A WORLD FIT FOR CHILDREN – KASESE, UGANDA

Kasese in western Uganda is one of the areas hit by insurgency. Rebels use the mountainous terrain for their activity making the protection of civilians against them slow. Some of the children interviewed live in displaced people's camps because of the rebellion in the areas surrounding the mountains. Because of this situation, these children dream small dreams which to them are big dreams. The children and young people interviewed were aged between 9-24 years. Some of them, especially the nine and ten-year-olds, made their wishes known through drawings.

1. HEALTH:

End Decade Goal: To improve the health and nutrition of mothers and children

Children in Kasese still die of diseases like measles and meningitis which they could have been immunised from. Because of the poor living conditions and the congestion, especially for those living in the camps, malaria, cholera, jiggers and skin diseases abound and spread very fast.

i) Infant mortality

*Children die in their homes because of diseases like measles, wounds in the stomach and meningitis
*Most children suffer from malaria, cholera and severe headaches because of the conditions in the displaced people's camps.
*When we fall sick we are taken by our mothers to the health centres.
*Children die a lot because of hunger and diseases because we are concentrated in one place.
*We get skin diseases and jiggers because we dress poorly and children laugh at us.

Progress:
*The Government has tried to prevent polio

ii) Maternal mortality

*Many mothers still die during childbirth.
*When girls get pregnant, they want to carry out abortions and in the process they die.

Progress
*Maternal mortality has reduced.
*There are a few mothers who die because now the mothers go to hospital when they are pregnant.
*In the camps the homes are near, and transport to the hospital is easy. Mothers are quickly taken to hospitals.
*There are traditional birth attendants (TBAs) who help mothers, but they are very few.
*The Traditional Birth Attendants were not very good at their job but now they have been trained and they are better.
*Death during operations in the hospital is going down.
*The Government provided mosquito nets and water

Priorities
*We need a hospital or a clinic in every sub county and at school in case children fall sick because it is difficult to get to the hospital.
*Teach the community about family planning
*Build more hospitals that charge little money
*Train community-based committees to educate the villagers.
*The government should make it possible for our parents to take us to hospital.
*The government should send more doctors to the villages.
*Government prevented and protected us from Ebola although some people died.
*We heard it came but it did not reach us

**Recommendations**
*The government should provide hospitals that are not expensive.
*We need nursing aids.

### 2. NUTRITION:

**EDG: Reduction of severe and moderate malnutrition**

For many of these children, life was better in the mountains because their parents grew their own food. Now in the protected camps, families have to depend on handouts and can only make trips to their gardens once in about four days if security allows. With handouts, they often do not get enough to eat and the food is not balanced.

*In the camp it is difficult to get something to eat. Most children go without lunch.
*Before we were displaced everyone had his own garden and we ate a balanced diet but those from large families did not get a balanced diet
*The meals are not balanced because our parents have to buy the food and they have no money.
*Sometimes we would want to eat meat and fish, but the money is not there.
*Everyday we eat cassava and matooke (plantains) with beans for lunch, then supper we eat cassava bread with beans because we are poor.
*Our cow used to provide milk free, now we have to buy.
*Formerly we the youth would go fishing, hunting and get money for food, but now we have no money because we are displaced.
*Parents give boys more food than the girls because they do the heavier work.
*Where we eat communally, the boys always eat more food because they are faster.
*Sometimes we sell coffee to buy food.
*Our parents have no money to look after the family because their main activity is growing cassava and beans.
*The matooke which is planted is sometimes sold in case of a problem like sickness which needs money. Sometimes it is exchanged for other items.

**Progress**
*Red Cross has helped us with food
*Some of us have enough nutritious food.
*The government gives us food.
*We go once to our homes in the mountain to fetch food for at least four days.
*The land for cultivation cannot be reached.

**Recommendations**
*The government should again tell UNICEF to give children food.
*The government should emphasise giving maize meal porridge to the children in the morning and at suppertime.

