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DEPARTMENT OF LABOR

Independent Midterm Evaluation of the Opportunities for Reducing Adolescent and Child Labor Through Education (ORACLE) Project

International Rescue Committee
Cooperative Agreement Number: E-9-K-3-0053



2006

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Dr. Florence Kiragu Nyamu
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LIST OF ACRONYMS

| | |
|--------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| AVSI | <i>Associazione Volontari per il Servizio Internazionale</i> |
| BCP | Brick Laying and Concrete Practice |
| CCT | Center Coordinating Tutor |
| CDO | Community Development Officer |
| C&J | Carpentry and Joinery |
| COPE | Complementary Opportunities for Primary Education |
| CVC | Community Volunteer Counselor |
| DEO | District Education Officer |
| DIS | District Inspector of Schools |
| ESIP | Education Strategic Investment Plan |
| FAC | Formerly Abducted Children |
| IDP | Internally Displaced Person |
| IGA | Income-Generating Activity |
| ILO | International Labour Organization |
| IPEC | International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour |
| IRC | International Rescue Committee |
| KURET | Kenya, Uganda, Rwanda, Ethiopia Together |
| LC | Local Council |
| LRA | Lord's Resistance Army |
| MDGs | Millennium Development Goals |
| MoES | Ministry of Education and Sports |
| MGLSD | Ministry of Gender, Labor and Social Development |
| NFE | Nonformal Education |
| NREF | Northern Region Education Forum |
| NGO | Nongovernmental Organization |
| ORACLE | Opportunities for Reducing Adolescent and Child Labor Through Education |
| PEAP | Poverty Eradication Action Plan |
| PTC | Primary Teachers' College |
| UCE | Ugandan Certificate of Education |
| UNICEF | United Nations Children's Fund |
| UPE | Universal Primary Education |

| | |
|-------|-------------------------------|
| USDOL | U.S. Department of Labor |
| USE | Universal Secondary Education |
| WFP | World Food Programme |

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The consequences of the continuing war in Northern Uganda have contributed to an increase in the number of internally displaced persons (IDPs), destruction of infrastructure and traditional families, increasing levels of poverty, and more importantly, increasing incidences of child labor, exploitation, abuse, and defilement. The latest statistics indicate that more than 25,000 children have been abducted since the start of the conflict and more than 30,000 children who have survived the conflict commute to towns, trading centers, and Catholic missions at night to escape abduction, murder, and rape in the rural settings. With more than 800,000 people living in emergency or IDP camps, access to education, health care, and water and sanitation facilities are grossly inadequate and large populations are exposed to dangerous health hazards, including the HIV and AIDS scourge.

The Government of Uganda has put in place mechanisms for addressing the education of vulnerable children in the Northern region, the latest of which is the Strategic Framework for Education for All in the conflict and post-conflict districts, prepared by the Ministry of Education and Sports in 2004. The creation of a Special Needs Unit within the Ministry of Education and Sports in 1999 and a Child Labor Unit in the Ministry of Gender, Labor, and Social Development are some of the key strategies in addressing the worst forms of child labor and strengthening the education of vulnerable children. The government recognizes the importance of partnerships in the provision of education and has created a welcoming environment for nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and other agencies that are keen to provide education services.

With funding from the U.S. Department of Labor (USDOL), the International Rescue Committee (IRC) is implementing with its partner, *Associazione Volontari per il Servizio Internazionale* (AVSI), a project aimed at reducing the worst forms of child labor through education. Known as “Opportunities for Reducing Adolescent and Child Labor Through Education” (ORACLE), the project is implemented by AVSI in Kitgum District and by IRC in Pader District. The expected results or outcomes include the improvement of the (1) awareness and attitudes of parents, teachers, children, and community leaders on problems of child labor, importance of education, and their roles in bringing about change, with special reference to girls education; (2) quality and relevance of education in conflict-affected areas; and (3) access to education for vulnerable children and other children at risk of exploitation in target districts.

Sensitization of parents, teachers, community leaders, and children focuses on the importance of education, the worst forms of child labor, importance of education of the girl-child, the role and participation of parents and the community in promoting education of their children, child rights and quality education. For improvement of quality of education, IRC and AVSI have distributed textbooks; teachers’ guides; science and laboratory materials and kits; school uniforms; scholastic kits to pupils that include a school bag, exercise books, pencils, mathematical sets, toothpaste, toothbrush, sanitary pads for the adolescent girls; and paid school fees. Teachers have been trained on psychosocial skills, hygiene and sanitation and reproductive health to enable them to assist formerly abducted and traumatized children.

Under the ORACLE project, alternative learning programs have been initiated for formerly abducted children and child-mothers. Child-mothers are encouraged to bring their babies to class. Vocational programs in carpentry and joinery (C&J), brick laying and concrete practice (BCP), tailoring and garment cutting, catering, and hotel management have been initiated to enhance the acquisition of skills.

The ORACLE project is well integrated into the system of education, both at the national and at the district level. The collaboration between the organizations implementing the ORACLE project and the government is stronger at the district level, and the district and sub-county leaders have embraced the project sufficiently well. At the national level, the main challenge is the collaboration between the ORACLE project and the Child Labor Unit. IRC is working on strategies for strengthening the unit, including training and hiring additional staff, to enhance collaboration. Communities visited appear to have accepted the ORACLE project and fully endorsed it. Participation in the evaluation meetings and composition of songs and skits with messages on the worst forms of child labor and importance of education served as evidence that the communities have embraced the project. The use of a variety of media for community sensitization has greatly contributed to reaching many people.

The ORACLE project has had a great impact on the parents, children, teachers, and communities in terms of changing attitudes toward the worst forms of child labor, creating positive attitudes toward girls' education, and improving the quality of education and the quality of life for the beneficiaries. Through the ORACLE project, parents have been able to distinguish between exploitative child labor and non-exploitative/non-hazardous child work,¹ and knowledge of child rights has led to reduced cases of child abuse and defilement.² Provision of textbooks and scholastic materials, training of teachers on psychosocial skills, hygiene and sanitation and reproductive health, and have all improved the overall quality of education. The graduates of the vocational training programs are better able to manage their lives and support their children or siblings. This is particularly important for the children heading families.

At midterm, the ORACLE project is on track and has already exceeded set targets at the secondary school level. The main challenge the project faces is the increasing demand given the vulnerability levels of the communities and the unpredictable security situation. At the inception of the project, it was hoped that the security situation would improve. This has not happened and access to certain areas and follow-up of individual beneficiaries has become unpredictably and labor-intensive.

¹ Child work refers to chores that children are expected to perform in their home as part of growing up and as part of helping their parents. For example, washing their clothes, cleaning the house, gardening, cooking, and tending to animals as appropriate. Child labor refers to work done by children for pay, outside the home, including use of children in armed conflict and sex slavery.

² The sensitization of the parents and communities has led to "community policing or neighborhood watch" on child defilement and child abuse, where parents report on neighbors.

Both IRC and AVSI are keen to make the project sustainable. IRC is working on a sustainability strategy. It is suggested that the development of an exit strategy will ensure a smooth transition.³

It is clear from the discussions with IRC staff that an increase in the budget (additional costs of travel for monitoring have led to over-expenditure) will be needed to ensure that the activities planned for in the fourth year are undertaken.

Stakeholders have made a number of recommendations for the remaining phase of the ORACLE project. There is a definite need to focus more specifically on training of female teachers and revamp the strategies for increasing girls' enrollment at all levels. In all the schools visited, the number of female teachers was significantly lower than that of male teachers. In one school, there was not a single female teacher. The presence of female teachers is important especially as role models for girls. This is definitely in line with one of the expected outcomes of the project, to bring about change in education, with special reference to girls' education. In addition to the Kitgum Core Primary Teachers' College (PTC), other training colleges such as Kyambogo Teachers' College could be used for training girls and young women as teachers. A focus could be made on girls and young women who have dropped out from secondary school to be trained to teach lower levels of primary schools. Girls in secondary school could also be targeted for remedial or bridging courses with a view toward improving their performance in crucial subjects such as mathematics, science, and English, so as to make them eligible for admission into teacher training colleges.

To reduce poverty and ensure that sponsored students continue with school after the sponsorship of one or two years, it is important to consider initiating some income-generating activities for the beneficiaries and their families. There is a general consensus among the beneficiaries that the project should be extended for another period of five years, with expanded support for secondary school from S1 to S4.⁴ Efforts should be made to continue with community sensitization on the themes of child labor issues, child rights, importance of education to children, importance of girls' education, quality education, and the role that parents should play in the education of their children as it yields great gains in the reduction of the worst forms of child labor and increases enrollment in education for all in general, and for girls in particular.

³ An exit strategy in this context refers to a handover process of the ORACLE project activities to the community. A sustainability strategy is intended for instituting mechanisms to ensure that the communities own the project activities and can continue with the similar activities even after the ORACLE project ends.

⁴ S1 refers to the first year of high school, S2 to the second year, S3 to the third year, and S4 to the fourth year. The Ugandan System of Education has four years of high school and an additional two years of advanced-level study before joining university. A national examination taken at the end of S4 determines whether a student will join advanced-level study. Another examination taken at the end of the advanced level determines entry into university.

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I INTRODUCTION

1.1 UGANDA

Uganda has a population of 27.3 million, which is predominately rural, and its population density is highest in the southern regions. The most important part of Uganda's economy is agriculture, employing more than 80 percent of the workforce (13.17 million according to a 2005 estimate).⁵

In the late 1980s and 1990s, Uganda became identified as an African success story, having overcome the violent years of rule under dictators Idi Amin and Milton Obote and the AIDS epidemic. Since mid-2002, however, Uganda is once again drawing international attention for gross human rights violations and the untold suffering of its people. The war in Acholi and between the rebel Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) and the Ugandan Government, which has raged on since 1986, has escalated significantly since June 2002, and renewed LRA attacks within Northern Uganda have been the most brutal and destructive in the history of the conflict. The number of Ugandans displaced from their homes has more than tripled in two years, increasing from 450,000 in early 2002 to more than 1.6 million today. Nearly 80 percent of the population in the north is displaced.⁶

1.2 EFFECTS OF THE WAR AND CHILD SOLDIERS

The longstanding civil war in Northern Uganda has shattered the agrarian economy, education system, and health care infrastructure, eroded Acholi culture, and instilled a constant state of fear among the population. More than 1.6 million people within the districts of Gulu, Kitgum, Pader, Lira, Apac, Soroti, Katakwi, Kaberamaido, and Adjumani are displaced, partly as a result of a Government strategy to relocate people into "protected villages."⁷ Because of pervasive insecurity, approximately 85 percent of the displaced population in Northern Uganda does not have adequate access to humanitarian assistance.

