

**PREVENTION AND REINTEGRATION OF FORMER CHILD SOLDIERS IN
NORTHERN UGANDA PROJECT**

Forgiveness and Reconciliation Workshop Report

The ESPERE Methodology

Joint Partnership between Goldin Institute and Arigatou International Nairobi

JANUARY 2015 NARRATIVE REPORT

Table of Contents

1.0 Background.....	3
2.0 Workshops' overview.....	3
2.1 Workshop I: Workshop with victims and survivors of Lukodi Massacre	3
2.2 Workshop II: Workshop with school teachers	4
2.3 Proceedings of the workshops	4

1.0 Background

Northern Uganda has been undergoing reconstruction slowly since 2006 when relative peace returned. The over twenty year's civil war contributed to a number of post war challenges that are still experienced to date. High number of suicide cases are still being reported in addition to many other issues such as street children menace in major trading centers who include former child soldiers and children of returnees rejected by their own communities. Domestic violence and over drinking among men leading to feelings of hopelessness are common place in Northern Uganda. The traditional leadership that would otherwise have stepped in has been rendered weak.

In light of the above background Goldin Institute and Arigatou International sponsored forgiveness and reconciliation workshops targeting communities that greatly suffered atrocities (massacres) committed by the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA). Schools and community members were the target of these trainings. They included schools offering vocational skills training to formerly abducted persons, child mothers, children with special needs and schools with cases of acute indiscipline. The workshops followed the ESPERE model of forgiveness and reconciliation aimed at creating a peaceful environment within Northern Uganda. They were conducted by the Acholi Religious Leaders Peace Initiative (ARLPI), working closely with the Interreligious Council of Uganda (IRCU) - both based in Uganda.

2.0 Workshops' overview

Four workshops were planned for, and this report highlights activities of the first two which took place between January and early February 2015 in the District of Gulu. All the facilitators were products of the first workshop that was facilitated by Lissette Mateus from the Foundation for Forgiveness and Reconciliation- Colombia in June 2014.

2.1 Workshop I: Workshop with victims and survivors of Lukodi Massacre

On May 19, 2004, the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) raided, and carried out a massacre that led to the death of over sixty people. Lukodi is located seventeen kilometers north of Gulu town, in Gulu District. It is one of the many villages in Northern Uganda that suffered from persistent LRA attacks, leading to the death of several people. Most of the people of Lukodi were able to return to their homes after relative peace returned in late 2008. Forgiveness and reconciliation were thus deemed necessary for this still traumatized community.

The workshop took place at Lukodi Primary School, Bungatira Sub County; Gulu District from January 21 to January 28, 2015. Participants were members of the *Lukodi Reconciliation Team* a group comprising victims and survivors of the Lukodi Massacre. Except for two teachers, all the other thirteen participants could only read and /or write in their local language. Despite this challenge, trainer' patience and the great interest and enthusiasm shown by the participants led to a very

successful completion of all eleven modules. The community showed interest in the program and in fact offered a classroom for the seven days sessions at no cost. The closing ceremony of the first workshop was attended by Retired Bishop Macleod Baker Ochola II. The workshop was facilitated by Okello Denis Kilama, Omony Geoffrey and Carolyne Adong.

2.2 Workshop II: Workshop with school teachers

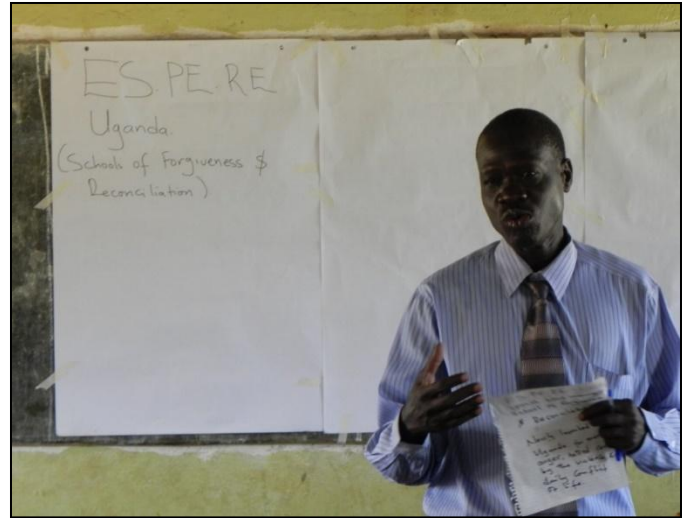
The workshop was carried out at Laroo Boarding Primary School in Laroo Division; Gulu Municipality from January 26 to February 1, 2015. Facilitators during this workshop were Okot Pius, Vincent Lawiri and Obada Julius. Participants consisted of 15 teachers from five (5) Primary Schools; Laroo Boarding, which offers vocational skills to child mothers, street children and formerly abducted persons, Laroo Primary School which caters for pupils with hearing impairment, Laliya school, Gulu Town Primary School which caters for children with extreme indiscipline and those with special needs; and Gulu Prison primary school. Out of the 15 invited teachers, 8 were female while 7 were male. Sheik Musa Khalil (Vice Chairperson ARLPI) presided over the closing ceremony.