### 3. WATER AND SANITATION:
EDG: Access to safe drinking water and environmental sanitation increased…ultimately reducing water related and faecal based diseases

Provision of clean and accessible water remains a problem in Kasese. Many people still fetch water from rivers or streams, which are often contaminated. For those that live in the camps, water is nearer home but the pipes and the tanks that carry it are rusty. Children noted that fetching of water is the woman’s role. The environment in the camps is unhealthy and the pit latrines are often dirty because they are used by many people who do not co-operate when it comes to cleaning.

*The water we drink is from very far like 2 miles and by the time you are back, you are very tired.*
*Before the war, almost each family had a spring which they would maintain but now some children pollute it with human waste and even wash from the river we all use to collect water.*
*There are many children in the camps and the mothers usually do not take responsibility to clear their waste. Everyone says it is not my child, hence the compounds are very dirty.*
*The water tanks are not cared for and there is rust in the water pipes.*
*Our house is a temporary structure yet we left a good one in the mountains.*
*We are many in the house and the house is not ours. I am a boy. I am not supposed to stay in the same house with my parents and girls.*

**Progress**
*Because we are displaced, most of us live in camps where a latrine is near the home.*
*The government brought a water tank to our school.*
*At home, the pit latrines are there, but when children leave the latrines, they do not wash hands.*
*In the camps, about 15 families use one pit latrine. Although families clean the pit latrines in turns, the women get tired of cleaning and collecting water.*
*The water we drink is from a river that flows across the village.*
*When we were at home, everyone would clean his/her home.*

**Priorities for the new decade**
*We want good water from a tap near home*
*We need a bigger, better house than what we live in today. We are currently staying in a grass-thatched house.*
*I am a boy. I need a house of my own*

4. EDUCATION:

EDG: Access to primary education for school aged children and completion rate of primary education cycle increased

Universal Primary Education has enabled most of these children get an education, especially the girls. However, the facilities are still too few to cater for the large numbers.

*Universal Primary Education (UPE) makes the number of children in school to be big.
*I am the only girl at home. Sometimes I do not get time to read because I have to do all the housework.
*Sometimes our parents ask us to stay at home with the little children so that they can go and find food.
*There is still dust in the classrooms. The classrooms are cold during the rainy season yet we have no coats.*
*We have no school uniform. People cannot tell that we are school children because we are never smart.
*Some children are still at home because their illiterate parents do not value education.
*After P7, (primary school), we lack school fees then we stop going to school.
*Girls get pregnant starting at Primary Six.
*When girls go to school, they face problems like parents do not buy pens, books, uniform for them. The parents say they are fit to get married and get their own money and children.
*There is no lunch, no desks, no shoes, no bags, no exercise books and no textbooks in school. There are no chairs in the classrooms. We sit on stones.
*The balls for playing with in the school are not enough for everyone.
*We are sent home for hoes to clean the school compound.
*Most children cannot to secondary school because it is not free.
*There were more boys in school even before UPE because of the cultural belief that girls should not be given school fees.

Progress

*Most children go to school because they want to be useful after school. I want to study, finish and get a job as a nurse.
*More girls go to primary school because the boys go looking for birds to shoot and eat.
*Before UPE, some girls would be sent away from school because of school fees. But now we are okay. We just buy books, pens and uniform.
*The local councillors have gone around telling parents about Universal Primary Education (UPE) but still the parents say they cannot take all the children to school because there is housework like fetching firewood, water, etc. In this case it is the girls to remain at home.
*Text books are not sufficient - One book is shared by 10-15 pupils
*We are in a temporary school with no play field.
*Schools have been constructed and equipped with desks.

i) Adult Literacy

EDG: Reduction of the illiteracy rate (with special emphasis on women)

*Most mothers do not know how to read and write. For the men at least some can read and write the local language (Lukhonzo) but not English.
*It is the fathers who attend classes because the mothers have to look for food everyday the whole day in the mountains.
*Most adults are not in school because they do not care and sometimes because of war.
*There are adult literacy classes but married people find it difficult to attend because they have to go to their gardens or do other domestic chores.