The LRA's main method of recruitment is abduction of children, usually between the ages of 5 and 12, from their schools, homes, and villages. Some believe that the LRA uses children to build its ranks because, "they are impressionable enough to brainwash, big enough to carry a gun, and plentiful enough to create huge masses of fighters."⁸ It is estimated that almost half of LRA's combatants are abducted children and that more than 20,000 children have been kidnapped since the conflict began. The children are forced to endure tremendous hardship, psychological trauma, and sexual abuse. According to Convention Number 182 of the International Labour Organization (ILO), recruitment of children for use in armed conflict and sex slavery is considered a worst form of child labor.⁹

⁵ CIA. 2006. *The World Fact Book*. Available at <http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/ug.html>.

⁶ IRC: IRC in Uganda 2006. Available at http://www.theirc.org/where/the_irc_in_uganda.html.

⁷ IRC: IRC in Uganda 2006.

⁸ Abels, A. (ed.). 2005. The invisible children of northern Uganda. *Silver Chips Online*, 68(3). Available at <http://silverchips.mbhs.edu/inside.php?sid=6012>.

⁹ ILO Convention No. 182 is available at <http://www.ilo.org/ilolex/cgi-lex/convde.pl?C182>.

1.3 NATIONAL RESPONSE¹⁰

The constitution of Uganda (Articles 34–45) and the subsequent Children’s Statute (No. 6, 1996) provide the legal framework to protect children from social and economic exploitation. The Ugandan government has also put in place a number of programs and policies as part of a framework to eliminate child labor—

- Uganda has been a member of ILO-IPEC since 1998, and in 1999 established a program to eliminate child labor. The country also ratified ILO Convention 182, prohibiting the worst forms of child labor.
- The Ministry of Gender, Labor and Social Development (MGLSD) has established the child labor unit to assist in developing policy, and a National Steering Committee with the purpose of coordinating efforts addressing child labor and its root causes.
- The Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES) is addressing child labor through its education programs. The government has developed a framework entitled the Poverty Eradication Action Plan (PEAP). PEAP is a planning tool that recognizes basic education, especially for vulnerable children, as a means of empowerment. Under MoES, the government has also put in place the following structures:
 - The Education Strategic Investment Plan (ESIP), which is part of PEAP. This plan commits the government to allocate one-quarter of public expenditure to the education sector.
 - The Complimentary Opportunities for Primary Education (COPE) targets specific groups such as orphans, children affected by armed conflict, and children in nomadic communities. This program was established in 1995.
 - The Universal Primary Education (UPE), which has the objective of improving access and quality of education by exempting each family from payment of school fees for all children in the family. This was introduced in 1997.
 - The Nonformal Education (NFE) started in 2001. This has initiated holiday programs covering trauma and has facilitated children’s recovery from trauma.
 - The Strategic Framework for Education for all in the conflict and post-conflict districts started in 2004.

Despite the strides that have been made by the Ugandan government in creating policies and frameworks to access and abolish the situation of child labor, the effects are still yet to be felt in the northern parts of the country that are most affected by the LRA war.

¹⁰ IRC, ORACLE Project Document: pp. 2–3.

II THE ORACLE PROJECT

The ORACLE project was started in August 2003 as a four-year project funded by the U.S. Department of Labor (USDOL), with the aim of reducing the worst forms child labor in Northern Uganda by means of improving access to quality education. The project is led by the International Rescue Committee (IRC) in partnership with *Associazione Volontari per il Servizio Internazionale* (AVSI).

2.1 PROJECT RESULTS/OUTCOMES

The expected results or outcomes of the ORACLE project are the improvement of the:

- **Awareness** and attitudes of parents, teachers, children, and community leaders on problems of child labor, importance of education, and their roles in bringing about change, with special reference to girls' education.
- **Quality** and relevance of education in conflict affected areas.
- **Access** to education for vulnerable children and other children at risk of exploitation in target districts.

To achieve these objectives, the ORACLE project undertakes the following activities:

- Improving community awareness and attitudes by conducting a baseline survey; building capacity among stakeholders; sensitizing the community via radio/drama programming, and community sensitization campaigns led by local partners.
- Enriching the quality of education through sponsorship of students at Primary Teachers' Colleges and unqualified teachers under the Teacher Development and Management system; provision of teaching materials for the Primary Teachers' College and Scholastic Teaching and Learning Material Kits for Primary and Secondary schools; and training in teaching and psychosocial, hygiene and sanitation, reproductive health, and child-centered methodology.
- Ensuring access to education through support to primary students; sponsorship of remedial education, secondary education, vocational, and Nonformal classes; and market research on skills needed in the district.

2.2 PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION

The ORACLE project is currently implemented in two districts in Northern Uganda: Kitgum and Pader districts.

2.2.1 Kitgum District

Kitgum district is located 433 kilometers north of Kampala—the capital city of Uganda—covering an area of 977.63 square kilometers. There are two counties in the district, namely Lamwo and Chua comprising 18 sub-counties and one urban council. The district has a population of 307,820 (est. 2004/2005). Before the LRA war, 90 percent of the population had a livelihood in agriculture. Currently, approximately 44 percent of the population now lives in Internally Displaced Peoples (IDP) camps.¹¹

2.2.2 Pader District

Pader is one of the newest districts in Uganda, having been created in December 2001. It was carved out of Kitgum district and is composed of two counties, namely Agago and Aruu. As a result of the LRA war, Pader experiences a lot of spontaneous demographic change, including much of the local population in camps and the influx of Sudanese refugees. Currently, Pader district has an approximate population of 326,884 people, of which 283,988 people live in IDP camps.

2.3 PROJECT STRUCTURE

The project is led by the IRC, and in partnership with IRC, AVSI implements the project in Kitgum.

2.3.1 International Rescue Committee

IRC was founded in 1933. As a world leader in relief, rehabilitation, protection, post-conflict development, resettlement services, and advocacy for those uprooted or affected by violent conflict and oppression, IRC works in 25 countries, and delivers lifesaving aid in emergencies, rebuilds shattered communities, cares for war-traumatized children, rehabilitates health care, water and sanitation systems, reunites separated families, restores lost livelihoods, establishes schools, trains teachers, strengthens the capacity of local organizations and institutions, develops civil society and good-governance initiatives, and promotes human rights.¹²

IRC started its operation in Uganda in 1998 in the Northern District of Kitgum, which formerly encompassed Pader. The major areas of intervention include the provision of water and sanitation to IDP camps and institutions, development of psychosocial programs designed to address the problems of former child soldiers and formerly abducted children, their reintegration

¹¹ Uganda Communication Commission: District Information Portal—Kitgum 2003.

¹² International Rescue Committee: 2004 Annual Report.

into the community, provision of counseling, education, and skills training.¹³ IRC implements the ORACLE project in Pader District.

2.3.2 *Associazione Volontari per il Servizio Internazionale*

Founded in 1972 in Italy, AVSI is an international, nonprofit and NGO, with the objective of promoting cultural, social, and economic development—especially in developing nations and countries in transition. AVSI cooperates with local organizations and institutions, governments, and international agencies to carry out sustainable projects and emergency relief operations. Worldwide, AVSI’s projects emphasize support to children and their families through education. In the Great Lakes region, offering education as an opportunity to avoid armed conflict has been central to AVSI projects.

AVSI has been working to improve access and quality of education in Northern Uganda since 1984, supporting Nonformal and formal education, skills training, teacher training, curricula development, and community sensitization. These activities have primarily targeted children orphaned by war and HIV/AIDS and former child soldiers who face a difficult process of reintegration and transition.¹⁴ AVSI implements the ORACLE project in Kitgum District.

The ORACLE project organizational structure is included in Annex 2.

¹³ ORACLE Project Document: p. 34.

¹⁴ ORACLE Project Document: pp. 37–38.

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III MIDTERM EVALUATION

3.1 GOAL OF THE EVALUATION

The scope of the midterm evaluation included an assessment of all activities undertaken under the USDOL Cooperative Agreement with IRC. The objectives of the evaluation were the following:

- Determine if the project was achieving the stated objectives and explain why or why not.
- Assess the impact of the project at all levels in terms of the quality improvements achieved.
- Identify lessons learned and good practices to inform future USDOL projects.

The Terms of Reference are included in Annex 3.

3.2 METHODOLOGY

A combination of methods were used for the midterm evaluation of the ORACLE project. These included the following:

- A desk review of the documents provided by Macro International Inc., USDOL, IRC Uganda and AVSI.
- In-depth discussions with officers in the implementing organizations IRC and AVSI both at the headquarters in Kampala and at the project sites, officers in KURET Uganda, focal persons in the Ministries of Education and Sports, Gender, Labor and Social Development, and an officer from ILO-IPEC project on HIV and AIDS.
- Interviews with the stakeholders including district officials, local council officials, the chiefs, the community development officers, and the community leaders (LC3 and LC5).¹⁵
- Focus group discussions with current and graduated beneficiaries including the children, parents, teachers, head teachers, women's groups, and child mothers (part of the Alternative Education Program).
- Field visits to the schools, vocational institutes, youth groups, and tailoring schools. The evaluator also visited night commuters at the Catholic Mission Hospital in Kitgum.

¹⁵ The administrative structure in each of Pader and Kitgum Districts is such that there are Local Councils (LC) at five levels. LC5 refers to the leadership at the district level, LC4 refers to leadership at the county level, LC3 at the sub-county level, LC2 at the parish level, and the lowest level is the village LC1. Each LC has a chairperson and a vice chairperson. There are Government District officers such as the District Education Officer, and the District Inspector of Schools.

