganda

**FEMRITE**'s goal is to create an enabling atmosphere for women to write, tell and publish their stories. For the women who tell their stories here, it is a major healing process towards becoming whole again. Through these stories, the women reflect on their true value; they re-identify themselves and they reconstruct themselves anew. The dehumanising experiences of war cannot be forgotten by just keeping quiet about them. Sharing and publishing these stories is one way of raising awareness about the atrocities of war and making the world reflect more closely on what happens in armed conflict. These are not stories from the press, which cannot be verified, but voices of women in first person narration. Often women's voices do not get a chance to be heard, because they are not part of the negotiating arena. FEMRITE hopes that these stories will contribute to the peace and reconciliation process as Northern Uganda and other war-torn areas in the region seek to end armed conflicts. The stories should inspire the reader and listener to construct meaningful social and political opinions towards a collective responsibility for the stability of our societies.

Hilda Twongyeirwe, Coordinator, FEMRITE, Kampala

## About IRIN

IRIN's principal role is to provide news and analysis about sub-Saharan Africa, the Middle East and parts of Asia for the humanitarian community. The IRIN networks target decision-makers in relief agencies, host and donor governments, human-rights organizations, humanitarian advocacy groups, academic institutions and the media. At the same time, IRIN strives to ensure that affected communities can also access reliable information, so they can take informed decisions about their future. This is the role of the IRIN Radio service.

IRIN Radio has produced news programmes that have reached millions of people in Africa and Asia. The service works with radio stations in conflict-affected countries to help improve their programming. IRIN supports these stations through the co-production of programmes, including news and information features and soap operas, as well as in training radio journalists.

In Uganda, as well as the work with FEMRITE that has led to this publication, IRIN Radio has supported a network of community-based bicycle reporters attached to Radio North, Radio Apac, and Rhino FM in Lira and Apac districts, and has worked with displaced women in Unyama and Bobi IDP camps in Gulu district to produce radio drama programmes with Radio King.

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# The New Green

Constance Obonyo

The serene scene of green  
Outside my window  
Once praised  
As a masterpiece of nature  
Now host  
To another green

An intrusion of  
Armoured personnel carriers  
Of green,  
Army green  
Civilians whisper  
And hurry past  
The menacing guests

That there  
Is a Kalashnikov,  
The other a grenade  
The citizenry discusses  
The accessories of the new green,  
The allure of the night green  
Long forgotten

Why?  
Why will the managers of society  
Not let the green,  
Long loved,  
Outside my window  
Be?

# The silver lining

## Judith's story



Esteban Sacco/OCHA

“ I say to the widows, if you see that problems have befallen your husband, you have to stay with a strong heart to keep looking after the children. ”

**Interviewer** Your first-born is 20 years (old), what else do you have to add about him?

**Judith** We have struggled to pay school fees since my husband died. We had to dig the whole day to pay his school fees and the rent. The first time he did his S6<sup>1</sup> exams he failed by one point. The second year my boy encouraged me to pay for him again. He did so well that the Government paid for him after that. I thank God for that. If you have your child who is big, you encourage him, and then he will be strong. If you put the spear head strong on the stick then the child will be strong, if you don't put the spear head strong, then the child will not be strong. I have had bad luck with my husband's family. They have rejected me and said I am not welcome in their homeland and that I should go back to my own homeland.

**Interviewer** You talk of the camp<sup>2</sup> as the first place you came to after your husband died, why the camp?

**Judith** People were moving away from my village. I was staying at my father's home and then we were removed to the camp which is where I am now.

**Interviewer** Let me take you back to your husband, is there anything you can tell us about the death of your husband?

**Judith** My husband, I know it is the 'sickness of these days'<sup>3</sup> that killed him. The time we separated from him, it was in 1997. The conflict was so bad, so people were moving about a



Euan Denholm/IRIN

<sup>1</sup> Secondary school for pupils aged 17 to 19 years

<sup>2</sup> Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) camps. At the end of 2007, the population of displaced people in Northern Uganda totalled 1,842,500, including 901,000 living in camps and 409,000 in transit areas. Source: OCHA Displaced Populations Report Issue 2

<sup>3</sup> Refers to HIV/AIDS. HIV prevalence rates in Uganda as a whole are 4.1%, with a far higher rate of 11.9% in the north. Source: USAID Uganda Programme

lot. He got another woman and married her the traditional way but that woman was already sick. By the second year of the marriage the scars of the sickness started coming out in him. The hospital doctors told him that he had 'the sickness'. He came and told me and said, 'if you are not sick stay away and keep my children properly'. I was encouraged that he told me and I stayed with a strong heart but I felt bad.

After he told me this I went to the hospital for a blood test and I found that my blood is good. I tested my blood seven times over the years and the doctor says my blood is still good and it gave me strength to keep looking after the children.

I say to the widows, if you see that problems have befallen your husband, you have to stay with a strong heart to keep looking after the children. You have to stay with a strong heart knowing that you will have to stay on your own. Don't think about getting another husband, that husband might bring you sickness and behave badly with your children. The children will not respect you. If you think that you should get another man, you might bring one who is sick then your children will have lots of problems that will never end.

# Today you will understand

Mildred's story



Esteban Sacco/OCHA

“

I beg Kony to return home and let peace return to our land. He should ask for forgiveness for the suffering he has caused in Abia.

”

**Mildred** One Tuesday in February 2004, we received a report that soldiers were in Gulgoi. Only a few soldiers remained in Abia. At about 5 pm in the evening, we heard gunshots being fired from the direction of the camp. The gunshots were so close and it was clear that the camp had been attacked.

Before the gunshots, I saw people walking in a single line. I was grinding millet behind my hut. Some of the people were carrying water, while others wore uniforms that resembled those of government soldiers<sup>4</sup>. They followed the route leading to the barracks then all of a sudden they turned their attention on us saying, 'you there, get into your house, today you will understand!'.

I gathered my six children and we entered our house. They surrounded all our homesteads as though they were watching over us.

One of the men with a gun stood behind the teacher's house while I was trying to organize a few things in the kitchen. I sent my children to take refuge under the bed. At that time, fire had already started gutting some huts. I heard them ordering someone to get back inside the hut, little did I know that the command was directed to my own children.

Fighting broke out, guns were being fired from all directions, screams and cries could be heard everywhere. At the same time

the rebels<sup>5</sup> were torching peoples' huts while others were held at gunpoint. One of the rebels pulled grass from the thatch of my hut and set my hut on fire. When my house was ablaze, the rebels were convinced that they had left us for the dead. They ran away, their mission had been accomplished.

I called out to my children, 'Let us get out, let us not die in this house, even if I died in this house you children should survive to continue our line'. The children started crawling out of their hiding place one by one. I saw one of my children trying to drown his head in a pot of drinking water. I quickly removed my shirt, wrapped him up and carried him outside. I ran back inside to rescue the others.

As I was struggling, fire blocked the entrance of our door. I pleaded with people who could hear to come and rescue my children and I: 'come and help me the rebels have killed my children, please don't let me die alone with my children'.

Some people braved the fire and managed to drag out my children. By the time I was rescued, there was commotion outside. My children had been taken to one of the huts that had not been burnt. I joined them in the same hut and locked the door.

Behind the locked door my body was burning. The people outside were banging the door. My children were crying, 'mama pour water on my back, pour water on my head, my

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<sup>4</sup> Uganda People's Defence Force (UPDF), the national army

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<sup>5</sup> Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) led by Joseph Kony



Euan Denholm/IRIN

whole body is burning up'. It was a chorus of pleas. I got some water, poured on my children's' bodies then poured on mine. The banging on my door was getting louder. Gunshots were exploding in the air, screams and wails could be heard from all directions. The people outside were rebuking my children to become silent or else the rebels would finish even the remnants of Abia. The people of Abia were defenceless. My mother managed to force the door open and joined us. I saw people scattering in different directions.

All of a sudden the whole place was silent. After the silence came dawn.

The next morning the remaining soldiers told us that they had been defeated. There were many children who had been burnt alive, others had been clobbered to death. As the day broke, people started emerging from their hiding places. I heard my children calling, 'mama come out and help us, mama let us come and carry you out'. I told them not to bother. Outside were widows whose husbands had been burnt alive together with their children. My landlord had been burnt to death only his skull was left in ashes. All our properties had been destroyed.

When I got out of the house, a government car was waiting to take me to hospital. I had to jump over bodies to get to the car. When I got to the car, I was too weak to move I had to be supported to get inside the car. I lay on the floor of the car, as it started moving.

By the time we reached Corner Apalla my eyes had started swelling and by the time we reached Centre Ogur, I could not see anything. When we reached hospital, I could not see anything I even didn't know the ward that I was admitted in. I stayed in hospital for one week. I could not see but I could hear people's cries. I could hear voices speaking if someone passed by, I could tell by the sound of their footsteps. I was transferred to Lira Hospital and I stayed there from April to May 2004.

From there I was transferred to Lira Modern where a certain Muganda<sup>6</sup> woman came and took pity on me. I stayed with her until September 2004. My burns healed and I was operated upon in October 2004. After the operation I returned home. I have nothing to survive on. My plea to the government is that I have been disabled, I don't have energy to do anything. Government should build me a house and connect me to a water supply.