2.3 Proceedings of the workshops

The ESPERE methodology uses a standard procedure in its approach to the process of forgiveness and reconciliation. This means that similar activities occurred in both workshops.



Trainers, Participants, Retired Bishop Macleod Baker Ochola II and Coordinator of ARLPI



Mr. Atube Albino Nyeko, head teacher of Lukodi Primary School giving welcome remarks

Module 1: I participate in the birth of ESPERE

The cobweb approach was used to help participants understand the ESPERE methodology and to gauge their level of understanding and alertness. Participants highlighted their personal qualities after which each was asked to connect with another participant using a string and repeat what he or she had mentioned about his/her qualities. There was much laughter as most participants either mentioned different qualities or could not repeat what was said by the other participant. This alerted the trainers to remain keen throughout the training to ensure active listening, attentiveness and understanding of readings, questions and all other activities.



Participants and Mr. Okulu Gipson, a local leader laughing during the interesting cobweb exercise

Participants were grouped into small groups of three termed the “Grupino”. In this groups, participants find a safe space to share some of the experiences that have deeply traumatized or hurt them. Remembering those experience elicited various reactions within participants as shared by them: ‘It reminded me of what happened’, ‘I still think it will happen again’, ‘I realized it will never get out of my mind till death’, ‘I still see death because I recalled the night when the incident happened while I was blind folded’, ‘I felt pity as I was listening to what others went through’, ‘I recalled the massacre which I never wanted to think of again’, ‘I almost cried’ etc.



Participants sharing their case - both pleasant and unpleasant in their Grupinos



Participants make commitment to participate in the birth of ESPERE

The participants actively developed rules for the seven days' workshop that all of them signed and made commitment to respect throughout the training.



Participants make workshop governing rules

Module 2: I go from Darkness to the light:

With lots of plays during this session, participants learned and recognized how aggression affects emotions, thoughts and behavior as well as determining the consequences of pain on physical and emotional health. In the story of Lius the invisible, participants were able to identify few things that were making Lius invisible amongst which were mistreatment by his mother and not loving and caring for him.

Notably, some of the participants basing on Lius story, narrated how they helped their fellows out of darkness in to the light. Carolyne's story illustrates this: *"My mum was ignored and left to die at home when she was extremely sick, I then cried hysterically which drew the attention of the people and she was rushed to the hospital where she underwent operation and with God's grace she recovered"*

One of the male participants narrated how he helped his friend who wanted to commit suicide in his village.



Participants demonstrating the consequences of aggression

However, at the end, participants after realizing how rage blinds us and prevents us from seeing clearly made a commitment to help others come out of the darkness generated by rage. See pictures below.



Module 3: I decide to forgive

Participants were led through a process of alternatives and making choices by choosing and picking unknown wrapped items. Each colour was a symbol of an alternative leading to forgiveness.



Participants choosing from many options as they observe and feel the unknown wrapped item

At the end of session participants chose forgiveness and made commitment of hope as illustrated in the pictures below.



Participants make a commitment of hope

Module 4: I see with new eyes

Using pictures with the capacity to generate different responses from different people, participants were taught to view issues from different perspectives to gain clearer understanding noting that no two people will interpret a similar thing or situation in the same way. Likewise people commit offenses for reasons that may seem justified to the offenders at the time and which need to be understood.



Participants share their views and perspectives of the pictures

Masks were worn to illustrate how falsely our perception blinds us from viewing others accurately. Participants at the end made a commitment to look at others especially their offenders with new eyes having gained a new positive perspective of them and with knowledge that they also offend others.



Module 5: I understand my offender (Empathy)

Participants were asked to write both positive and negative qualities of their offender. Most participants indicated they found it simple to describe the negative aspects than the positive ones which were also much fewer. They also represented their offenders with the image of an object. Some drew snakes, others monkeys, tortoises etc.