- Classroom observations of the primary schools and alternative learning programs.

Sampling

The project evaluation was carried out in two districts (Kitgum and Pader) in Northern Uganda, which were identified in the June 2004 baseline survey report as the regions most affected by the war. The Bala IDP Camp in Lira was also part of the sample.

Desk Reviews

The documents studied included the Project document, the logical framework, work plans, performance monitoring plans, the baseline survey reports, the initial assessment, the beneficiary selection criteria, and the technical progress reports with an emphasis on the March and September 2005 report that contained the most recent information. A document entitled, *Strategic Framework for Education for All in Conflict and Post-conflict Districts*, prepared by the Ministry of Education and Sports, was also reviewed. Other documents available to project staff on the ground included progress reports and annual reports.

In-depth Interviews

In-depth individual interviews were carried out with staff of the implementing organizations, partners, and with beneficiaries. A total of 16 individual interviews were conducted. At the IRC office in Kampala, interviews were held with the Country Director, Education Advisor, and Assistant Education Advisor. At the IRC field office in Kitgum, the evaluator interviewed the Field Coordinator.

At the Kampala office of AVSI, interviews were held with the Country Representative. At the KURET office in Kampala, individual interviews were held with the Chief of Party, Education Advisor, and the Monitoring and Evaluation Advisor.

Among the partners, the evaluator interviewed the Assistant Commissioner in Charge of Special Needs Education at the Ministry of Education and Sports, and the Assistant Commissioner in Charge of the Child Labor Unit at the Ministry of Gender, Labor and Social Development. The evaluator also interviewed the Senior Program Officer of the ILO-IPEC Project. The evaluator conducted individual interviews with the Principal of the Kitgum Core Primary Teacher Training College, two female beneficiaries in Pader, and two male beneficiaries in Kitgum.

Focus Group Discussions

A total of 21 focus group discussions were held with different categories of people, including the IRC implementing team at Pader, the AVSI implementing team at Kitgum, district officials (District Education Officer, District Inspector of Schools, Local Councils, the Police Officer in charge of family welfare), and officials at the county, sub-county, parish and village levels in both districts. Considering that the people in the above categories are involved in the implementation of the project in one way or another, the evaluator used the 28 questions in the Terms of Reference as a guide.

Focus group discussions were also held with other categories of people including the beneficiaries of the ORACLE project, children, volunteers, head-teachers, teachers, tutors, parents, graduated beneficiaries, women's groups, and child-mothers (beneficiaries of the Alternate Education Program). Recognizing that not all the interviewees would have responses to all the 28 questions provided in the Terms of Reference, the evaluator developed key questions for each group of people to guide the discussions, which included (1) what benefits the ORACLE project has brought to them; (2) what challenges/obstacles they face in the implementation of the ORACLE project; and (3) what they recommend should be changed or corrected in the remaining phase of the project.

Field Visits

In Pader District, the evaluator visited one primary school, one learning center, one secondary school, one vocational training, and two alternative learning programs for child mothers. In Kitgum District, the evaluator visited a night commuter center,¹⁶ and two vocational institutes, one offering technical courses (BCP and C&J) and one offering modern tailoring. Field visits were also made to the Kitgum core Primary Teacher Training College, two secondary schools, two primary schools, and two learning centers.

Classroom Observations

The evaluator was able to observe some classroom settings and evaluate the education adequacy using a schedule that ORC Macro has used in the past. This schedule is included in Annex 4.

Stakeholders' Workshop

At the end of the fieldwork, the evaluator conducted a 1-day workshop in Lira, Uganda, in which preliminary findings and recommendations were presented. The workshop was attended by the district education officers from Pader and Kitgum, the staff of IRC and AVSI, the deputy country director of IRC, officers from the Ministry of Education and Sports, and beneficiaries drawn from primary and secondary schools. The presentation made at the workshop is attached separately. Through group discussions, the participants made specific recommendations, which have been integrated and summarized in the section on recommendations of this report.

A sample list of those interviewed is included in Annex 5.

¹⁶ This is a Catholic hospital where displaced persons, both adults and children, come to spend the night for safety. The children are taught at night and recently a library facility has been set up for the children.

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IV FINDINGS

4.1 GENERAL MAIN FINDINGS

The ORACLE project is well integrated into the national educational systems as well as the district systems. With focal persons at each MoES, MGLSD, and at the district offices, ORACLE has been well embraced. Although they are not involved in the budgeting, the focal persons at MoES and MGLSD agree on the work plans and facilitate visits to Northern Uganda. The focal person in the MoES is also the chairperson of the Northern Region Education Forum, a forum created in 2001 to specifically discuss issues of Education in Northern Uganda. The focal person in the MGLSD Child Labor unit provides advice to ORACLE staff on child labor issues and has recently (September 2005) invited IRC to join the National Steering Committee on Child Labor, a forum that brings together the Media and the National Council of Children. There are efforts to meet with the focal persons once every quarter and share the reports.

The warm reception at the communities, schools, training institutes and colleges, and villages, which were visited and interviewed, was an indication of the acceptance and endorsement of the ORACLE project by the beneficiaries. Through the ORACLE project, the visibility and credibility of IRC and AVSI have risen in Pader and Kitgum, respectively. The challenge is that IRC has not been able to establish an office in Pader because of an unstable security situation, thereby limiting IRC's presence.

Through the ORACLE project, several partnerships have been created. Of special mention and importance is the partnership between IRC and AVSI, two organizations that have been present in Northern Uganda for many years and that use an integrated multi-sectoral approach for humanitarian assistance. The fact that AVSI has a strong presence in Kitgum as a well-known and credible organization has increased the credibility of the ORACLE project. The recent USDOL-funded project KURET has benefited greatly from the ORACLE project, and the positive collaboration between ORACLE and KURET at the national level and at the project site synergizes the efforts. Although the partnership between ORACLE and the ILO-IPEC has been initiated, it has not developed as strongly as it otherwise should have, given that the focus of both projects is child labor and both are funded by USDOL.

The representation of ORACLE in the National Steering Committee of the Child Labor Unit since 2005 and the creation of the Northern Forum of Education in 2001 have increased opportunities for the lessons learned through ORACLE to inform the Child Labor Policy, which is yet to be finalized.

Through the ORACLE project, messages, songs, poetry, and dramas—which remain an integral part of the communities and a way of life—have been created on the importance of combating the worst forms of child labor and the importance of education especially for girl-children. The use of a variety of media personalities, print, radio, talk shows, and talking compounds,¹⁷ has increased the visibility of the ORACLE project and assisted in internalizing the messages. The

¹⁷ A talking compound is one in which messages on the importance of education and/or on the risks of child labor are written on trees, buildings, or small billboards for all to read as they plough the compound.

increased enrollment at all levels of education in both districts bears testimony that the messages have been internalized by the communities and more children who may otherwise have been at risk of child labor are now in school. There is also evidence of improved performance at the primary school leaving examination and the Uganda Certificate of Education¹⁸ as a result of the use of child-centered teaching methodologies, the empowerment of teachers, and the provision of scholastic materials. One head teacher said that the provision of reading materials and laboratory equipment has led to improved student performance.

4.2 SPECIFIC FINDINGS

The more specific findings are categorized into five broad areas: program design; project implementation; partnership and coordination; management and budget; and sustainability and impact.

4.2.1 Program Design

Integration into National Efforts

The Government of Uganda declared Universal Primary Education in 1997 and is a signatory to the international goals of “Education for All” set in Dakar in 2000. The government has also formulated laws against child abuse and child labor.¹⁹ MoES has set up a Department of Special Needs with the express mandate of addressing education of vulnerable children and children with special needs, especially girls and formerly abducted children and former child-soldiers. Recognizing the importance of addressing the issues, the unit of Special Needs has created a Northern Region Education Forum made up of District Education Officers (DEOs), District Inspectors of Schools (DISs), politicians, officers from NGOs working in the northern region, and representatives of all line ministries.

The Assistant Commissioner for the Special Needs Commission serves as the chairperson of the Region Education Forum as well as the focal person for the ORACLE project. This link serves to ensure that the project design complements existing efforts to combat the worst forms of child labor, improve quality of and access to basic education for at-risk children, and rehabilitate former child soldiers and war-affected children in Northern Uganda.

Project Strengths and Weaknesses

According to the information collected from the various stakeholders, the overall project approach and strategy has both strengths and weaknesses. The main strength is that the project complements government efforts to combat the worst forms of child labor, increase access to education for vulnerable children, and improve the quality of education. Five aspects that have made the greatest contribution to the strengths of the project are the following:

¹⁸ The Uganda Certificate of Education is the National Examination given at the end of four years of schooling at the Secondary School level.

¹⁹ A national Child Labor Policy has been formulated and is in draft form awaiting finalization.

1. The strong relationship between the project staff and the district officials in both Pader and Kitgum shows that the district officials conceive the ORACLE project to be contributing to the achievement of their own plans and targets. District officials reported that the ORACLE project is assisting them in achieving their educational objectives, especially because the project supplements the District Education Officers' efforts in improving the quality of education. The provision of textbooks, learning materials, and training of teachers are important components of education in each district. Indeed the involvement of the DISs in the monitoring of progress is a strength. The DISs visit the ORACLE project schools and monitor the activities. District officials also receive periodic reports from the project implementers. The local leaders at LC3 or LC5 levels said that the ORACLE project has improved the quality of life of the people living in IDP camps.²⁰
2. The awareness and sensitization component of the project has created a strong link between the communities and the project. The link has improved service delivery and reduced obstacles and barriers in penetrating the communities. This was evident in the songs, poems, and skits performed by the communities in both Pader and Kitgum, which carried messages on the importance of education in general, and of girls' education in particular. Examples of messages from the songs and poems by the youth group in Pader include—

“Dad do not hold my chance, I want to go to school,” “Even if I am old, I must go to school to get a better job,” and “Sensitization on children’s rights and access to education.”