I have been depending on the World Food Programme for food. We don't have food, the food we cultivated is over. I even have nothing to plant. There are times when I go without food. My children cannot study well even if they want to study, hunger

cannot allow them to concentrate in class. There are times I remain silent yet people should have mercy on me because what I went through is more than anyone can bear.

The other issue I have is that the government should heal the wounds of Abia. My children and I are suffering all because of Kony<sup>7</sup> who has forced us into the camp. I don't know what will happen to our children. This business of putting people in one place has brought diseases of different natures but HIV/AIDS has finished many people. Government should get rid of this disease. If you take a look at me, I have been disabled. If I try to work, the scars swell and start bleeding. My whole body has problems.

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<sup>6</sup> Name of a tribe found in central Uganda

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<sup>7</sup> Joseph Kony, head of the Lord's Resistance Army, a guerilla group engaged in a violent rebellion since 1987. Kony claims he aims to establish a government in Uganda based on the Ten Commandments

# Woman of fate

Beatrice's story



Esteban Sacco/OCHA

“

He can kill me with a knife and no one will follow him. At the police station if you kill your wife, you stay in for only three days, that's why I am afraid.

”

**Beatrice** The changes in the war are what caused us to leave our home. There was insecurity because the rebels kept coming to our home and that is why we had to leave.

**Interviewer** Maybe you can tell us more about your husband. When you came with him to O'ngako camp<sup>8</sup>, how did your married life continue?

**Beatrice** Before the war we used to stay well but when he got another woman that is when life changed.

**Interviewer** When your husband left, did he leave you with any property because he knew you had nine children.

**Beatrice** He did not leave anything. At first we used to dig and hired out cows for cultivation. We managed to cultivate six bags of groundnuts. He (the husband) removed three bags and took them to another woman. The other three which remained he came and sold them when I was away. I took him to the police and he said he had used the money. The police made him bring back the money but I refused to accept it.

**Interviewer** Haven't you tried going to your in-laws place maybe to claim for land or some assistance from them since you are keeping their children?

**Beatrice** My in-laws came to me after hearing what happened between us and even wanted me to go back to him, but my husband says I am weak and that he will kill me. He says my home is a home of dead people. 'Slim'<sup>9</sup> has killed my mother's children. He can kill me with a knife and no one will follow him. At the police station if you kill your wife, you stay in for only three days, that's why I am afraid.



Manoocher Deghati/IRIN

<sup>8</sup> Gulu District

<sup>9</sup> Colloquial reference to wasting effect of HIV/AIDS related illnesses

The landmine hit me on 25th Dec 1996<sup>10</sup>. We had bought food and we decided to look for firewood. Where we were walking, there were tall grasses. My friend was in front of me. We checked our movements as we walked but before I realised it I found myself falling down. My friend also fell. By the time I regained consciousness I saw hunters coming. They were saying that the landmine had hit my friend. For me who was still alive, they carried me to the main road and a military van came and took us to Lacor.<sup>11</sup>

The challenges which I now face? Before the incident I used to dig but now I can only dig for about thirty minutes. I cannot

stand for long. I also get tired so fast, I don't have help.

**Interviewer** If the conditions at the camp were changed, would you like to stay here and why?

**Beatrice** I would agree to stay because in my homeland the land to cultivate is not there. Here I can rent a place where I can dig.

What I would like to change? They should counsel men not to drink so much and to stay with their wives at home. In the camp here women have a lot of sufferings.

<sup>10</sup> Landmines and explosive remnants of war survivors in Uganda 2006, total 2,039, casualties 50. Source: Landmine Monitoring Report 2007

<sup>11</sup> Main hospital in Gulu district

# I am still young

## Lucy's story



Esteban Sacco/OCHA

“

God honestly you are the one that created me, see my future like the future of a human being.

”

**Lucy** I'm called Lucy, I was born in Dog Otako Lawiyo Village. We came back from the foreign land<sup>12</sup>. While we were there, my father mistreated my mother. He also mistreated me. I guess I grew up facing problems. My mother would sieve rotten posho<sup>13</sup> and that is what we would eat. When we returned home to the village, we continued to be mistreated by my father. So, we went to my maternal place and then later we came back to my birthplace.

I wasn't able to get an education because of my father's misconduct (he mistreated my mother and I). When someone begun to hold my hand (when a man showed interest in me), I was not yet mature for marriage, but then I thought it would

be better for me to get married and face problems in another place. It was unfortunate that I married a poor man. He had no parents. During the war, my husband was abducted and later killed. He left me with two children and I had four more children with another man.

At the time people were ordered (by the government) to leave their homes within 24 hours in order to move to the camp. Everybody left their homes but I had no strength to leave. I couldn't leave because I had so many children and luggage to carry with me. I was the last one to leave. The government (soldiers) wrote to me saying that if I remained behind then I was collaborating with the rebels.



Manoocher Deghati/IRIN

I said 'God honestly you are the one that created me, see my future like the future of a human being'. I collected my children and came to the camp (Puranga). There was no food to eat. By that time, my name was not included in the list for World Food Programme food distribution. I would do casual work. That's how I would survive. People in the camp, who saw what I was going through would provide me with beans, give me flour.

If problems are not mixed with disease then you can survive. When people saw how thin I

<sup>12</sup> Anywhere other than your home land or village

<sup>13</sup> Dough-like staple food made of maize flour

was they said I must have AIDS. People who were testing blood to check for AIDS came here and I went and tested for the virus, they said:

'Mama you don't have AIDS'.

'What should I do?' I asked them,

'Continue to protect yourself' they said.

Honestly, up to today I have continued to protect myself.

I can say that riches cannot be begged. For me, the pot of poverty that God has given me, I will carry and will not beg for luck. If he wants, he will give it to me. He can give me wealth in future. I have now passed the years of a young person, I am 40 years old.

I have accepted the problems that God has given me to carry on my head. This is what I am narrating to you so that you people who live in this world should know that peace cannot be begged. Poverty cannot be begged. So, when your friend is facing problems, you should not laugh (at them). When your friend is peaceful, don't be proud of it. See a person facing problems like yourself because everybody is the same. If they cut my skin, I will have the same blood as that of a rich person.

I could return home because the problems I face in the village are nothing compared to the problems in the camp. In my home, I farm my late husband's land and I yield so much food. In the camp, I have to wait for World Food Programme food. Until it arrives only then my children can eat. Even for clothes, I have to do casual work then buy clothes for my children. I have never worn these

tailored clothes<sup>14</sup> neither have my children. I love my children. Me, I see the future... I see that the rebels disturb people. I think that I should stay home since the government soldiers don't want us to stay there and the rebels abduct us. I want to rest. I have sacrificed my life. I want my children to remain in the camp and then I can go home and farm. What if I go with them (to the village) and landmines hit them? I will be sending them to their death. What if they (the children) dig out a landmine from the ground? If a landmine hits me while I am farming then the government can take care of my children.

Government soldiers arrested me for delaying in the village after everyone had moved to the camp. I told them there was no land for me to farm (in the camp) and my name had not been included in the list for food distribution. When I told them the truth, they accepted what I had said and then they made me sign with them.

I said that I wouldn't return to the village (without permission) in case the war hasn't ended. I signed with them in 2005. I returned home in 2006 to build my house, which everyone (internally displaced person) has been told to do so. But those who should return should return at their own will and not by force not even from the government.

I have a dispute with my in-laws who are now farming my own land. So I have taken my case to the people concerned in Sub-County and they have said that a widow's land should

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<sup>14</sup> Refers to ready made clothes

not be trespassed. I have four boys and land is passed on from generation to generation and as I do not have a father-in-law my children will inherit the land and be able to pass it to the next generation.

I composed a song about the problems I have faced. It is called 'Why Do I Face Problems Yet I'm Still Young'. When I sing it, it relieves me from pain.

When I got married, I used to sing songs that are influenced by the ancestral guidelines. I continued to sing even in the camp.

As I got older when I got married, I started singing gospel songs and songs for traditional dances. The song I mentioned just came as a thought, so I sang it. I even thought that my mother or my father would beat me for it.

Yes, when you have problems you think about anything, day and night. What can I do? Can I sing to relieve the pain? So every time a song comes to my heart I sing it. So the song doesn't bring tears, but tells the stories of my life so that any person hearing the song can sing it too.

# Barlonyo Massacre 2004

Joyce's story



Esteban Sacco/OCHA

“

Life is not easy but I had to return home. Survival is a struggle. I have remained alone and keeping alive remains a very big challenge.

”

**Joyce** It all started on 21st February 2004<sup>15</sup>. I saw rebels approaching the Barlonyo IDP Camp. They surrounded us from all directions. We decided to get into our houses when I heard a bomb explode. I ran outside and collided with people who were also running for safety. I lay flat on the ground trying to take cover. Meanwhile bullets were exploding in the air. I got up to help my drunken husband but given his state I could not do much, he just fell to the ground.

I started running, as I was running a bullet hit the person who was running behind me. I kept on running as another bullet hit yet another person behind me. I was just trying my luck with a baby on my back. I continued running until I reached a thicket, that I dived into. I could hear gunshots close to where I was hiding. I started asking myself: What are you going to do? If you stay here, these people will surely kill you.

I started crawling in the opposite direction of the gunshots. It is then that I met my niece.

'Let us run before these people kill us'.

I warned her not to say a thing. As we were preparing to leave, she started vomiting, fell down and died.