Priorities

*We need a permanent school building with all the facilities.
*We need chairs or benches to sit on.
*We need trees to provide shade.
*We need hoes for cleaning our school compound.
*We need cups for drawing water for drinking from the school tank.
*I need a mathematical set
*I want to be educated and become a minister
*Schools should be built in the mountains so that when we go back home we are assured of education.
**Recommendations**

* All children should go through secondary schools
* Educate our parents about the use of education
* The government should provide free secondary school education.
* The Government should build more primary schools.
* Ensure education to the last person in the community
* Give us more support like new schools in the area for education improvement.
* Groups or clubs should be trained to assist in educating the community.

**5. RESOURCES:**

| EDG: The provision of sufficient resources by government communities and external support agencies to provide basic social services to all Ugandans |
| EDG: The effective use of limited resources |

Rebellion has taken its toll on the Kasese community. The children would like to see it end because they want to return home. The children also suggested that income generating activities be put in place because many of them are poor. In addition, bridges need to be improved because many of them have to cross shaky bridges with heavy loads. In addition they asked for good leaders to get programmes going.

* All assistance coming to the camp goes to the adults and not the children.
* Currently we have to move a long distance to get firewood.
* We need a better church than what it is today.
* We need a bus to carry passengers and earn money.
* The houses have been destroyed by rebels.
* We have no clothes
* Sometimes we return when we are loaded with food and fear crossing the shaky bridge.

**Progress**

* Families in the camps were given blankets and second hand clothes.

**Priorities for the new decade**

* We need land to plant coffee to get money.
* We need plates. Since we left our homes during the war, everything remained there.
* Make family planning services available to all households so that parents can have few children who they can afford to look after.
* Provide electricity in all urban places.
* We need good leaders.
* School leavers should get employment in order to assist their parents and their families.
* See to it that we children who finish school get employed so that we can help and support our parents who paid our school fees.
* Develop our skills so we can work for ourselves.
* We need good bedding, clothes and shoes.
* We need money for business for our parents.
* We should have good clean roads which do not make our uniforms dirty.
* We need iron sheets to rebuild homes destroyed by rebels.
* Our bridge should be constructed.
**Recommendations**

- Support road construction for easy transportation of our children.
- Give us hybrid goats, cows and chicken so we can earn better incomes.
- Encourage clubs for developing skills.
- Encourage truth, transparency and sincerity among the leaders - no corruption and embezzlement.
- Leaders should support local initiatives made towards achieving promises and goals.
- We need support and transport to reach more people in the communities.
- The government should provide us with mattresses and blankets.
- Provide employment to the learned.
- Ensure a good road network.
- We still need more help from Save the Children so that we can do more in the community.

**6. CHILD RIGHTS AND PROTECTION:**

*EDG: Legal protection of the rights of all children*

Parents still need to be sensitised on children's rights. Progress has been made in fighting cases of rape and defilement although cases still get stuck with the Police or in the courts and there are a lot of out of court settlements. Girls are still neglected by their parents who think all they are good for is marriage. The children feel they would be better protected if the war ended because some of them have been abducted and many feel very insecure.

- The parents take the new blankets leaving us children with old, small ones because they also do not have.
- Boys always decide for themselves and parents respect their decisions.
- Children lack parental care
- Most children are overworked by their parents.
- Children are abducted
- Children do not know their rights
- Children are not cared for by the parents and end up becoming thieves, going for opium (drugs) and sexual intercourse.
- Most local councillors do not care and the law of children is not working

**Progress**

- The Government is trying but when it goes away or after directing what should be done, the whole process is let down by some local councillors.
- Rape cases have reduced.