Such messages have encouraged parents to send their children to school and remove them from the worst forms of child labor.

3. The fact that both IRC and AVSI are well established in the project districts has contributed to the acceptance of the project. It is the evaluator's view that the approach taken by IRC of strengthening institutional capacity through the training of teachers and the support to the schools is also an important aspect for sustainability.
4. The tailor-made vocational courses for formerly abducted children and former child-soldiers, waving the requirement of minimum education of primary seven, has assisted the children and improved the quality of lives of the young adults. Capacity building for the teachers on psychosocial skills and sanitation and hygiene has improved the discipline in schools and classroom management. The teachers interviewed confirmed that they are more confident in addressing children with special difficulties and are better able to manage classrooms with formerly abducted children.

²⁰ The adolescents who have graduated from the vocational training institutes and tailoring schools are making quality furniture and clothes for members of the community.

5. The sensitization and awareness raising that has taken place among the communities has led to innovative ways of combating the worst forms of child labor, such as the setting up of Child Protection Committees and Task Forces. There are currently a total of 12 Task Forces in Pader and two Child Protection Committees in Kitgum.

According to the discussions with the project implementing teams, the project design has a few weaknesses that are worth mentioning.

1. While the framework is global and replicable, its application in a project area with the unique characteristics of Pader and Kitgum, renders the design very rigid and inflexible. The IRC Country Director, the AVSI Country Representative, as well as the implementing teams, feel that the project framework is global and replicable but needs to be flexible enough to be tailored to the unique context of project sites. The project sites, Pader and Kitgum districts have had war for the last twenty or so years. Rebels from the Lord's Resistance Army have continued to terrorize the area leading to the displacement of people and schools.

When the project began in war-ravaged northern Uganda, the original assumption was that there was going to be a phase of reconciliation and a phase of reduced insecurity leading to an improvement in the security situation over the period of the project. This has not been the case. Instead, security has worsened, rendering some areas of Pader and Kitgum unreachable and limiting access and follow-up. Project staff reported that they have to use armed escorts or fly to the project sites, which has escalated project costs and limited the monitoring of the project. Use of the armed escorts in Pader can cost up to about US\$ 1,000 per trip if IRC is also delivering vocational education kits and scholastic materials. This factor has been included in the budget, but not to the extent necessary. Use of armed escorts includes additional limitations. Staff can only leave the office at about 10:00 a.m. and have to leave the project site by 3:00 p.m., thereby reducing the contact time with the beneficiaries in both districts.

Insecurity is the primary challenge facing the ORACLE project in northern Uganda. The project design should have been specifically tailored to address insecurity in the region. As a result of insecurity, the majority of the people in the project site area has left their homes and now lives in IDP camps. The camps are crowded and have inadequate amenities such as water and sanitation facilities. Poverty and famine are rampant in the camps. Hungry children find it difficult to concentrate in school and more importantly, parents send their children into child labor as a way of helping to feed the family.

Beneficiaries who have been given sewing machines or carpentry equipment are generally followed up by the project staff to monitor how well they are doing. Some of the beneficiaries set up individual businesses or are employed. Usually the project staff is able to initially locate them. However, displacements make continued follow-up of the beneficiaries more difficult, as a beneficiary would be in one camp at the time of training and soon after training, and then later move to a different camp in search of better opportunities or because the family has moved to a different camp. There seems to be no way that these beneficiaries can give feedback to the ORACLE project staff.

2. The support given for each child in Pader is two years, and in Kitgum the support is for one year. This time limitation has posed a challenge to the project staff and the communities as demand for increased support continues. Poverty levels are high and parents are often unable to support the children after the period of support ends.²¹

Project Achievements to Date

In the evaluator’s view, at midterm, the project is on track in terms of achieving the set targets. The targets set were realistic, but appear to be low compared with the increasing demand. At the primary school level, the project will meet the set targets during the third year, and at the secondary school and vocational training levels, the number of beneficiaries at midterm exceeds the set targets. This is as a result of increased demand.

The project has been slow in assessing the number of people that have been sensitized, in part because of mobility. The level of internal displacement at the project site, the insecurity levels, and the inadequacy of resources have contributed to a slowing down of the implementation process. The policy environment has not been conducive to sensitization especially because although schooling is free, it is not compulsory, and although child abduction is a crime, exploitative child labor is not. This means that parents or guardians cannot be prosecuted for involving their children in exploitative child labor. There is a legal framework but not set penalties. The table below compares targets set at inception and targets achieved as of September 2005.

Table 1: Targets and Achievements

| Level | 4-year Targets | Achievements (2 years) |
|-----------------------|----------------|------------------------|
| Primary | 2,000* | 1,715 |
| Secondary | 200* | 359 |
| Alternative Education | 200* | 168 |
| Vocational | 300* | 277 |

Note: Data taken from the ORACLE technical progress report for September 2005 retention statistics. The report for March 2006 had not been finalized at the time of data collection.

Targets at inception were set as—

- *Primary—500 per year
- *Secondary—50 per year
- *Alternative Education—50 per year
- *Vocational Education—75 per year

²¹ There are children who have been supported for a year or two in secondary school and have had to discontinue education without taking the national examination in S4. Others have been supported in primary school, perform well in the primary leaving examination in P7, but are unable to continue and enroll into S1 of secondary school.

Challenges in the Project Design

The project staff and beneficiaries mentioned several challenges in relation to the project design:

- **Rigidity and inflexibility:** Limiting support to one or two years is too short for sustainability, and the age limit of 18 makes it difficult to support vulnerable children who may have returned from an abduction at an older age.
- The six- or nine-month periods for the vocational courses are too short for the students to gain practical skills that would enable them to enter the competitive job market and be prepared sufficiently to perform well in the government grade tests. This is a problem because, for example, carpenters or tailors who have a government grade test certificate, have a higher probability of getting a well paying job in the public or private sector.
- It takes longer to rehabilitate formerly abducted children and some are already too old to enroll in primary school. For girl-children, it is even more difficult and there may be a need to create specific interventions targeting young girls. For formerly abducted girl-children who already have babies, it becomes more difficult to rehabilitate them because they are not easily integrated back into their families and many of them have to attend classes with their babies.
- **Definition of vulnerable children:** In the project sites, though not classified as such, almost everyone is vulnerable. For example, an orphan may be supported (in accordance with the project design), while excluding a child with a physical disability who may be more at risk of child labor.
- **Relationship with the Ministry of Gender, Labor and Social Development—**The Department of child labor within the Ministry acts as the focal point for the ORACLE project and is currently understaffed. This needs to be strengthened.²²
- **IRC does not have an office in Pader:** Although government regulations stipulate that all NGOs have offices in the areas they are operating, a special waiver has been granted to IRC because of the security situation. This makes operation difficult. In Kalongo, Parabongo sub-county, a small office has been set up at the Catholic Mission and is managed by volunteer teachers of the alternative learning school, also located in the church compound.
- **Vagueness about child labor:**²³ While many parents indicated that they now know the difference between exploitative child labor and non-exploitative/non-hazardous child work, it is clear that more clarity is required. It is expected that this will be clarified in the policy on child labor, which is still in draft form.

²² The Child Labor Unit appears to be understaffed, and IRC has offered to strengthen the unit and its link with ORACLE through hiring and training of staff.

²³ Child labor is not perceived as a crime while abduction is perceived as a crime.

- An exit strategy was not included in the project design. Although the project is well integrated into existing structures, the main threat is insecurity and hence the need for a long-term exit strategy and approach while responding to emerging challenges.

4.2.2 Project Implementation

Project Monitoring and Evaluation

The two organizations implementing the ORACLE project have developed tools and systems to monitor and evaluate project performance. These include the initial assessment form (see Annex 6), which is used to collect data on each individual child. An analysis for intervention form is completed when a decision has been made to support an individual child. Forms have been developed for follow-up of vocational beneficiaries (see Annex 7) and a record is made of the dropouts. A tool for monitoring of sensitization campaigns (see Annex 8) and a teacher-training checklist (see Annex 9) has also been developed. The established monitoring system is to follow up each beneficiary every six months until the end of the project. The tools have been revised periodically with the most recent being the synchronization of the initial assessment tool used by IRC and that used by AVSI, to include more detailed information required by USDOL on withdrawn and prevented children. Previously, the two organizations used forms with different information, but these forms have been synchronized and are included in the same form.

Challenges in the Use of Tools for Monitoring

There are several challenges that ORACLE project staff have faced both in Kitgum and Pader.

- The database provided by the USDOL is considered to not be user friendly and not customized to the specific needs of the project. Some of the details requested from the USDOL database are not readily available, making data collection and entry a time-consuming and labor-intensive exercise. Previously, AVSI has used their own database but is now entering the information into the USDOL database. IRC has also created a spreadsheet for data entry. A monitoring and evaluation expert working for both KURET and ORACLE is assisting in entering the AVSI database information into the USDOL framework, and ensuring that the information is accurate and up to date. Another challenge with the database is that when converted to an excel spreadsheet; it leaves out certain information, which renders it difficult to use for analysis and report writing.
- The project staff in Pader requested a data entry clerk; a position not originally budgeted for. There is need for budget allocation to support this position.
- Using the tools is time consuming and labor intensive. Because of mobility of the beneficiaries, it is difficult to trace some of the beneficiaries after six months. A suggestion has been made to monitor the children more frequently than six months, especially to identify the dropouts, but this will require more resources. Following up teachers in their respective schools to monitor their performance is also proving to be a challenge because some of the schools that the teachers are posted to are not accessible.

Selection of Beneficiaries

The evaluator found out that a system has been put in place for the selection of scholarship beneficiaries. The first step is the sensitization of the community and the community leaders. The sensitization covers the six themes: (1) introduction to child labor issues; (2) introduction to children's rights; (3) importance of education to children; (4) importance of girl-child education; (5) quality education; and (6) role of parents in educating their children.²⁴ A set criterion for selection is then given to the block leaders.²⁵ The set criteria includes children under the age of 18; vulnerable children and adolescents, especially girls; former child-soldiers; orphans, especially those orphaned by HIV and AIDS; children who are heads of households; child-mothers; and school dropouts. The children must be from either from Pader or Kitgum.