I jumped over her body and continued running. I ran for a long distance until I found a bush where I rested. I settled under a tree but the bullets continued getting closer. I tied the baby to my back and set off again. On hearing gunshots ahead of me, I started running backwards.

I entered another bush. I heard people screaming, 'Run, run, run the rebels have been defeated'.

I refused to get out of my hiding place. A soldier saw me and ordered me out, 'You old woman, get up and run'.

I pleaded with him not to kill me, 'I am a mother please don't kill me'.

I had to do as ordered. That was at about 9 pm. I could see fire spreading to every homestead, soldiers were scattered everywhere and children were screaming on top of their voices. All of a sudden there was silence, the rebels had left. I spent that night in the bush.

I returned the next morning, it was a Sunday, only to find the body of one of my sister's children. She had been axed to death and flies were covering her body. My husband's face had been sliced into four pieces with a machete. I gathered the different bits of his face and tried to put them back in their rightful places, then I used a piece of cloth to hold them together. My mother was watching from a distance. She told me to take good care of the dead because death is death and death is real.

As I moved closer to inspect the remains of my home I was informed that my brother was also dead. I only got half of my brother's body and pieces of my granddaughter. I could only identify my brother by the bits of his red shorts that still clung to his thigh. The rest of his body was bones, oil was oozing out of his body. His dead children, both girls, were lying next to his corpse.

<sup>15</sup> Over 200 people were killed at Barlonyo camp near Lira by the LRA

With no clothes to cover our backs, we walked until we reached the trading centre. My husband's brother who was working in Lira collected his body and took it for burial in Lira. My other brothers and sisters were buried in the mass grave in Barlonyo. That was what happened.

At that time the fighting had reached its peak, I don't know how I managed to survive. We mourned for the dead and the men tried to give them a descent burial but after three days we found that the bodies had been exhumed.

When the government realized that the bodies had been exhumed, they brought cement, exhumed the remaining bodies, put them in black polythene bags and reburied them. But even after this the bodies were exhumed again. This is when government decided to give them a fresh burial.

That morning people gathered, we were all involved, all of us had lost someone. The mass burial started with prayers and two cows were slaughtered to feed the mourners. At that time, the rebels were still causing havoc

within the neighbourhood. We were instructed to stay in one place. After the burial, filled with uncertainty, we all left for Lira town. I settled in a swampy place close to Lira where I stayed for one year. I then relocated to Abim, stayed there for one year then I returned to Ogur Centre. But life became so difficult at that Centre I relocated to Awealem from where I returned to Barlonyo.



Euan Denholm/IRIN

# The spirits went the wrong way

Cecilia's story



Esteban Sacco/OCHA

“

I first thought of going back to the bush so that I could be killed by the rebels instead of remaining alive when I am suffering.

”

**Cecilia** I am now alone. All my relatives were killed. There were rumours that I was Kony's wife. My parents and siblings were locked in a house and burnt by the Ugandan government soldiers. The only brother I was remaining with was killed by the rebels after I had come back from the bush.

Even the neighbours did not like me. I thought of going back to the bush so that I could be killed by the rebels instead of remaining alive when I am suffering.

I used to eat one meal a day. Another woman came and took my children away from me and looked after them. I stayed alone. The people in our village wanted to kill me themselves because they knew that when the LRA rebels came, they would kill them because of my escape<sup>16</sup>. Coming to the camp was of great relief to me. I am now safe. I got some loans to start a small business.

**Interviewer** Tell us about how you were abducted.

**Cecilia** I come from Pabbo west. The rebels abducted me when I was 12 years old. I stayed in the bush for 13 years. I came back with three children but one has since died.

The first problem I faced in the bush was they give you to a man not of your choice who may also be older than you. They hand you to that man by force. If you refuse they kill you. That

<sup>16</sup> Common rebel punishment for villagers who welcomed or hid escapees during the war

is what happened to me. I was given to some elderly man to be my husband.

The other system they use is that they take off their shirts and pile them together, then they send girls to pick the shirts, when you get one, that one now is your husband. The moment you take that shirt to that man whether that man is so big and you are young, he still becomes your husband. If you refuse him they say that you are in love with the UPDF soldiers and the end result is that they kill you.

After assigning us husbands they started training us to become soldiers. The first training was by caning us. After that they then started training us on how to use weapons and how to shoot. After learning how to shoot, then we were regarded as real soldiers. We had to move wherever they told us to go. If you refused to go or collapsed on the way you would be killed because you were not fit to become soldiers. Starvation was also a big problem. When there was no food we had to walk many miles without getting water or food. The moment one would collapse you would be killed.

The other issue was that we had to eat raw sorghum<sup>17</sup> and then some leaves that animals feed on. When we reached places where there was no water, we had to drink a friend's urine. If you tried to escape from the bush and was discovered, you would be caned to death. It was only by luck that one would

<sup>17</sup> Mainly used to make local alcoholic brews but also used as a food source during periods of scarcity

survive. If one was fortunate and escaped from the rebels and came home, the rebels would be ordered to come back to the village where you were abducted to kill the people as an act of revenge. If they do not come immediately, they would wait for a few months then come later and kill many people. About twenty or even more. They would do that for compensation of the weapons that the person fled with.

If the person who escaped was a man he would be castrated, if it were a woman she would be taken as a slave. If they got you at your home, the rebels would kill you and cook you in a pot. The worst thing in the bush was caning. One time my friend

escaped and I was caned on her behalf. (Reveals scars on arms and legs) I don't know if peace will result from the ongoing negotiations. I wish the government can do their best so that they can stop war and we have peace.

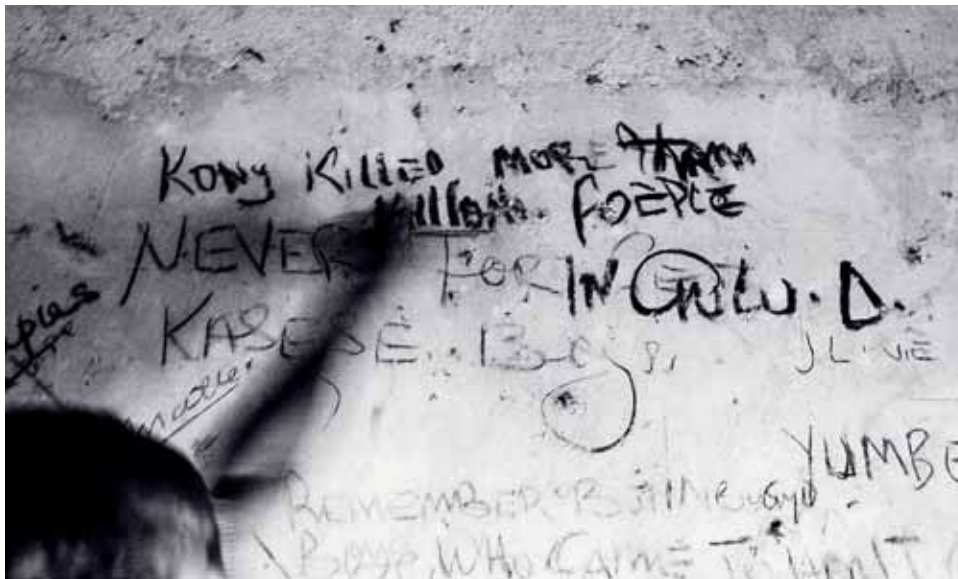
I came back (from the bush) in 2002.

Kony said he will not come back as long as Museveni<sup>18</sup> is still the president because the administration of Museveni cannot be compared with his. He will not come home because the government of Museveni raided cattle from his home area and one of his top commanding officers was killed by Museveni's

soldiers. There was a time two of his commanders, Okello Director and Otti Lagony, told some rebels to come back to Uganda and report. Kony got to know of the plan. He arrested them and put them in a deep pit. They killed them to instil fear among those who were planning to escape and come back home.

**Interviewer** Why does Kony think he shouldn't come back home?

**Cecilia** One day, Kony gathered all the people in his command and told us he won't come back home but he did not tell us the reason. He said that if any person wanted to come



Euan Denholm/IRIN

<sup>18</sup> Yoweri Museveni, President of Uganda since 1986

back to Uganda they could come but he would not release any person. But anyone who tried to escape will be killed. When Kony would be talking to us, his power of spirit would come. When one had intentions to escape, his powers could point you out and say this person wants to escape but don't kill him/her. He/she will meet his death at the right time. While Kony would be talking to us in his spirit, he did not know what he was talking about but there was somebody to record. One time when Kony's power was coming, he went to a mountain in Gulu called Guludek to pray then he came back and told us what to do.

When the government is planning to do anything to the rebels, Kony's spiritual powers tell him and he gathers people and he talks to them about what to do. So there was a time he told us that the government was sending a dog to come to us, so the dog came and did not do anything because Kony summoned us and told us what to do. Any plan the government is making, the spirit tells Kony and he tells his people what to do before any government action.

Kony told us that the war will continue as long as Museveni is still president because he knows whatever his plans are. The government says that Kony is abducting people but Kony told us, he is also recruiting people because Museveni's government also recruits people illegally. Some people say that Kony was exchanging those people with guns but he was not.