**i) Problems girls face**

- Every time she comes home from school her father abuses her and discourages her from going to school. He says that since she is a girl anytime she will get pregnant and waste her father's money.
- Stubborn grown up girls do not want to dig for money or go to school. They depend on boys.
- When girls go to school, they face problems like parents do not buy pens, books, uniform for them. The parents say they are fit to get married and get their own money and children.
- Girls are enticed by the new things which were not in their villages/mountains.
- Girls are involved in prostitution
- Girls are not able to say no because they are shy and obedient. Boys are able to speak out for themselves.
- Girls have no time for reading because they are engaged in domestic chores.
- Girls are viewed as maturing faster than boys and therefore feel they have to fend for themselves at an earlier age than boys.
*The girl should start getting used to situations of going hungry sometimes because she will get married soon.
*Men go out with school children and later dump them. In case of defilement, parents and local councillors usually settle the case outside the courts. The laws are equally useless.
*In this period of displacement, some girls have been married off for dowry since the family needs can no longer be solved by selling off farm produce.

**Progress**
*Before UPE, girls were always sent home for fees.

**ii) Women Rights**

EDG: The achievement of policy solutions to problems that are equitable to all groups, particularly women...

*In the old days, the men would beat our mothers but now the mothers can report to the Local Councils and the men are arrested.
*The war has slowed down progress towards women empowerment

**Priorities For The New Decade**
*We want a war-free Uganda and security so that we do not have to keep running and dying.
*Look for all means possible to end the war so that we can go back to our land. Chase away all rebels.
*We need co-operation with our neighbouring countries.
*Train trainers on child rights and meet youth needs.
*Promote women's rights.

**Recommendations**
*The government should teach the parents and the community about children's rights.
*We need good leadership from our local councillors.
*We should all be educated.
*Children should be given their rights.
*We children should be consulted because you do not know what we want.
*We should have children on the executive committee of the district so that our fellow children deliver information to us in time.

7. **CHILDREN IN DIFFICULT CIRCUMSTANCES:**

EDG: Protection from abuse, neglect and exploitation of children who are not cared for or supported by parents or relatives

More needs to be done to support the children with disabilities and the orphans. Disabled children especially the dumb are kept at home. There are more orphans now because of HIV/AIDS, some of whom have to look after themselves because no one is willing to take them in and there are no programmes catering for them. Those who get taken in often end up doing all the domestic chores in the new home instead of going to school.

**i) The disabled**

EDG: Protection of the rights of children with disabilities to equal access to health services, education and freedom from discrimination

*The disabled are not cared for. However, the law is improving the problem although a lot still needs to be done.
*When the leg or hand is not straight, or is bent in a funny way, then children give you names.
*Some children like those who cannot speak are not brought to school.

**ii) Orphans**

**EDG: Protection from abuse, neglect and exploitation of children who are not cared for or supported by parents or relatives**

*Orphans are not treated properly and are used as domestic workers/porters.
*Orphans are overworked while biological children are seated at home.
*When our parents die, no one takes care of us. Orphans take care of themselves
*When I go early to school, I am not given food when I return home because they say I have done no work.
*Men marry many wives and when one of the wives dies, her children suffer.
*The girl orphan suffers more than the boy orphan because she obeys but the boys refuse to work.
*The boys do not think about their dead parents like the girls. Girls think a lot.
*Men marry many wives and keep on marrying young girls who have AIDS then it is spread to everyone. The many wives also begin killing each other with witchcraft. These are the causes of parents’ death and eventually orphanhood.

**8. THINGS CHILDREN THINK THEY CAN DO:**
Most of these ideas were given by the 14-24 year olds.

*The youth should create jobs and not wait for the Government to provide jobs.
*The youth should know first what brought poverty. This is because our parents did not care. They should not be like them.
*Youth should come up with clubs for generating money.
*We as the youth if given support and trained, can teach the community.
*Times have changed; we need and should work hard. Our parents did not need to work as hard.
*Support us to travel to other areas to teach others through drama.
*As children we should have a heart to help our parents e.g. like constructing a pit latrine at home.
*We should clear the roads and paths in our villages.
*As children who have learnt about sanitation and hygiene, we should go to our parents and educate them so that our homes and lives improve.

**WHAT CAN BE DONE - TO STOP WAR**
* Each family should have a gun to protect and fight against rebels.
* Soldiers should guard our gardens because the rebels come and take our food.
* Find means to end the war so that we go back home.
* Soldiers should be well-equipped to fight rebels.
* Give us food because we share our food with rebels.