Child Protection Committees or Task Forces have been also been set up in each camp to assist in the identification of potential beneficiaries. An initial assessment form is completed for each potential beneficiary. The ORACLE project staff verify the information and assess whether the children meet the requirements. During the verification exercise, the local leaders, LC3 chairpersons, sub-county chiefs, and block leaders, are all involved to ensure transparency. Children are selected to ensure a balance at all levels of the community—the village (LC1), the parish (LC2), the sub-county (LC3), the county (LC4), and the district (LC5). Those who are selected have their details entered into a form that indicates the intervention, and details are then entered into the database. Not all children who were identified are selected, but the details and the initial assessment forms are kept in ORACLE files, both in soft and hard copies. The selected beneficiaries are placed in the schools or training colleges. When a uniform has been procured and other materials purchased, the children bring in their parents and community leaders when the goods are handed over and acknowledgement received. The beneficiaries receive a scholastic kit that includes a school bag, one school uniform, 10 exercise books, three writing pens, a ruler, four pencils, a mathematics set, a bar of soap, a rubber eraser, toothpaste, a toothbrush, and sanitary pads as needed.

Challenges in the Selection of Beneficiaries

According to the people interviewed, the main challenge in the selection of beneficiaries is the fact that in any given level of the community, there are many more vulnerable children than the project can support. Many vulnerable children are left out and this has led to reports that, in some cases, the block leaders tend to use their influence to ensure that certain children are selected and others, who may appear to be more at risk of child labor, are left out. It was also reported that there are cases where orphans living with guardians have had their school uniforms and scholastic materials taken from them and given to the guardians' child.

Project Indicators

The project staff have been able to collect data and report on the USDOL common indicators (i.e., withdrawal, prevention, retention, and completion). There are, however, several challenges in the field, including the following:

²⁴ The topics covered in the sensitization and training are listed in the certificate of attendance issued.

²⁵ The camps are divided into blocks and each block has a leader.

- The ORACLE project is extremely data-heavy. A lot of time is taken in collecting the data on beneficiaries who have graduated (where they are and what they are doing), and getting data on the effectiveness of the community sensitization activities.
- Mobility of beneficiaries—young people are generally mobile either in search of better opportunities or to settle in new camps, making interviews difficult.

Tracking Project Beneficiaries

Tracking the working status of each direct beneficiary is hampered by mobility of the populations and the level of insecurity that makes certain parts of the districts inaccessible.

Project Geographical Accessibility

The selection of Pader and Kitgum districts as the sites for the ORACLE project has affected the implementation process. Pader district has recently been carved out of the Kitgum district and is isolated and lacks amenities such as water, electric power, and effective sanitation. Pader is also one of the poorest districts in northern Uganda and the displacement is almost 90 percent. It is estimated that about 1,000 people die per week in the IDP camps in northern Uganda. The only hospital in Pader is in Kalongo, and it is owned by the Catholic Mission.

Displacement of schools has created new learning centers comprising three or more schools in one learning center. The infrastructure has been destroyed, communication is difficult, and distances between schools are long. Living in camps makes life difficult for people to lead lives with adequate water and sanitation. Prevalence of HIV and AIDS in northern Uganda is 11.9 percent,²⁶ compared with the national prevalence rate of 6.2 percent. The consequence of this high prevalence rate is the increasing number of orphans.

Security has been a key issue in the project area. According to the politicians, the war is reportedly over and the leader of the LRA has fled to the neighboring Democratic Republic of Congo. However, insecurity remains a key issue, and as it is not possible to access certain areas, witch usually leads to incomplete work plans.²⁷ The security situation has also limited the number of counties within the district that the ORACLE project is implemented.

The lack of a radio station in Pader makes it difficult to effectively implement community sensitization by radio. Megha FM radio based in Gulu can be used in Pader, but doing so is expensive and the costs are prohibitive to the project budget.

Project Acceptance

From the discussions held with the stakeholders, beneficiaries and implementing teams, the ORACLE project has been well accepted and embraced by the communities, and has stimulated interest and participation of the children, parents, communities, and leaders. The children have become more disciplined, neater in school uniform, and more empowered. The focus group

²⁶ Wallis, D. 2004. HIV/AIDS soars in war-torn Northern Uganda. *Reuters*.

²⁷ Incomplete work plans include follow up of beneficiaries and expansion into all counties in Pader.

discussions with children, parents, and teachers gave evidence of the interest the project has generated. Teachers and administrators, the LC leaders, and block leaders were enthusiastic and told of the benefits the ORACLE project had brought to their communities. The communities' understanding of the difference between child labor and child work has made a significant difference in the way parents relate with their children. The levels of child abuse and defilement have gone down. In Pader district, the police officer who facilitated a training workshop reported that cases of defilement had declined from 175 in 2004 to 128 in 2005, and he felt that the community sensitization activities in the ORACLE project contributed to this decline.

4.2.3 Partnership and Coordination

Relationship with Government, Local Organizations, and NGOs

From the discussions with the implementing teams, there is a positive relationship between the project and MoES. MoES created the Special Needs Unit whose mandate is to deal with education of vulnerable children, especially girl-children. The Assistant Commissioner of Special Needs within the MoES is the focal person for the ORACLE project within the Ministry. There is a lot of goodwill at the Ministry. The project has been well integrated into the priorities of the Ministry of Education, which include ensuring support for traumatized children, ensuring continuous support to the children and teachers by providing education materials and food, supporting post-primary and secondary students with scholarships, and addressing dropouts.

Recognizing the need to give adequate attention to education of vulnerable children, the Northern Region Education Forum was created in 2001 and is made up of a total of 22 districts. The members of the Forum include DISs, district labor officers, DEOs, politicians, district directors of medical services, and officers from line ministries (agriculture, internal affairs, and gender). The forum is chaired by the Assistant Commissioner Special Needs Education, who also serves as the focal point for the ORACLE project in the MoES. All NGOs operating in the districts in the Northern region are expected to be members of the Forum. The forum meets twice a year in April and November to review progress in education in the northern districts and is an opportunity to inform the partners of emerging challenges.

MGLSD also created a department of Child Labor, with the Assistant Commissioner as the focal person for the ORACLE project. The collaboration between the ORACLE project and MGLSD is weakened by inadequate staff within the Child Labor unit.²⁸ Collaboration with government officials includes facilitation of training and provision of training materials. For example, officers from the Ministry of Health facilitate sessions on reproductive health.

With some of the sub-counties inaccessible because of the high levels of insecurity, Pader has been a difficult area for NGOs to operate. In the beginning, the ORACLE staff contacted the Alliance for African Assistance in Pader to reach out to areas not covered, but they soon realized they the Alliance for African Assistance also did not have the capacity to cover those areas.

²⁸ There have been discussions between IRC and the Child Labor Unit about the need to strengthen the Child Labor Unit by training and employing more staff to enhance the collaboration for the ORACLE project.

Relationship with the Kitgum Core Primary Teachers' College

The implementation of the ORACLE project in Kitgum differs from the implementation in Pader in that in Kitgum, AVSI works closely with the Kitgum Core primary Teachers' College. There are 26 tutors involved in the ORACLE project and more than 600 student teachers (400 in pre-service and 200 in in-service programs).²⁹ The 12 pre-service tutors and 14 Center Coordinating Tutors (CCTs) assist in the training of primary school teachers on psychosocial, hygiene and sanitation, child-centered methodologies, and guidance and counseling. From the discussions with the teachers in both Pader and Kitgum, it was clear that these skills are important for handling formerly abducted children. The Kitgum Core Primary Teachers' Training College has benefited from the ORACLE project in notable ways. Through the ORACLE project, the college has acquired a generator to counter the problems associated with an unpredictable electrical power supply, and it also enables student to extend their study hours. In addition to the generator, assorted textbooks, and teaching and learning materials have been provided, which have enhanced the academic performance.³⁰ The college tutors have also become empowered through the improvement of their psychosocial skills.

Materials for extracurricular activities, such as balls and nets, have significantly boosted the games department. Individual student teachers have been assisted with examination fees and uniforms. The success of community sensitization has increased the enthusiasm of the student teachers and empowered them to create the ORACLE PTC Youth Brigades. The Brigade composes songs, drama, and poetry that are used for community sensitization.

The main challenge facing ORACLE staff in working with the Kitgum PTC is that the schedule of the college is not always synchronized with the activities of the ORACLE project. Good personal relationships have, however, made collaboration easier. For example, the Ministry of Education has a rule that no training of teachers should be done during school cycles, to avoid interrupting learning. The Kitgum district education office has relaxed the rule somewhat and some training has been conducted during the school term. Pader district has been stricter and not allowed training of teachers during the school term.

ORACLE and KURET

The ORACLE project has fostered collaboration with the USDOL-funded project KURET.³¹ The strengths of KURET are that the project is able to follow up on children, the project has a pave³² process that allows for discussion with children and their parents on what assistance they require to continue and complete their education, and the project offers a variety of education levels: nonformal, training, and quality programs.

²⁹ The pre-service is a two-year teacher training program for recent secondary school graduates leading to a Grade 3 teacher training certificate. The in-service is a three-year program targeting practicing untrained teachers who receive face-to-face residential training during the school holidays and leads to a Grade 3 certificate.

³⁰ In the year 2005, Kitgum PTC was ranked second overall in the national examinations out of 45 teacher training colleges compared with position 3rd in 2004 and 7th in 2003.

³¹ KURET is an acronym for Kenya, Uganda, Rwanda, and Ethiopia Together, a project funded by USDOL in those countries. Started in 2005, KURET has similar objectives and operates in the same region as ORACLE.

³² The pave process is a process whereby the project staff in KURET discuss with the children and their parents what assistance they require to continue and complete school.