What I experienced personally is that there is some connection between the Kony rebels and the Sudan Government. The Sudanese government helps the rebels with guns and ammunition. People say that Kony has heavy weapons but what I saw myself is that he has small ones. I have carried them myself.

Whenever the Ugandan government would get in touch with the Sudanese government, they would say that they are not conniving with the rebels. After that the Sudanese government would provide us with food, ammunition and other things.

There was a time when Kony clashed with the Sudanese government and they killed Sudanese soldiers. The contract between Kony and the Sudanese government was then breached. They later reconciled and continued providing us with ammunition. There was a time the Ugandan government worked hand in hand with the Sudanese government to get Kony but Kony was not moving far and was not caught. He was communicating with the Sudanese government by telephone.

Some people said that Kony has demons but he said he has no demons, he has the Holy Spirit. When he was going to meet us, he would tell us to clean our bodies with clean water, and then gather together. He came in a Kansan<sup>19</sup>. There is oil from a tree called Ya<sup>20</sup>. He would smear that oil with grass and a small stone before he came so talk to us. When he would be talking to us, it would not be Kony but the spirit talking.

<sup>19</sup> Traditional clothing

<sup>20</sup> Tree common in the north; its oil is used in cooking

**Interviewer** How did you get food in the bush?

**Cecilia** We would get it from the government of Sudan. When there was any delay, they selected some LRA rebels to go and fight the Dinka.<sup>21</sup> They were divided into two groups. Some would fight and others would collect food. The fighting group would fight the Dinka and chase them away then the other group would collect all the food from the Dinka and carry it.

**Interviewer** How did you manage to look after the children while you were in the bush?

**Cecilia** Taking care of children in the bush was so difficult. Sometimes we would camp in areas and cultivate there. We could cook there and then move. At times we had to move and carry food, property and the young ones.

**Interviewer** How did you manage to deliver in the bush, were there doctors?

**Cecilia** Everybody is a birth attendant in the bush. When one is going through the labour pains, others help her to deliver. There were some people who were trained to look after the wounded.

**Interviewer** So you gave birth to all your children without any difficulties?

**Cecilia** For the first child, I had difficulties because I was still young. They wanted to take me to Juba for an operation. They tried and pushed me from different sides until I gave birth. When one had difficulties in giving birth, they would be taken to Juba in a government hospital in Sudan to deliver. The young girls who are underage are taken to Juba when it is time for delivery.

**Interviewer** Is there anything good about Kony?

**Cecilia** There is nothing good in Kony. He cuts peoples ears, mouths, canes them... We used to walk long distances and many died on the way especially while climbing mountains. There was a time two friends of mine and I escaped. The two of us were summoned to kill one person. One soldier stood behind me, the other stood behind the other friend and ordered us to kill the friend of ours with whom we were trying to escape. So there is nothing good in Kony.

**Interviewer** How did you finally escape?

**Cecilia** We had settled and camped on a mountain with Kony and the gun ship was coming and we were ordered to run in one direction. I went the opposite direction so I went with my children and dropped the property that I was carrying. That is how I finally managed to escape. One child was running and the other two I carried them. They sent a soldier to look for us but fortunately there was a woman who hid us. That is how we managed to escape.

<sup>21</sup> Prominent tribe of traditional cattle herders from south Sudan

# Under the Odugu Tree

Rose's story



Esteban Sacco/OCHA

“

The baby's cord healed and fell in the bush but that child's survival has been a struggle. To prevent the baby's cord from rotting I had to clean it using my saliva. I would spit on the cord and then wipe it clean. The child is alive to this day but he never listens to anyone maybe because of what he went through before and after his birth.

”

**Rose** During active insurgency, we faced a lot of problems. When you go to collect food or in the evening when one is in the garden, Lord's Resistance Army rebels come and destroy you.

The incident that remains fresh in my mind - the one event that I will never forget is when the rebels got us harvesting peas. I had gone to collect food to feed the children. The rebels attacked and raped us. There were six of us and at that time I was six months pregnant. The rebels were all armed. They wore smart civilian clothes and others wore new army uniforms. They were very proud you could not easily tell if they were rebels, government soldiers or Karamojong<sup>22</sup> raiders. They raped us without shame - women, grandparents, in-laws and children. No wonder we cannot easily tell where we contracted the HIV virus.

As I speak, I am not fine. I am one of the people whom the rebels raped. After the rape I got up and ran as fast as I could but the rape had already weakened me. While I was running I stumbled and fell. When I got up to run I did not know that something had pricked my stomach. I cannot still figure out if the rebels pricked me while I was being raped or if the stick pricked me the time I fell. Fortunately, the stick did not dig deep enough to harm the baby. I later produced my child without any complications. He is alive.

The time I gave birth, I did not have anything for taking care of the baby. I just ran as the sound of the gunshots intensified the pain in my waist (labour pain). I did not know what exactly was happening to me. I ran until I reached a shea butter tree where the contractions intensified and I gave birth all by myself. There was nobody around to assist me. I had plaited my hair with threads. I released a strand of thread from my hair and used it to tie the baby's cord. There was no water for me to bathe with. There is something called Apipil rao (spear grass), I split it in the middle and used its sharp edges to cut the umbilical cord. Then I wrapped my baby and laid it gently on the ground. I was being tempted to walk away and abandon the child. My heart got hardened on realising that the baby was a boy. I wanted to throw it away. But God touched my heart and I decided to just carry it since the child was innocent. You cannot run away from what is yours. At about that time many people had gotten rid of children. They killed many children!

I would move round with my child who was poorly wrapped. People would ask, 'What is that you are carrying?'. Suddenly, the war started afresh. I wandered in the bush for over three days without bathing the baby or myself.

The baby's cord healed and fell in the bush but that child's survival has been a struggle. To prevent the baby's cord from rotting I had to clean it using my saliva. I would spit on the cord

<sup>22</sup> Pastoralists from NE Uganda many of whom have taken to cattle rustling, clashing with rival clans due to limited natural resources

and then wipe it clean, spit on the cord then wipe it clean. The child is alive to this day but then he never listens to any one maybe because of what he went through before and after his birth. Even if you try to talk to him he just ignores you. But he is very intelligent. He is very bright in class although the problem of fees usually disorganises him. The war has affected our children's education and our girl children have been worst hit. Even before she is old enough to get married you find her




Manoocher Deghati/IRIN

eloping with a soldier. As I speak, I have a daughter whom a soldier took away, he eloped with my daughter without marrying her not even giving me any dowry. When you produce a girl, the soldiers somehow take her away. A girl child cannot endure, she is always looking for a comfort zone, looking for where the money is. This makes life very difficult.

As I continued living I started falling sick. I could not understand what was happening to me but I miscarried. After I miscarried I said to myself after the rape, my husband's death and contracting TB, what could have happened to me? Is it the war that has done this to me? I then went to check my blood and I found that I was HIV positive. I have the AIDS virus.

After the test I felt at peace within myself now that I knew the cause of my ill health. That's what strengthened me and kept me alive till now. I have lived positively for over ten years maybe even fifteen years. I am now on drugs. I get the drugs from the main hospital. The drugs are free I don't need money to buy them. But getting registered with the hospital is the most difficult thing. I had to struggle to get registered. I am not certain of how I am going to end up. But I believe that I will survive another ten to fifteen years.

My husband lost the battle too soon. He died of AIDS. When we returned he became a changed man, fearing the stigma, he isolated himself. He would only open the door for you to give him food then he would close it. He lived in denial. He kept his status a secret. But I said to myself, people have always spoken of HIV/AIDS. It seems this guy was told that he was positive that's why he refuses to mix with people and he refused to be put on drugs. He always insisted that he was bewitched but given the state of his health I decided to go for a test. I went for a test because the rebels had raped me, my husband was sick, even the people around me were sickly.



The message that I am sending out to you is that you should have mercy on us. There is this child who was in my womb while the rebels raped me called MB. If there can be any kind of counselling or if he can be taken to a far off place where he can study well I would be very grateful. I am sick and if I am to die now and leave these children alone on this land they may just become the target for the rebels. Even though I am sick, I would not mind as long as my children are being assisted. I only think of my children's education.

I now live at Ngetta ginnery. The thought of my village still traumatises me. I will never return to the village. I will not return for a second blow. Even those who are insisting that we should return should know better than that. Even if they gave us money for returning home what's its use when all the men who should build houses are long gone and you have nothing to start with? I cannot go back for a second war. I won't ever return.

# I am worth something

## Helen's story



Esteban Sacco/OCHA

“

If God gives you problems you welcome them with open hands. Don't throw it to anyone. You keep your problems.

”

**Helen** My name is Helen. I'm a daughter of Bwobo Ma Nam (village). When my father died, I remained with my mother and we would go together to farm the land. I didn't get an education because it was said that girls shouldn't get an education, if they do, they become prostitutes. I used to work with my mother until I became a big girl.

My elder brother married and the money was borrowed from my maternal relatives because I was still too young to get married. Before he got married, my brother used to beat me that I didn't want to bring bride wealth.<sup>23</sup> I wasn't yet mature enough to get married.

Then later I met my present husband and I had my own home. I should have been happily married but then I begun to face more problems. My husband began beating me. I was in the same circumstance as before I got married. How will I survive in this world? God if you could listen, please kill me so that the world remains without me, I told myself.