Participants drawing representations of their offenders



Participants modeling representations of their offenders



Participants imagining a meeting with their offenders and the discussion envisaged

Module 6: I break chain and wash away the pain



Participants making a commitment to forgive by washing away the pain



Participants filled with joy after completing Forgiveness part of ESPERE Modules

At the end of the forgiveness modules of ESPERE program, two participants got relieved as a result of the knowledge they attained during the training. The gentleman in the picture below never thought he could forgive his offender who had died long time ago. But with the knowledge gained from the ESPERE program, Mr. Opira had this to say, *“I kept on wondering and asking myself from time to time how i could ever forgive my offender who had died long time ago till when i underwent the 6 modules of ESPERE program.”*



The lady beside him had never experienced peace of mind ever since she was offended and had been living in anger and bitterness. The forgiveness lessons provided her with a way to approach her offender especially after realizing that she (offender) lacked the courage to ask her for forgiveness. She expressed a sense of emotional relief.

Reconciliation Process

Reconciliation is the way towards rebuilding of trust through dialogue.

Module 7: Building truth and principles

Reconciliation comprises elaboration of a series of principles for dialogue of narratives between the victim and the aggressor from an ethical point of view. Victim and aggressor agree on the path their relationship will follow from that moment on, based on the principles they have explored and accepted.

During the workshop, participants shared a number of principles and values in groups. Through discussions they agreed on what each principle meant to them. This process helped participants to understand the process of establishing certain principles to guide the new relationship with their offender.



Participants with written examples of principles

In the discussions, each participant reflected on their case and determined which of the principles were broken by the offense.

Using what is called the flower of life, the trainer described how life is beautiful, worth living and worth protecting. Participants were then shown how breaking of one or two principles affected the balance of the group or the tree of life. It emphasized to the participants the need to keep rebuilding broken principles for personal and societal good.



Strengthening principles: the flower of life

Module 8: Caring and protecting the life and principles of others

On inflated balloons each participant wrote his/her cherished principles. The balloons were then exchanged and participants were then to seek to deflate the others balloons as they protect the one they received which bore the principles of the other. Allowing the balloon that one held to be damaged, implied less care for the principles of others and vice versa.



Module 9: Rebuilding and restoring the broken principles

Restoration of the principles that shape a relationship is at the heart of reconciliation in ESPERE. The act of restoration may be in the form of an apology, a symbolic act of reparation or even the giving of something tangible as ways of recognizing that an offence was committed. However, none of them can restore the past relationship to where it was before the offence took place. Fundamentally, the principle of reconciliation is the re-establishment of some kind of relationship, be it coexistence, cohabiting or communion, framed by a regulator of principles. Establishing principles thus becomes the glue that holds the relationship henceforth.

A pot on whose surface participants wrote their principles was broken by the facilitator to remind them that time and again principles that hold relationships may be broken. The beneficial thing to do would be to continuously restore the principles.





Participants represent their principles with different colors and restore symbolically the broken principles

Module 10: Dialogue and Reconciliation Pact

A pact is an agreement explained as a dialogue in which the commitments and the features of the new relationship that begins are defined. A pact expresses the principles on which said pact is based.

Participants were taken through the process of reconciliation with explanations on the three types of reconciliation, namely: -coexistence, cohabiting and communion.

In ESPERE, care is considered the most important element in reconciliation since it prevents aggression and heals the wounds caused by aggression. Both parties must seek opportunities to express care to the other



Participants use puppets to indicate the reconciliation type chosen (coexistence, cohabiting, and communion) as per their offence

Module 11: Memories and Celebration

To forget totally is impossible because the wounds received mark our existence and the scars remain.

The memory traps the victim and influences his view and approach to life- always influenced by the offence received. So it stands to reason that revisiting the memory, reworking it with new forms of interpretation, is a liberating process. The new memory goes back to the past to liberate the victim's identity. The new memory helps new roles and principles to come into being and renew the existing ones, creating a new relationship between the actor and his audience. Working towards a collective memory helps parties to enter into the state of communion with freedom, solidarity and peace. The new memory becomes a life plan that overcomes pain and death. In bringing back the facts, this collective memory becomes both regenerative and creative. The passivity of the victim's resentment is replaced by the creativity of the new narratives that sows the seeds for a new relationship.



a. A demonstration of impossibility being made possible



b. Bishop Ochola closing the workshop