The ORACLE and KURET projects identified areas of collaboration that include—

- Capacity building—during a training workshop for program managers on program management, the current assistant education advisor for ORACLE was invited as a facilitator.
- Training—two ORACLE staff members participated in a workshop introducing the newly drafted child labor module for teachers.
- KURET and ORACLE are developing a child labor module for teachers that will be edited by the ORACLE staff.
- The two project’s staff have coordination meetings twice a year, where they sit and plan together on what to do on the world commemoration days. For example, in 2005, during the World Day against Child Labor, the two projects collaborated, where the ORACLE staff wrote a newspaper article and the KURET staff produced the banners and the radio messages.
- One staff member, who is a monitoring and evaluation expert, works half of the time for ORACLE project and the other half for KURET.

The partnership between ORACLE and KURET has been working well. However, much more could be done, such as the following:

- Sharing of data or information needs to be implemented between the two projects.
- Joint monitoring and sharing of tools would be useful, as both projects have the same objectives and work in the same area.

The collaboration between ORACLE and the ILO-IPEC project, another USDOL-funded project, has not been sufficiently developed to build on each other’s strengths. ILO-IPEC started its program in Uganda as recently as January 2005. Staff at IRC and ILO-IPEC have initiated links to strengthen the collaboration not only between ORACLE and ILO-IPEC but also between each project and the Child Labor Unit in MGLSD.

IRC and AVSI Relationship

AVSI has been operating in Kitgum district for more than 25 years. Using an integrated multi-sector approach, AVSI has a presence in Kitgum District, which comprises offices and residential houses for staff, and is soon going to open an office in Pader. The country representative, based in Kampala, is well versed with what is going on at the district level, and at the project site a temporary office has been created specifically for the ORACLE project. A project manager is in charge of the ORACLE project and is supported by staff in charge of specific components—primary school, secondary school, and vocational training.

Both IRC and AVSI say that they have learned a lot from each other and that the partnership has improved the quality of the project implementation. IRC is the lead agency and is responsible for the implementation of the ORACLE project in Pader, and the staff operates from the IRC office in Lira. AVSI implements the project in Kitgum, but there is an understanding that AVSI is responsible for the training on psychosocial skills in both Pader and Kitgum, while IRC is responsible for training for reproductive health, and hygiene and sanitation in both districts.

Challenges in the AVSI/IRC partnership include the use of different approaches and policies in the implementation of the project. For example, in Pader, IRC gives support to individual children for two years at the primary and secondary school level, while in Kitgum; AVSI gives such support for only one year. IRC provides vocational training for six or nine months, while AVSI supports the vocational training on tailoring for six months and one year. Using the USDOL database has been a challenge to AVSI, because AVSI has its own database that is not easily modified to use with the USDOL database.

Both IRC and AVSI have initiated a process of streamlining policies and approaches, the first being the initial assessment form that has now been harmonized. The partners have quarterly meetings, but there have been difficulties in sharing of documents. Recognizing that use of the same documents is important for planning, the partners have now created a CD that contains all the key documents. The monitoring and evaluation officer working for KURET and ORACLE is assisting AVSI with cleaning up the database. Another challenge is that communication in the field is not easy, especially now that IRC operates from Pader and AVSI from Kitgum. The link with AVSI can be conceived as a weakness for the project and more coordination is needed.

Cooperative Relationship with USDOL

At midterm, the relationship with USDOL under the cooperative agreement is good. However, there are a few challenges that need to be addressed. Data collection on follow-up of beneficiaries has become a daunting task because of insecurity and beneficiary mobility. Given the requirement of USDOL to follow up individual beneficiaries, the project staff have found the exercise labor-intensive, time-consuming, and expensive. An additional issue is that staff at USDOL have not had an opportunity to visit the project sites and it is difficult to visualize the real difficulties on the ground, especially in Pader.

Double Counting

IRC and AVSI have made efforts to ensure that “double counting” and “duplication of efforts” is not occurring in the project sites by (1) counting a student only once when a beneficiary transfers from one program to another, (2) ensuring that where other NGOs are supporting children, lists of beneficiaries are shared during the coordination meetings, and (3) ensuring the lists of beneficiaries are kept in safe custody with the local council leaders for easy reference by incoming NGOs.

4.2.4 Management and Budgetary Issues

Management

Given the multiplicity of partners and actors involved in the ORACLE project, better coordination, transparency in the sharing of information and documents, and use of the documents as a common tool for planning will be needed to better manage the project. More coordination with AVSI is required to harmonize policies, and a greater focus needs to be placed on teachers, what they are learning and what they need if they are to create more conducive learning environments. For example, the in-service programs could include sessions on mathematics, science, and English. Science camps³³ could also be organized for practicing teachers to enhance their knowledge.

To better coordinate the project in Pader, IRC should open an office in the district. Currently, it is a violation of council regulations, which state that all NGOs must have an office in the district where they operate. Despite the fact that this rule has been relaxed, having an office in the district will ensure better coordination of follow-up activities, including monitoring and evaluation.

Implementing Staff

Currently, the IRC Country Director spends 20 percent of his time and the Education Advisor spends 100 percent of her time on the ORACLE project. An Assistant Education Advisor's position has been created and will be taken up by the previous IRC Project Manager, who has just come back from her study leave. The main role of the Country Director is to ensure support for the Education Advisor and is currently focusing on fundraising to ensure that what has been planned is undertaken.

Budgeting

In terms of finances, the project has used more funds than anticipated because of the unique situation of the project site, and it will need more funds for the activities planned for the fourth year. Funds that were intended for year four of the project have already been used, and IRC has requested an increase in funding from USDOL to ensure that all activities set for Year 4 are completed.

Lessons to Be Learned in Budgeting

The project is being implemented in sites where school infrastructures and other amenities have been destroyed by the war. Schools have joined others to form learning centers, which has led to severe overcrowding. The inadequate infrastructure should have factored into the budget to allow for resources to build classrooms even if only temporary. The inadequacy of the classrooms, desks, and other learning facilities hampers successful implementation of the project in certain areas.

³³ A Science camp is a workshop for teachers in which they discuss and practice how to teach specific science subjects and specific aspects of science.

According to the baseline survey, children generally drop out in P4³⁴ at the primary school level and in S2 at the secondary school level. This led to a decision by the project implementers that the bursary scheme would start in P4 at the primary school level and S2 at the secondary school level. The financial support for individual students is for one year in Kitgum and two years in Pader. The main challenge is that students who have been supported in P4 are not eligible for support from the project as they enter secondary school (S1), and therefore, become school dropouts at the end of primary school. Those students supported in S2 or S3 but not in S4 drop out without completing secondary school. Budgeting should have taken into account support for the whole school cycle for individual students or setting up income-generating activities for parents of supported children to ensure continuity.

Travel and transport to monitor progress is a major challenge for the ORACLE staff and different modes of transport³⁵ should have been factored into the budget because of the unique circumstances of the project site.

Communication Between Grantee and USDOL

The overall communication between grantee and USDOL has been adequate and progress reports have been sent to USDOL once every six months.

4.2.5 Sustainability and Impact

Initial Strategy for Sustainability

The institutional capacity development approach being used in the project training of teachers, provision of generators, textbooks, duplication machines, and typewriters for schools is necessary but not sufficient for sustainability. There should have been an explicit exit strategy stipulating what was to be done within the project period to ensure sustainability and what was expected to happen after the four years. The implementing organizations are working on a sustainability strategy.

Some of the steps that have been taken to ensure continuation of the education strategies include training of CCTs who are responsible for providing support and in-service training to practicing teachers, and the special focus on the student teachers at Kitgum Core PTC to ensure that they enter the teaching profession with adequate skills for handling traumatized children. Teachers who are trained on psychosocial and child-related methodologies are most likely to continue using their skills even without additional funding.

Community sensitization through songs, drama, and the creation of consistent messages against the worst forms of child labor ensures that the messages are integrated and embedded into the communities' way of life and will have a long-lasting impact. The evidence was clear in the skits

³⁴ The primary school level in Uganda comprises seven years of schooling. Children start in primary 1 (P1) and continue through to P7. Performance on the National Primary Leaving Examination determines who enrolls in secondary school (S1).

³⁵ In Kitgum, some of the project staff use motorcycles, but for Pader, because of higher levels of insecurity, staff have to fly and use armed escorts from the airport to the project sites.

and songs performed during the evaluator's visits to the communities and at the beginning of focus group discussions.

Impact on Teaching and Learning

Quality of Teaching

The training of teachers on psychosocial skills, child-centered methodologies, and hygiene and the provision of textbooks and other teaching materials has led to improvement in the following areas:

- **Quality of teaching**—teachers report that the better textbook ratio³⁶ has significantly made teaching easier. The provision of teaching and learning materials has increased the knowledge of the students.
- **Classroom management**—teachers who have been trained report that they are better classroom managers and are better able to handle traumatized children.
- **Empowerment**—teachers report that through the ORACLE project they had gained new skills that empowered them and made them better teachers especially because of the training on child-centered methodologies.

Quality of Learning

- **Availability of learning materials and textbooks**—this has boosted learning in that students are able to refer to the materials in their studies, which improves their performance on national examinations. In focus groups with students, as well as with the principal of Kitgum High School and the teachers, this advantage was cited.
- **Reduced dropout and absenteeism rates**—because of the financial support and provision of uniforms, children are now rarely sent home and are in school as required. During the support period, the beneficiaries stay in school. The problem arises when the support period ends and the parents are not able to continue supporting the child for the remaining school period.³⁷
- **Increased focus on learning because of greater punctuality**—especially the primary school teachers observed that children who are supported by ORACLE are now more punctual in arriving at school. They thought that parents are looking at education as having a greater priority due to community sensitization and children are not expected to do as many chores before going to school.

³⁶ Through the provision of textbooks, the textbook ratio has significantly improved in the project schools. In some schools in Kitgum, the ratio has been reduced from 1:15 to 1:6.

³⁷ For example, a student supported for 1 year in S2, will remain in school for that year. However, there is no guarantee that the same student will continue to S3 and S4 and complete secondary school.

- **Mango tree³⁸ learning kits**—a number of schools have been provided with assorted learning materials made from locally available materials as a way of demonstrating innovative methods of making teaching aids.