He broke my hand. I went home and my family treated me with 'cassava powder'.<sup>24</sup> Then I returned [to my husband]. I came back for my children. I wanted to take care of the children.

**Interviewer** Why was your husband beating you?

**Helen** My husband was beating me because he thought that I was worthless. His relatives were saying; 'She is barren. Chase her away. Why do you let her control you.'

**Interviewer** Did you try Acholi medicines?

**Helen** I also tried Acholi medicine. I tried different ones, from almost sixty people (herbalists). I drunk their herbs but they didn't work. I went to Kitgum (hospital) six times. I also went to Lira (hospital) four times. All these times they never scanned my womb. I asked them to scan my womb but they never did. They would only give me tablets to swallow. I would say to them that these medicines that you are giving me will not heal me if you haven't scanned my womb. My relatives worked hard so that I could get children. If God had accepted I would have had my child. But God didn't accept.

He beat me again and I went to live with my relatives. He later came and brought me back to his house. He continued to beat me. He broke my hand again. Then I asked him, 'you broke my hand, will I again go back to my relatives to be treated?' My relatives wanted me to take the case to the police.

Honestly some members of my family are born again Christians and they asked me to forgive him, 'even if he had done so many things to you only God knows and he will revenge accordingly'. 'God will give you a better future even if he has not blessed you with children', they said.

<sup>23</sup> In Acholi tradition a woman's bride wealth usually in the form of cows, is used by her brother should he wish to marry

<sup>24</sup> Powder made from pounding dried cassava

I got the letter from the police and I decided to let go of everything and forgive him. He brought other children to the home. His brother had died of AIDS. My brother also died of AIDS, and his wives. The other children I had also become orphans. Their father also died. I gathered all of them. They are seven of them that I'm taking care of.

Then my husband began to acknowledge and say that my wife who people say is barren is actually useful. She is helping the clan. She is taking care of the children who are orphans. I'm taking care of the children very well. I don't discriminate against any of them. I would have been happier but then the problem of rebels.



Euan Denholm/IRIN

The rebels have caused more problems. They cut my buttocks and my breast. Then I later also got shot in an ambush.


**Interviewer** Tell us how you were protecting yourself during the insecurity?

**Helen** When they were fighting in the camp we would run because if they find you in the garden they would kill you. I was the first to run in the camp and the rest of the people followed me. Sometimes they would send people to other people's

places and they would come and kill you and yet you have nothing. You survive then someone else comes again.

Now I brew alcohol. I get 2,000 Uganda shillings<sup>25</sup> for my cash box and 2,000 Uganda shillings for food. I feed all the children that I have, no one has given me money to keep them. I don't have clothes. I don't even have shoes that are distributed in the camps. I walk bare footed like a mad woman. Let them laugh at me, even those who point at my back. Let them do it. That's life. If God gives you problems you welcome them with open

<sup>25</sup> Equivalent to just over US \$1



hands. Don't throw it to anyone. You keep your problems, you don't throw it to anyone.

I tell my children to get serious with their education. These days it's hard to teach children in the camps. You sit them down and then talk to them. In a short time you go to the well, you find that the children have gone roaming.

These children's rights that people are talking about have empowered children. They don't listen to the teaching of their parents. Every now and then you hear that they are paying school fees for children here and there in the camps. I'm all alone and I have received no assistance. The assistance that people receive in the camps, I don't.

# Face to face with death

Lily's story



Esteban Sacco/OCHA

“

Going back home when Kony is still in the bush is risky. Staying in the camp is not good, but when we go home and we hear that Kony is passing around I don't know how it will be.

”

**Lily** My name is Lily. I have a small business and I am one of the disabled. I feel chest pain. I was beaten in 1998 by the rebels. That is why my ribs are bent and I still feel a lot of pain.

**Interviewer** How were you abducted?

**Lily** I was abducted while I was from school. I was then taken to the bush. After abduction we were taken to Gulu and from Gulu to Sudan. There was a lot of fighting in Sudan and we later came back to Uganda.

That time that I was abducted I was in Primary Three.<sup>26</sup> At one time, we went to a place called Agoro in Sudan, it was there that I managed to escape. When I escaped I was taken to the Local Councils who were also afraid. Later, I was taken back to my original home in Okiri. Unfortunately, the rebels found me there and they beat me so much. That is why I am disabled. I was taken to hospital later but before that I was being treated with local herbs because there was no money to go to a hospital.

The biggest problem I experienced in the bush was hunger. In addition to hunger, we were given about 70 kilograms to carry. I was about twelve years old and was given to a man who was too old to be my husband. We would eat only at night. When we would get food, they would grab it from us. The top commanders would eat first. I am stopping to speak. I am not crying. I am feeling pain. I cannot talk too much or walk long

distance (she bends). The doctor told me that they cannot do much for my chest pain but they asked me to be careful not to overwork. I am now completely deformed.

**Interviewer** How did you escape?

**Lily** We were coming from Sudan, I escaped when we camped at Agoro Mountain just at the Ugandan border with Sudan. We camped there and started to cook, but there was no water. So some other girls and I had to go and fetch water from a well that was very far from where we were camping. While we were there, I told the other girls that I was going for a long call. Luckily enough, there was a very big cave near the well. I hid in the cave. The other girls waited for me in vain then they went back to the camp and reported to the LRA rebels that I had escaped. The rebels looked for me but they did not find me. The cave was very big. They camped there and slept there. The next morning the Uganda People's Defence Forces came after the rebels. They started to exchange fire. Later on the rebels went away. I was afraid to come out of the cave because I feared that the UPDF soldiers might shoot me. So I remained in the cave until the UPDF soldiers also went away.

I slept in the cave for two days. On the third day, I saw a woman in a field harvesting her cabbage. I went to her and told her that I was hiding in the cave afraid that the UPDF might kill me. I also told her that I escaped from the LRA rebels. Then she

quietly took me to her house. I was kept there without even notifying the local authorities. She was afraid that if the LRA got to know they might kill her. Luckily, there was a relative of mine in that neighbourhood who I met later. I moved in and stayed with her until a vehicle was brought to take me to Okiri, my village.

After one month, the same group of rebels I was with came home. They recognized me. They beat me until they thought that I was dead. But I was not dead. That is how I managed to escape.

**Interviewer** Were you worried about anything else in the cave?

**Lily** I was very afraid mostly of snakes while in the cave. While I was there I did not see any snake or baboon. But I was preferred to be bitten by snakes and baboons instead of suffering in the bush.

**Interviewer** Do you consider yourself lucky to have survived?

**Lily** I feel I am lucky to be alive that is why I am saved. I am a mulokole<sup>27</sup>. I have been through a lot.

**Interviewer** Is there anything else that you went through that you would like us to know?

**Lily** They are very many. While in the bush, there were several

ambushes that I survived. Sometimes someone would be shot right in front of me, besides me or behind me. I survived all that by God's grace. Now I look healthy. At first many people thought that I would not survive even for a week. While still in the bush, one time we were sent to go to Gulu in Acakocwenyi and attack the trading centre and I was almost killed. I escaped very narrowly. I cannot forget that incident.

**Interviewer** How did you escape that particular incident?

**Lily** As we advanced, we met the UPDF soldiers and we chased them away. We looted their camp and went away carrying heavy loads. The UPDF reinforcement came from Kitgum and other areas. When they reached where we were, they threw mortars at us. As each mortar fell, it fell with a dead body. Many of our colleagues died. I narrowly survived.

**Interviewer** At the time, the rebels beat you, what did they beat you with?

**Lily** It was a stick used for pounding millet. We were very many people. Others were outside and I was inside. Those who were outside managed to run away. I was still pushing my way out, and then they recognized me and said. Ehh... That I am the one who escaped from them.

They beat me and thought they had left me for dead because their intention was to kill me. They then ran for one mile

<sup>27</sup> Lugandan word meaning born again Christian

and sent some people back to see if I was dead because their intention was to kill me. They found that I was not completely dead, but they touched my hands and felt the blood was still hot so they left thinking that I would die anyway.

**Interviewer** What would you advise the government to do about Kony?

**Lily** My advice is that Kony should be killed completely. Even at night when I go to bed and try to recall what happened to us, I feel that Kony should not be alive. At times, I feel afraid that I cannot sleep alone when I remember what was happening while I was with the rebels. Sometimes I was afraid of the man I got married to after I left the bush. When I came back from the bush, I had no intention of getting married to any man. But my parents insisted that I get married. As of now, I don't want any man.

**Interviewer** Did you make any friends while in the bush?

**Lily** I had female friends while I was there.

**Interviewer** Aren't there some that you miss?

**Lily** Very many of them died. There were some who were trying to escape. One of

them we had been to the same school as me. They got them, undressed them, put them before all of us and shot them naked.

In the bush even if you were related to somebody you would pretend you are not because when they would kill your relative, they would also kill you.

**Interviewer** What plans do you have when you go back home?

**Lily** I am disabled but staying here in the camp will damage my children. When we are going back home, we can go with some relief food. Going back home is okay but the government should do it's best to wipe out Kony completely.



Manoocher Deghati/IRIN

# Against all odds

## Eunice's story



Esteban Sacco/OCHA

“

At University I want to do civil engineering. Maybe after studying my course, I will also go and work for an NGO like GUSCO. I would like to help the ones who were once abducted. From there I will become a successful woman, married with children.