Overall Quality of Education

- **Increased school discipline**—teachers and head-teachers reported significant improvement in the discipline of children, especially formerly abducted children.
- **Increase in girls' enrollment**—because of the sensitization of parents and communities on the importance of education in general and the importance of girls' education in particular, and the provision of bursaries, more girls have enrolled at all levels and there is a significant decline in drop-out rates at all levels. Two particular areas where this was noted was in the increase of girls bringing their children to the alternative learning program, and enrollment in the modern tailoring school has increased dramatically.
- **Provision of duplicating machines and typewriters**—the provision of duplicating machines and typewriters in primary schools has made the preparation of examinations much easier and improved levels of teaching and learning.
- **Improved academic performance**—Kitgum High School is very pleased with the number of students attaining Division 1, the highest attainment in the Ugandan Certificate of Education (UCE), which increased from 16 in 2003, to 22 in 2004, and to 27 in 2005. The teachers and principal attribute this to several of the factors listed above (availability of materials and increased student punctuality and attendance), as well as the provision of school fees through ORACLE. In the past when students (generally the poorer ones) did not pay school fees they were sent home until they could pay. This affected attendance and reduced student performance.

Project Impact

Individual Beneficiaries

The children who have been supported with scholastic materials, uniforms, and bursary have benefited greatly in terms of cleanliness, self-confidence, discipline, and general ambience. Parents whose children have been supported have benefited in that they do not have to struggle to buy uniforms or pay the school fees, and they report being more positive about the influence the schools on their children. Individual teachers and head-teachers report feeling more empowered and self-confident. Young men and women who have been trained in BCP, C&J, tailoring, and catering have become significantly empowered and a majority of them have started their own businesses using the start-up materials provided through the project. Others are employed and those interviewed intimated how they have become breadwinners for their families and are assisting in supporting their siblings, especially the children heading households.

³⁸ Mango tree kits are bags that contain teaching and learning materials made from locally available materials (e.g., the letters of the alphabet are made by cutting rubber slippers, and diagrams such as the alimentary canal are drawn on sisal sacks).

Communities as Beneficiaries

There has been a significant attitude change toward child labor and education, especially with regards to girls' education and child rights. For example, among the communities in Pader and Kitgum, in the past, when a girl got pregnant while in school, she would automatically drop out of school and have no other opportunity to continue. Through the alternative learning program, child-mothers who were either formerly abducted or had dropped out of school, now have a chance to continue with formal schooling or train in a vocation. This has also improved the communities' attitudes toward child-mothers and girls who have returned from abduction and brought with them children. They are now more accepted and they have gained self-confidence. The quality of life for the communities have also been improved through the availability of better quality furniture, better buildings using brick construction, and better tailoring and catering facilities offered by the trained beneficiaries of the ORACLE project.

Incidences of crime are have dropped, and it is thought that this is because the youth at risk are now better occupied and earning a decent living. Through education on child rights, levels of child abuse and child defilement have reduced. In Pader, it was reported that through the sensitization of parents and the community, the cases of child labor, child abuse, crime, and sexual offenses have reduced. For example, in 2004, the number of defilement cases was 175 as compared with 128 in 2005.

Government and Policy Structures as Beneficiaries

The information and experiences of the ORACLE project are useful in the finalization of the Child Labor Policy. IRC has already given feedback on the policy through a national forum held to revise the draft policy. The District units and structures in education have benefited from the ORACLE project in many ways. The provision of support to schools and colleges and the provision of textbooks have improved the overall quality of education. The DEOs report that the ORACLE project is helping them achieve their own targets. The DISs are involved in the monitoring of the ORACLE project, which enhances their own work and reporting requirements. The reports from the ORACLE project feed into the overall district reports on education.

Impact from Interventions

The combination of interventions has contributed to the success of the ORACLE project and all the interventions have in one way or another, contributed to reduced child labor, increased school enrollments, and improved quality of education and life. For example, the enrollment in P1 at the Nimaro learning in Pader, increased from 800 students in 2004 to 900 in 2005. The leaders also reported to the evaluator that there are cases where police and community leaders have collected children from their parents and taken them to school as a way of drawing them out of exploitative child labor. Within the communities, some parents have also taken the role of counseling others on the importance of education and the hazards of exploitative child labor.

However, asked which of the interventions has had the greatest impact, many respondents indicated that at the primary school level community sensitization has yielded the greatest gains, leading to a phenomenal increase in enrollment, especially of girls, followed by the training of teachers. At the secondary school level and Nonformal education programs, the bursary schemes

have had the greatest gains. Continued community sensitization using a variety of media and focused teacher trainings, especially for female teachers, might yield greater gains in the long term. The critical issue is to support more girls to qualify for entry requirements into teacher training. This means supporting more girls to perform well in mathematics, English, and science, as well as supporting the enrollment of more female teachers in teacher training colleges, such as Kyambogo and Kitgum.³⁹

Government's Willingness to Continue

The fact that MoES and MGLSD have provided focal persons for the ORACLE project at the national level, and the fact that the district officials and local council leaders work closely with the project staff is evidence that the government is willing to continue with the project. More importantly, the government has set up mechanisms for support of vulnerable children in northern Uganda and is already giving bursaries and scholarships as part of the provision of UPE. The main challenge is the level of expense of the ORACLE project, which may make it difficult for the government to continue implementing all the activities under ORACLE, if the funding ends.

An additional challenge is that the government of Uganda has announced the inception of free USE beginning in 2007. The people interviewed were skeptical about the expense involved and are not sure it is feasible.

³⁹ Girls' performance at the Uganda Certificate of Education (end of S4) is generally poor, and many girls do not obtain entry requirements for enrollment in teacher training colleges.

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V CONCLUSIONS

Based on the findings, the evaluator can conclusively state that the ORACLE project as implemented in Pader District by the IRC and in Kitgum district by the AVSI has been well embraced and integrated into the education system in both districts as evidenced by the active involvement of the staff in the District Education office in each district. The support to student teachers and the pre-service and in-service tutors at the Kitgum Core PTC through the ORACLE project is an important strategy that will ensure that the new teachers going to the field are trained on child-centered methodologies and can better handle traumatized learners.

The use of a variety of media—songs, drama, poetry, radio programs, talk shows, and talking compounds—for community sensitization, has enhanced the internalization of the ORACLE project and made a significant contribution to changing the perception of parents, teachers, leaders, and communities toward the worst forms of child labor. Parents and communities are now beginning to understand the difference between child labor and child work and the importance of education in general. They have also developed positive attitudes toward the education of children and that of girl-children in particular as evidenced by the increased enrollments of girls and child-mothers in the schools visited.

It is the opinion of the evaluator that the messages in the songs about the importance of education and the elimination of the worst forms of child labor will have a lasting impact within each community. The project has given hope to internally displaced people and enhanced the integration of formerly abducted children into the communities. Child-soldiers and child-mothers are now perceived as an integral part of their communities.

Below are conclusions drawn from the findings on the five broad areas namely, project design; project implementation; partnership and coordination; management and budget; and sustainability and impact.

5.1 PROJECT DESIGN

The ORACLE project design fits in well with the national system of education in Uganda and is making an important contribution towards the achievement of the Universal Primary Education (UPE) declaration of 1997 and the achievement of the Dakar Framework for Action (2000) and the United Nations Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) one of which is universal primary education.

While the ORACLE project has made significant strides in the reduction of the worst forms of child labor and helped to rehabilitate former child-soldiers and child-mothers through education and vocational training, it is the view of the implementing teams that the rigidity and inflexibility of the project design has posed some challenges in achieving the set objectives. The period of support for individual students, one year in Kitgum and two years in Pader, has led to some ORACLE beneficiaries dropping out before completing the primary or secondary school cycle. The six- and nine-month practical training for vocational courses is not enough time for the acquisition of adequate skills to enable the trained students to compete with others for formal employment or successful self-employment. The requirement to support only children under 18

years, limits access to the increasing number of vulnerable children who may have taken longer in abduction and are, therefore, over 18 years when they return to the community as well as the children with handicaps who are not adequately catered for in the project design.

5.2 PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION

At midterm, the evaluator can conclusively state that the implementation of the ORACLE project is on track and the project has made commendable strides in the achievements of the set objectives. However, there are still significant challenges. One challenge relates to the project coverage in each district especially in Pader where the project covers only 11 counties out of the total of 18 counties in the district. Another challenge is that in both Pader and Kitgum districts, the 20-year-old war has caused destruction of infrastructure and displacement of schools which in turn has led to the creation of new learning centers comprising three or more schools and the distances between learning centers is long.

In spite of high levels of insecurity in the project areas, making penetration to the areas for implementation, monitoring and data collection, the ORACLE project has succeeded through the use of armed escort but the immediate consequence is that the implementation has been slowed down and the project has become more time consuming and more expensive than envisaged at the start of the project.

The system of selection of beneficiaries has been put in place and utilizes the local structures effectively. However, the system needs to be made more transparent and accountable and better coordinated to avoid duplication of effort in areas where other NGOs are providing support to schools and individual students.

5.3 PARTNERSHIP AND COORDINATION

The partnerships created between the ORACLE project, the Ugandan government, the NGOs, and other USDOL funded projects is good. The working relationship with the MoES has created a lot of goodwill at the Ministry and the activities of the ORACLE project have been integrated into the priority agenda of the Ministry. However, the relationship with the Ministry of Gender, Labor and Social Development through the Child Labor Unit requires strengthening for efficient coordination on reduction of the worst forms of child labor in the ORACLE project areas.

The Northern Education Forum which meets twice a year and includes all stakeholders and players in education in northern Uganda has provided a good opportunity for sharing of information, experiences and constraints in education in northern Uganda. To also ensure smooth coordination and to avoid double counting, IRC and AVSI also share lists of beneficiaries with other NGOs offering support in the same project areas during coordination meetings and ensure that lists of beneficiaries are kept in safe custody with the local leaders. It is the view of the evaluator that the coordination is strengthened and enhanced in the remaining phase of the ORACLE project.