”

**Eunice** I grew up with my mother, two kids and my father. I went to school but I was abducted when I was 12 years in P7. It was night when we were just sat outside after eating supper. From nowhere we saw the rebels coming. They just took me up, I left my father and my mother there and the other siblings. They just beat them and they took me. From there we moved on foot up to Sudan. It was very long. On the way we faced some difficulties, there was no food, we could go to some villages, the nearby villages and we get food from there. We loot I mean. We even met some UPDF soldiers and they chased us seriously but we survived.

I remember we found a man and they told the man that he should go with us to Sudan. He was resisting so they chopped him into two pieces.

**Interviewer** At that time you were telling us you were around 12 years old. Were you the youngest person in that group or were there other people who were even younger than you?

**Eunice** There were other people who were even younger than me. There was a boy who was just seven years and he was the youngest. He suffered a lot. You know, we took 5 days walking from Gulu to Sudan but that boy his legs swelled. He suffered a lot.

When they abducted me we were many girls, we were age 12 and above. So they selected us and gave us to the rebel commanders. For me they gave me to a man, he was too big.

**Interviewer** Were you the first wife or you were the first in line? You were one of the many wives?

**Eunice** In fact, I was the seventh!

**Interviewer** You were the seventh wife?

**Eunice** Yes

**Interviewer** Did you have any special duties as the wife of the rebel commander?

**Eunice** There was not any special duty. In fact all it was about was suffering. Forcing you into sex when you don't want, beating you up when you have done a small mistake. Moving - you don't stay in one place - and not eating anything. One kind of suffering I faced was cooking too much food for many army commanders. And you know those other women (wives) they also used to mistreat me. It was so difficult, so many problems, eh, even I can't tell.

**Interviewer** Was there any good side to being the wife of a commander compared to those people who were maybe not married to the rebel commander?

**Eunice** At least the army commanders after looting things like clothes, food, they bring to you and you have a share. But now those (others) they have to suffer, sometimes they stay for a week without eating but at least I can eat at least one meal a day.

**Interviewer** For how long did you stay in the bush?

**Eunice** I stayed in the bush for 8 years. I saw some changes at least. When I had just arrived, I used to hate the fighting. I used even to feel pity when they are killing people, but now when I was getting used to it I saw it as normal and I also wanted to learn how to shoot.

**Interviewer** Did you ever hold a gun maybe during your stay?

**Eunice** I did not hold one but I had wanted to.

**Interviewer** They did not allow you?

**Eunice** No.

**Interviewer** Is there any special reason because we understand that in the bush everyone has a gun?

**Eunice** The other army commander refused me but me, I had wanted to.

**Interviewer** To learn how to shoot or to hold a gun?

**Eunice** How to shoot.

**Interviewer** What other changes did you see? Were things going for the better or for the worse?

**Eunice** Things were going for the worse. As I was married, I was the seventh wife, there were six other wives and they used to mistreat me. The war was just increasing and Kony was becoming stronger and stronger because he was abducting more and more especially the boys. They could train them for one month on how to shoot, how to loot things and they get everything.

Life in Uganda as compared to Sudan is so fantastic and interesting. I got an opportunity of going back to school. I am even being helped with other basic things like clothes.

**Interviewer** Did you ever think of coming back to Uganda when you were in Sudan?

**Eunice** No, because escaping itself was very difficult. I saw many people killed on the spot for trying to escape.

**Interviewer** It seems you got used to seeing death every day when you were an abductee. How did you manage to escape?

**Eunice** It was one day when the UPDF soldiers had ambushed us. As they were trying to shoot the Kony rebels, some people escaped. Some were killed by the UPDF soldiers but I remained somewhere in the bush, so, when I saw that there was only UPDF soldiers who were remaining, I surrendered. I raised up my hands, they saw me and they came for me. They put me in the helicopter then we came to Uganda. At that time, I was the only one.

**Interviewer** I would like you to tell us, do you remember any touching event when you were still under Kony's rebels?

**Eunice** While I was still there in Sudan, there were these boys, they had just recruited them. They told one boy to go and to loot food in Kitgum. He refused, and, they just put him in a big mortar, very big, they just put him in there and they pounded him.

**Interviewer** After you were rescued by the UPDF, how did your life go on from there?

**Eunice** After the UPDF had rescued me, they took me to GUSCO<sup>28</sup>. It is an NGO that helps abducted children. I stayed there for two months and they started telling me about going back to school. The next year, they took me to a secondary school in S1<sup>29</sup>. Life at school was not so easy. Students would laugh at me because I looked different from them.

**Interviewer** What do you mean you looked different from them?

**Eunice** I mean my body, wounds. So life was not easy for me. They would discriminate

(against) me. Even in the dining room, they do not want to sit with me. As time went on, students got used to me and I started being friendly with them, they also started being friendly to me.

**Interviewer** Did you try looking for your relatives or are you now alone? What happened when you came back?



Euan Denholm/IRIN

<sup>28</sup> Gulu Support the Children Organisation – local NGO offering psycho-social support, education and advocacy for war affected children

<sup>29</sup> Pupils aged 11 to 13 years

**Eunice** When I was in S3, I tried looking for my relatives but I failed to find my parents and the other two siblings. I only found my auntie, a sister to my father, and she is the one who took me in.

**Interviewer** What about your village, haven't you tried going back?

**Eunice** I went there and found that our house got burnt down.

**Interviewer** You are in S6 as we are talking. I can see that you have come a long way and you are a very strong woman and even your English is good compared to the life you've gone through. I would like to commend you for that.

**Eunice** Thank you madam.

**Interviewer** But again I would like to find out, what are your hopes for the future - how do you see yourself in the future?

**Eunice** At University I want to do civil engineering, Maybe after studying my course, I will also go and work for an NGO like GUSCO. I would like to help the ones who were once

abducted. From there I will become a successful woman, married with children.

**Interviewer** You want to lead a normal life?

**Eunice** Yes

**Interviewer** You seem to be one of the few lucky ones who come out of such situations and to lead a very good life. What advice would you give to those people who were once abducted and have not had help like you?

**Eunice** I encourage them to have hope and to also seek help. And I also encourage them if they were once studying to go back to education.

**Interviewer** Do you have anything you would like to add as we are winding up. Maybe something you would like to say?

**Eunice** I encourage the people of Uganda and Gulu most especially, to work hand in hand with the government so that the peace talks that are going on go on successfully because we have suffered a lot.

# Hope in the rock

## Jennifer's story



Esteban Sacco/OCHA

“

The future of my children should be better than mine so if I can keep my children and send them to school, I will struggle hard and do it.

”

**Jennifer** I lived with Phil <sup>30</sup>. Very early in the morning, my job was to wake up, wash clothes for all Phil's women and children because he had three children. I had to look after those three children and prepare meals for them and the other women as well. Prepare bathing water as soon as their bath time came.

If I didn't do as I was told I would be beaten. A woman like me with no husband if I am seen standing with a boy then we will both be killed. People are so fearful in the bush.

**interviewer** [Link] The death of Lafonye Phil plunged Jennifer into marital responsibilities as she became wife to elderly Okello Twiga, already married with four wives. Jennifer resisted the idea of being wife number five and that nearly cost her life as she explains:

**Jennifer** When I was transferred there, I thought they would take me to the home of a young man but I was given to an elderly man who was so mature that he walked with a walking stick.

They told me that this man is now my husband. When evening reached, he told me to go to bed and sleep. I started crying and ran away way but was picked up by the rebels who threatened to kill me. They tied me up and forced me to agree that I would become wife to the mzee<sup>31</sup>.

**Interviewer** Did this man have any other wives?

<sup>30</sup> An LRA commander

<sup>31</sup> Swahili word meaning old man

**Jennifer** There were four other women and they were the ones teaching me and consoling me all the time - 'Please stop crying, because if you keep on doing it they will kill you. There is nothing for you to do – just become a wife'.

When I heard that encouragement, I started accepting my fate as my friends had done. If you became sad in the bush, you end up crying. If you say that you like someone else (one whom you are not attached to), when Kony calls a meeting and you are pointed at as one who does not want the husband you are attached to, they take you and kill you.

**Interviewer** Is Kony a spirit?

**Jennifer** He says that an angel appears to him and if he hadn't gone to the bush, he would have been a strong witchdoctor because he can read the future.

Also when he chooses someone to act as the commander, he knows what that person is thinking.

These people (GUSCO) have made me a hut. Although the digging place is small, I can live here (Agwok camp in Amuru district) with my mother.

My father was killed by Lakwena<sup>32</sup>.

<sup>32</sup> Alice Auma aka "Lakwena" meaning messenger in Acholi. Self-proclaimed prophetess Lakwena was head of the Holy Spirit Movement, a hugely popular cult that led a rebellion against the government forces of President Museveni from August 1986 to November 1987. Many of Lakwena's followers later joined the Lord's Resistance Army led by her cousin, Joseph Kony.

# Ku Ku

## Flora's story



Esteban Sacco/OCHA

“

Did you scream so that people can hear you? Yes I did but nobody came...they later said they were afraid.

”

**Flora** My name is Flora, I study in primary school. I'm in primary one<sup>33</sup>.

**Interviewer** How old are you?

**Flora** I'm ten years old.

**Interviewer** Tell us what happened to you? What did 'S' do to you?

**Flora** I left my uncle's place to go home and sleep at around ten o'clock. Then he (S) came and started undressing himself and he was naked, then he pulled down my dress and then my panty. He then put his penis in my vagina.

**Interviewer** What time did he do that?

**Flora** Around midnight.

**Interviewer** When he did that to you did you get any pain?

**Flora** I found that my vagina was hurting.

**Interviewer** Did you scream so that people can hear you?

**Flora** Yes, I did but nobody came.

**Interviewer** Did people hear you?

**Flora** They heard but they refused to come (and help).

**Interviewer** Why do you think they didn't come (to help you)?

**Flora** They later said they were afraid.

**Interviewer** Is 'S' your relative?

**Flora** He is ... he is my grandmother's brother.

**Interviewer** What do you think should be done to your uncle?

**Flora** I want him to be killed.

**Interviewer** What advice do you have for other children?

**Flora** I want children to take care of themselves. This thing ...this thing (sex, defilement) should not be done to them. They should protect themselves.

**Interviewer** Are you afraid that your uncle will one day return home?

**Flora** Ku ku - (No no)

---

<sup>33</sup> Aged between six to eight years

## OMONA

My name is Omona, Flora is my child. I had gone to the main road the night after 'S' had defiled Flora. While, I was at the roadside I saw Flora going to the well. She asked someone to summon me and she asked 'do you know what happened to me last night? Then she said 'S' defiled me last night'. I asked her that why she had not told me earlier but she said she could not find me where I usually sleep.

I was saddened because I know 'S' is not well. He has the disease (HIV/AIDS). I went to the police and reported 'S' and the police said they would look for him because he had gone into hiding. They eventually found him drinking alcohol so they arrested him and took him to Gangkal (local police post).

**Interviewer** How do you normally live with 'S'?

**Omona** We always live very well with him.

**Interviewer** Do you always eat from the same pot?

**Omona** Yes, we eat from the same pot.

**Interviewer** What do you think of his relationship with the child?

**Omona** When he is drunk that is when his thoughts and actions are evil.

**Interviewer** What have you seen him do to this child?

**Omona** When I'm not around, he calls this child and beats her for no reason.

**Interviewer** Is there any advice that you want to give to men in this camp?



Euan Denholm/VIRIN

**Omona** Men in this camp should not get drunk and beat up children because they are people who are sick and they can transmit it (HIV/AIDS) to young children.

**Interviewer** The child had earlier on said that she called out for help but nobody came to assist her. Do you have any advice for such people so that they can be alert to help such children?

**Omona** Yes, I can give an advice. I beg neighbours to be alert to what is happening to other people's children.

**Interviewer** Did they tell you anything?

**Omona** No, nothing. They kept quiet. It's Flora herself who told me what happened.

# Hot-Stepping

Concy's story



Esteban Sacco/OCHA

“ My heart told me that I should go away but his parents keep pressuring me to stay. His parents told me to stay because with former captives, you just have to understand them. ”

**Concy** When we had already started living together and even got a child I found an (amnesty) card<sup>34</sup> that told me that he was captured in 2000 then returned in 2002.

In the bush, he was second to the big man<sup>35</sup> so when he died, he became the big man and that is how he managed to come back.

With such people (returnees), I just tolerate him because he has many problems. There are times when rudeness takes control of him and then there are times when he just wants to murder people. So I just keep on being very careful with people from the bush.

**Interviewer** What annoys him?

**Concy** Sometimes, he is thinking of things of the bush because when he comes home, he wants one to do something quickly and when you do something at your own pace it annoys him. He gets upset very easily.

**Interviewer** Would you have married him if you had known that he was once a captive?

**Concy** Eh...now that one, I had to marry because I had already had a child in his house and it is risky to change men.

I have accepted to marry him. I can tolerate him and when he becomes upset I run away and come back when he has calmed down. So one just keeps adjusting to his temperament. I will stay because now we are living amicably, unlike before when he would get frequent mood swings.

If I didn't have a child and had been told about his past before, I would have left, but now I have already given birth so I can't leave. I have already spent my youth on him and have a child with him.



Euan Denholm/IRIN

<sup>34</sup> Some former LRA members were issued with documents under the Amnesty Act of 1999

<sup>35</sup> LRA leader

# Living on the edge

## Josephine's story



Esteban Sacco/OCHA

“

They would say 'you allow that woman to rent there, the rebels will kill you'. Whenever I would look for a house to rent they would say, that but one day, I managed to get one. The neighbour said 'if they are looking for this woman to kill let them kill me also'.

”

**Josephine** It was in 1995 when my child was captured by the rebels and the child is Nancy. That child was taken during the night and after she was captured we really suffered. Even before the child was captured we were suffering because of the rebels. The child stayed for 8 years in the bush before she tried to escape.

When she escaped we were also in danger because the rebels did not like escapees. After the escape, the rebels began to disturb us and they were planning to even kill us but we were informed and we ran away from the home where we were staying. After our departure, the rebels came and found that we were not there. They also captured a certain boy and they tried to make inquiries from that boy so that he could tell them where we were.

We realised we were in serious trouble and we decided to take the child to my home. We left her there and stayed in the camp. Life in the camp is very risky, there is nothing to eat and we are also aware that whenever we are found by the rebels, we will be killed. We are not the only people suffering. People are now preparing to go back home. But we hear through rumours that those rebels are coming back to disturb people.

**Interviewer** How did your child manage to escape?

**Josephine** The child told me that they had gone to rob some things in the bush. There was a certain child who was her best

friend and she was a bit older than my daughter. She was the one who told her to escape at that moment. They did so and came and reported at Gang Diang (barracks).

**Interviewer** They reported at Gang Diang Barracks. Why were the rebels so furious about her escape?

**Josephine** The girl said she was suffering a lot in the bush. They couldn't even sleep. They had to keep looking, moving, looking for food. Sometimes they would be fired at by guns. She said she was almost killed one day by a bomb whilst collecting wood from a house. It was God's power otherwise the bomb could have killed her.

**Interviewer** Did she tell you anything in particular that happened to her when she was in the bush?

**Josephine** The only thing she told me is that she was suffering, her life was at risk. Every time she could be forced to go and fight. She could be forced to go and kill people. If you refused to kill people you would be killed.

**Interviewer** Are there any major things that happened to you after the escape of your child?

**Josephine** Nothing happened apart from the threatening words. It is the rebels who were threatening that whenever they get me they are going to kill me.

**Interviewer** How did the rebels threaten you, did they go through radio?

**Josephine** They came after our departure, and wrote a letter and the letter is still with the RDC<sup>36</sup>. It was saying that if I don't bring back their child, they are going to kill me and the whole clan, not only me.

**Interviewer** Why do they claim it was their child yet the child is yours?

**Josephine** How do I know? I don't know. They were worried that the child is going to say what they were doing in the bush. She saw what was happening and the wrong things that were done. They were worried that when the child comes back she is going to reveal the secrets to the government.

**Interviewer** Was she open to tell you everything or she was still going through the pain?

**Josephine** The only thing she told me was that she was loved very much and that Otti<sup>37</sup> had many wives who looked after her as a child.

**Interviewer** What is your relationship with people in this camp?

**Josephine** First of all when I came here these people did not like me. Later when we began to settle and began to be given some assistance from NGOs, some began to befriend me. I don't want to move far from here for the reasons I have told you.

**Interviewer** Are they also pursuing the parents of the other girl who escaped?

**Josephine** I don't know. Some parents understand this and say 'There are some other children who have escaped from the rebels but you don't say anything against them, why do you disturb this woman? This woman is not the one who told the child to escape from the bush'.

I know very well that in other places like Mucwiny where another child escaped, the rebels killed about seventy-five or more at Mucwiny.

**Interviewer** Otherwise how is life in the camp?

**Josephine** On the whole it is difficult because we are like prisoners. There is no food. Even we who are government workers, we cannot pay for our children's school fees so we have poverty, we have epidemic diseases like cholera. Theft is a big problem, there are very many thieves. People are planning to go back home but I hear rumours that the rebels are back. Sanitation is also very poor.

<sup>36</sup> Office of local government Resident District Commissioner

<sup>37</sup> Vincent Otti, Kony's second in command and spokesperson

I even tried to rent a house but people said 'Eh you allow that woman to rent there, the rebels will kill you'. I managed to rent somewhere from a neighbour. She said 'If they are looking for this woman to kill let them kill me also'.

**Interviewer** So you left the house and decided to come here?

**Josephine** Yes I decided to come to the camp because one day when I was asleep at around 2.00 am somebody came and tried to push open my door. I tried to shout and the person ran away. I decided to leave the house and come back to the camp here. I returned to the house some time later and again someone disturbed me in the night. I don't know whether he was a thief, there are many in the neighbourhood.

**Interviewer** So as a teacher, they can post you anywhere?

**Josephine** I have been posted deep in the village but I will not go. I will request to stay. It is hard to say in the villages unless you were born in that area. I am not free.

**Interviewer** What punishment do you think Kony deserves for the pain that you have gone through?

**Josephine** It is even useless to punish him because as God says, you don't punish somebody who has punished you but instead of punishing him you just pray for him to change his mind.

I think it is not good to punish Kony but what we should do is to tell them to come back home. They should accept the advice, they should sit down for peace talks so that they can come back home.