The working relationship between ORACLE and KURET, another USDOL funded project, is good but there is a need to strengthen the working relationship between the ORACLE project and the ILO-IPEC so as to combat HIV and AIDS in the project areas.

5.4 MANAGEMENT AND BUDGETARY ISSUES

Given the difficult conditions of insecurity in Pader and Kitgum districts, the ORACLE project has functioned well during its first two years. Both IRC and AVSI have adequate staff and management systems in place and are functional. The work plans are prepared annually; progress is well documented and systematically monitored. Reports have been timely and generally appear to have reflected the reality on the ground.

The unique situation of the project site has increased budgetary costs and the implementers are requesting for additional funding to complete the activities.

5.5 SUSTAINABILITY AND IMPACT

Both AVSI and IRC have recognized the need to develop sustainability and exit plan to ensure that the activities under the ORACLE project continue even after the funding cycle ends. Inclusion of the ORACLE activities into the district plans and budgets and support for poor parents through income generating projects will go a long way in ensuring sustainability of the activities. The government's willingness to continue supporting the project will determine the future success and long-lasting impact of the investment in the ORACLE project at the community level and also at the national level.

In terms of impact of the ORACLE project, it is evident that the provision of textbooks and learning materials and school uniform in the project schools, has enhanced the quality of teaching and learning both for the individual beneficiaries and the schools as evidenced by increased enrollments. The overall quality of education has also been enhanced by the training of pre-service teachers and in-service tutors on psychosocial skills and child-centered methodologies. There is however, a low rate of female enrollment to the teacher training colleges in both districts, and additional support needs to be given to female students to ensure they meet the teacher training entry requirements.

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VI RECOMMENDATIONS

In this section, there are two sets of recommendations. The first set is derived from the stakeholders' workshop and the second is drawn from the evaluator's experience in the field.

6.1 RECOMMENDATIONS FROM STAKEHOLDERS WORKSHOP

On the basis of the discussions and group work at the stakeholders' workshop, the recommendations made are best categorized in relation to each of the three objectives of the ORACLE project.

Objective 1: Creating Awareness

- Intensify community sensitization to reinforce and increase knowledge on the worst forms of child labor among the communities.
- Encourage the creation of clubs and societies in primary and secondary schools for sensitizing the communities.⁴⁰
- Empower the community structures and leadership for sensitization through songs, poetry, and drama.
- Reinforce knowledge of responsibilities in addition to child rights.
- Community sensitization needs to be extended to include the affluent members of the society, as they are the potential employers and perpetrators of child labor.
- Project should be expanded to cover more sub-counties, especially in Pader where only 11 sub-counties are covered.

Objective 2: Improving Quality of Education

- Sponsor children in secondary school from S1 to S4 and those in primary school from P5 to P7.
- Train more teachers in child-centered methodologies and creative and innovative teaching and learning methodologies.
- The District Education Offices should ensure equitable posting of female teachers in the rural schools not only to teach but also to serve as role models for girls.
- Intensify community sensitization on the importance of girl-child education.

⁴⁰ The student teachers at the Kitgum Core Primary Teachers' College have formed a Youth Brigade, which undertakes several community sensitization activities through music, poetry, and drama.

- Provide the District Education Offices, particularly the inspectorate units with motorcycles in both Pader and Kitgum districts, to enhance monitoring of progress in schools and monitoring of individual beneficiaries.
- The uniform provided to the sponsored children should be with the same as the standard school uniform to avoid stigmatization and reference as “IRC children” or “ORACLE children.”
- Improve infrastructure—classrooms, libraries, desks, and sanitation facilities—to make the learning environment more accessible to all learners. IRC has lobbied with UNICEF to improve the school infrastructure in Pader. A needs assessment of educational infrastructure in Pader was carried out by IRC in October 2005 and a report was submitted to UNICEF.

Objective 3: Increasing Access to Education

- Extend the age limit from 18 to 25 years to cater to children who are in captivity for long periods of time.
- Support families with income-generating activities to address poverty reduction and ensure continuity of education for the sponsored children and to avoid the “dependency syndrome.”
- Incorporate the elements of the ORACLE project into the school and community plans and budgets, as well as the district budgets and plan to ensure sustainability.
- Integrate the ORACLE project into the Northern Uganda Support Action Forum project.
- Need affirmative action in employment at MGLSD.
- Support the enrollment of more female student teachers in teacher training colleges such as Kyambogo and Kitgum.
- Institute special “remedial programs” specifically for women to increase their chances of admission into teacher training colleges.
- Increase opportunities for girl dropouts.
- A new strategy should be developed to target children heading families.
- The process of selection of beneficiaries should be reviewed with a view to making it more transparent and inclusive.
- Create partnerships with World Food Program for School Feeding programs in the learning centers supported by ORACLE.

6.2 RECOMMENDATIONS FROM EVALUATOR'S EXPERIENCE IN THE FIELD

It is the evaluator's view that the project as designed is currently meeting its goals. To increase its impact and sustainability, a few recommendations are in order:

- **Coordination**—the implementing agencies need to share more, meet more regularly, and harmonize policies, approaches, and tools. This has already started with the harmonization of the initial assessment form.
- **Insecurity**—some areas remain inaccessible and in Pader only 11 sub-counties out of 18 have been reached. Contact with individual beneficiaries is reduced when staff have to use armed escorts. A way to overcome this would be to identify a focal person within the community to whom the beneficiaries report on their whereabouts and who in turn can give the information to project staff.
- **Difficult working conditions**—working with displaced people, destroyed infrastructure, traumatized children and teachers, and high levels of poverty and hunger makes implementation challenging. While some of these are not within the control of the ORACLE project staff, issues such as hunger, poverty, and destroyed infrastructure could be addressed through the development of linkages with other agencies providing services in the area, such as the World Food Program to provide food and UNICEF and other agencies to assist in building classrooms.
- **Legal framework**—the Child Labor Policy is still in draft form and perceptions of child labor are not uniform across the board. In some cases, child labor is not perceived as a crime but child abduction is. It is recommended that the ORACLE implementing agencies keep abreast of the process toward the finalization of the Child Labor Policy.
- **Follow-up of beneficiaries**—because of the mobility of the populations, follow-up of individual beneficiaries is a major challenge especially those enrolled in educational programs. It is time-consuming and labor-intensive. Focal persons could be identified within the communities to which the beneficiaries report, on a monthly basis, where they are and what they are doing. This will make it easier for the ORACLE project staff to follow up on beneficiaries every six months.
- **Availability of teachers**—in some learning centers, the teacher-pupil ratio was 1:130, and in some schools there were no female teachers at all. The ORACLE project can assist in increasing the number of female teachers in the teacher training colleges by providing remedial teaching and bridging courses to improve the performance of girls and make them eligible for admission into teacher training colleges.
- **Inadequate sanitation**—a majority of the schools lack water and sanitation facilities are poor. Mature girls are supplied with sanitary towels but toilets may not have water. The ORACLE project could link individual schools with agencies that can assist in sinking bore holes.

- **Few schools**—distances between schools are large, especially for the children with physical handicaps. The ORACLE project staff should continue coordinating with the district officials in terms of school mapping.
- **Inadequate teaching and learning materials**—the children who have been supported are much fewer than those who are vulnerable and needy. More textbooks are needed to reduce the textbook ratio to the desired national level of 1:3 (one textbook for every three students in every subject). The ideal is for each student in every school to have their own textbook for every subject.
- **Sponsorship period**—one year in Kitgum and two years in Pader for individual beneficiaries is too short and has led to dropouts. It should be extended.
- **Period of vocational training**—six months and nine months are inadequate amounts of time for students to gain proficiency in the vocational skills. The ORACLE project needs to extend the period of training to give the beneficiaries opportunities to acquire adequate skills and knowledge needed for the government grade tests. It would also be useful for the ORACLE project staff to synchronize the periods of training and levels of proficiency with other vocational training in the country.
- **Age limit**—children who have returned from abduction may be older than 18 but still at risk of being involved in child labor. The ORACLE project can link the over 18 year olds with alternative agencies that can support them or seek alternative sources of funding to support them.

VII LESSONS LEARNED AND BEST PRACTICES

7.1 LESSONS LEARNED

A number of lessons can be learned from the ORACLE project. Selection of project sites where the implementing organizations have a presence increases the chances of acceptance and reduces the time of penetration into the community structures. The strategies for sustainability should be considered at the design level. A four-year period should be considered as a pilot phase and integrated into a broader education project. Factors that are unique to the project site—security, amenities such as water and sanitation, and people living in camps as IDPs—increase the factors that militate against success of the project.

Partnerships and alliances that build on each other's strengths enhance the visibility and credibility of each organization and contribute significantly to the success of the project. When a project is being implemented by more than one organization, more time and effort is required for aligning, coordinating, and harmonizing policies and approaches.

The legal framework is a critical component in the implementation of a project. Ratification of the Child Labor Policy will help in justifying the ORACLE project activities and ensure harmony across all agencies that address exploitative child labor issues in the country. For effective and efficient monitoring of the project, there have to be good staff and structures on the ground.

7.2 BEST PRACTICES

Working closely with the national systems at the headquarters, the district level, and the sub-county level ensures that the project is integrated into ongoing systems.

Community sensitization using a variety of media has the greatest impact on the beneficiaries and has a longer lasting impact on the communities. Indeed, the people interviewed confirmed that without the parents' and communities' commitment to education of their children, it may be possible to pay tuition for a student and the parent then withdraws the student from school. That is why community sensitization is crucial for success in implementation of the ORACLE project and its sustainability.

Implementing an integrated multi-sector approach is crucial for success. Creative alliances are needed. For example, at the learning center hosted by Latolim Primary School in Madi Oipei, Kitgum, the World Food Program has a school-feeding program through which children are provided with lunch. This effort complements ORACLE's work in Madi Oipei. The provision of lunch attracts children from the camps to the school area.

Focusing on institutional capacity building—training teachers and providing textbooks and generators—enhances the institutions' capacity. The impact of this focus will continue after the project is ended.

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