Euan Denholm/IRIN

# Beneath the gunshots

Faith's story



Esteban Sacco/OCHA

“

A long time ago you could go to the village, and dig a garden to promote your business, but nowadays you rely on money only.

”

**Faith** I have been in the business of brewing malwa<sup>38</sup> for so long. I started the business in 1995. I get money for school fees for my children which I have been paying for about 6-7 years. My husband died a long time ago in 1994 when my (first) child was in P6. The firstborn is now a laboratory technician. I have three children and I have been keeping them out of my business brewing malwa.

I now have a motorcycle which I bought out of my business. I also have a little money in the bank.

**Interviewer** Tell me about doing business during the war, where were you getting your products?

**Faith** For millet, I go to Pabbo<sup>39</sup>. I bring it here then I use it for selling malwa. During the war, I had to go to town Genako to the store in Gulu and buy millet there at a very high price.

**Interviewer** So, was doing business during the war profitable? Did you get a lot of money?

**Faith** Ahhhhhh... you don't get a lot of money. You get very little because the price of millet was so high - 600 shillings per kilo.

**Interviewer** Weren't you afraid of doing business during the war?

**Faith** I was afraid because one day we were looking for somewhere to sleep. We slept in the town by the gates and when we got back home we found out that one person had been killed near our home.



Manoocher Deghati/IRIN

<sup>38</sup> Local alcoholic brew

<sup>39</sup> The largest IDP camp in northern Uganda, 42 kms northwest of Gulu town

It was very difficult because I have no husband, he is dead already. I am alone to care for the children. It was very difficult to take care of the children in town.

One day I was caught by the rebels and when I escaped they came and killed my father. They found us at home in Koro during the night time and they killed our father there and then.

**Interviewer** [link] The fate that befell her father might have been the same for Faith had it not been for that fact that she recognized one of the rebels as her uncle.

Her biggest challenge now is where to pour the residue from her local brew, but I wonder what changes she sees now that the war has ended.

**Faith** It has made life different because a long time ago, you could go to the village and dig a garden to promote your business, but nowadays, you rely on money only. People are in the camp, you leave your home even when you try to go and dig, no one can help you.

**Interviewer** Would you leave this business if you had an option?

**Faith** I can leave it if I get enough money because it is hard work brewing malwa.

**Interviewer** But now that you have been in this business for long, don't you enjoy it?

**Faith** You can enjoy it but it is very difficult - you do it because of the conditions - if you don't do it, you don't get money.

**Interviewer** Are you in any women's organisations?

**Faith** We have a small group - we have a plan for generating money in our group. We were thirty-six in the group, some used to dance... other people used to sing. We go wherever we are invited to perform.

**Interviewer** What advice do you have for widows?

**Faith** I tell them that they must keep their business. I advise them not to get other men because it may spoil their business.

**Interviewer** So men spoil business?

**Faith** Yes because if you have a man and if you want to go to Pabbo, he may refuse or if you have a drunkard man he may steal your money.

# Marriage to Captain Abola

Mary's story



Esteban Sacco/OCHA

“

I tried to refuse the man I was given but I was told that if I refused, I would be killed. I had no choice but to accept the man as my husband. I had to stay with him just like that and we had our three children. Imagine, we were given out at a time when we were not yet ready to be with men.

”

**Mary** One Saturday morning in December 1998, I was abducted from my home. We were made to walk until we reached some place and after three days we were given away as wives to the rebels. We were given out in a very bad way, there was no time allowed for the rebels to convince you to become their wives. They would just hand you over to a man and they would tell you that this is your husband go with him.

At that time I was still very young, I tried to refuse the man I was given but I was told that if I refused, I would be killed. I had no choice but to accept the man as my husband. I had to stay with him just like that and we had our three children. Imagine, we were given out at a time when we were not yet ready to be with men. We stayed together until it was time to return home in 2004.

My husband, the father of my children, was called Captain Abola Sali. We were six wives altogether. Being six wives, we could not live in harmony, as you know many women fighting for one man's attention cannot live in peace. Out of these six, I was the only Langi, the rest were Acholi. We the Langi were hated. Sometimes I was beaten by those others for being a Langi and because the Captain loved me most, but that was not really the case. My husband used to treat me well but sometimes

he was very violent. At such times he would beat me up. You were not expected to cry, you had to endure the pain without tears. But in most occasions we used to live peacefully.

What made us leave that place? One day Captain woke up in the morning and told all of us to return home because the war had become very violent. He took me together with the others and we walked until we entered Gulu. In Gulu, we entered the barracks from where we were transferred to the main barracks. From there we were taken to Gulu Support the Children Organisation (GUSCO). He remained in the first barracks.



Esteban Sacco/OCHA

While in GUSCO, the administrators rang the people of Rachelle to come and collect me. The people in Rachelle put an announcement over the radio and that is how my people got to know my whereabouts and they came and collected me.

That is how we left the bush.

While in GUSCO, we lived a very happy life. They would counsel us and encourage us who have returned to have a heart of forgiveness. Even if people abused us we were supposed to forgive them. When we would fall sick we would be taken to hospital in a vehicle. We really enjoyed life while in GUSCO. We were always being taught. When our children would fall sick they would be taken to hospital. We were given everything for free - clothes, soap, basins and bedding, they took good care of us. That was our life in GUSCO.

When I got to Lira, the life here was similar to that in GUSCO. There was no discrimination. We were all treated equally. Every morning we would be taught how to live and survive after returning from the bush. If people referred to us as rebels, we were encouraged to forgive them. Our life was good we had no problems we used to sleep well. That was our life in Rachelle.

I want to continue staying with my children because now there is relative peace. We are able to cultivate food to feed our children. The people in Rachelle gave me a sewing machine that's what I utilize to take care of my children. I do not wish to go back to Rachelle because I am at peace at home. Nobody disturbs me or even gives me headache.

# This time tomorrow

Hilda Twongyeirwe

Yesterday, I woke up here  
Today, I wake up here  
Tugging at my sagging tummy  
Listening to the old tune, asking myself,  
Will it be the same, this time tomorrow?

When they came  
You said they would go  
You said they were insects  
You laughed at them  
You said they would not be here this time today.

Today, their thunderous guns rock us to sleep  
The burning camps soothe our chopped lips and noses  
Crying babies rest their lips on nipples breasts.  
You still blow on our wounds  
Like a rat and its prey

You gave them days, we waited.  
Months  
Now it's years  
We wait,  
Will it be the same this time tomorrow?

**FEMRITE** - Uganda Women Writers' Association is a non-governmental organisation launched in 1996 by a group of women, who sought to address writing and publishing challenges that were affecting women at the time. Since then, FEMRITE has nurtured and mentored a number of women writers, who have matured in their writing and attained recognition both at national and international levels.

Currently, FEMRITE is engaged in a number of programmes, one of which is recording stories of marginalized women in different fields. FEMRITE recognises that there are many unique true-life stories of ordinary women that need to be told and published. 'Tears of Hope' – narratives of women's experiences with the Ugandan Law - and 'I dare to say' - narratives of women's experiences of living with HIV/AIDS - are examples of such stories that FEMRITE has published.


Narratives of women's experiences in armed conflict is the third project under this programme. It has resulted in the 16 audio stories entitled 'Today you will understand' and 10 other stories FEMRITE plans to print.

### **Five members of FEMRITE were involved in the recording of these stories:**

**Apophia Agiresaasi** holds a bachelor's degree in Social Sciences (Literature, Sociology and Social Administration) and a Master of Science degree in Population and Reproductive Health. She has contributed feature articles to Uganda's national daily The Monitor and written book reviews for The Weekly Observer. She has also written a book The Victor to be published by Macmillan publishers. She is currently the General Secretary of FEMRITE.

**Oketta Barbara's** poem 'Just a Bit' was published in a recent FEMRITE anthology 'Painted Voices'. She is also a freelance editor for Fountain publishers and is currently writing stories for children.

**Lamwaka Beatrice** is the author of 'Anena's Victory', a supplementary reader in primary schools in Uganda. Her fiction has appeared in Gowanus Books, Women's World, WordWrite and Words from a Granary. She is one of the pioneers of a British Council writing scheme to link Ugandan writers with established writers in the UK. She is a member of Transcend Art and Peace, an organization that supports creativity and art in working for peace. She is currently working on her first novel.



**Sembatya Rosey** studied English Literature at Makerere University, Kampala. She joined FEMRITE in 2003 as a member of the Readers' and Writers' Club. Rosey is a teacher by profession and formerly taught at Taibah College School. She is currently a banker and a Rotaractor with the Rotaract Club of Kololo.

**Aduto Margaret** studied Social Work and Social Administration at Makerere University. Currently she is working as regional programme officer with Uganda Change Agent Association across Eastern Uganda.

'Today You Will Understand' is a collection of transcribed audio testimonies from women living in areas affected by the war between Ugandan government forces and the Lord's Resistance Army in Northern Uganda. The women were interviewed by members of FEMRITE Uganda Women Writers Association in January 2008. These true stories reveal how war has impacted on the lives of ordinary women, many of whom were displaced from their communities and now survive in camps for the internally displaced.

Integrated Regional Information Networks (IRIN) trained writers at FEMRITE in basic radio production skills to enable them to record and edit audio interviews. The CD and stories captured here are the results of this collaboration.

IRIN is part of the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

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