

**Uganda's Response to Street Children: Investigating the Validity and
Impact of the Kamparingisa National Rehabilitation Centre (KNRC) in
Working with Street Children in Uganda**

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List of Acronyms

AIDS	Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome
CRC	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
KNRC	Kamparingisa National Rehabilitation Center
IDP	Internally Displaced People
LRA	Lord's Resistance Army
MGLSD	Ministry of Gender, Labor and Social Development
NGO	Non Government Organization
NRM	National Resistance Army
STD	Sexually Transmitted Disease
UN	United Nations
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund

Abstract

Street children have become a world wide phenomenon and often solutions seem either to be short sighted or instituted for alternative reasons besides the welfare of children.¹ However, the world is slowly waking to the fact that there are consequences beyond human suffering to turning a blind eye to street children. Uganda has moved forward with a plan to get children off of the streets, rehabilitated and repatriated. This plan has the advantage of partnerships between different levels of government and NGOs.² The response is a trial that focuses on Uganda's capital city Kampala and includes relocating children to the Kamparingisa National Rehabilitation Center.

As other cities in Uganda, and the global community look for answers which address the dynamic social issues presented by street children the KNRC response will undoubtedly be looked to as a potential model. However, even creative plans need to be investigated, examined and scrutinized before they can most effectively help children. Thus, this paper is designed to provide a broad overview of the KRNC model from the perspective of the main stakeholders in the community. From this starting point research can be done to more effectively develop a framework from which to study this model.

After interviewing the stakeholders, it would appear that KNRC is a plan with wide governmental acceptance and to a large extent, acclaim from the community. However, there are problems recognized by the government, the community, and in particular the children themselves the NGOs working with them. Understanding these problems and developing responses that are owned by the whole community is going to be a process requiring reordering of fiscal priorities, gathering helpful input from all stakeholders, and a willingness to forge strong, lasting partnerships with all involved.

¹ Kilbourn, 1997: 20-22.

² For a detailed analysis of the resettlement guidelines in Uganda see: Guidelines for the Resettlement of Street Children in Uganda. MGLSD:PCY Report, undated.

Background

Uganda, nestled into the far west corner of East Africa, is a developing nation that in many ways is well poised for a stable future.³ Once billed the pearl of Africa it has been tarnished by many years of dictatorial rule, however, in the midst of this Uganda has sprung back to life and is billed as one of the economic and development success stories in Africa.⁴ Imaginative leadership and responses to its devastating problems has propelled Uganda to the forefront of Sub Saharan African countries and allowed it an opportunity to push beyond many of its devastating social ills. Even with the successes, however, Uganda still contends with poverty, unemployment, HIV/AIDS and a constant internal threat in the North from the LRA.⁵ Caught in the middle of this juxtaposition of turmoil and progress are the children. Children at risk who often call the streets their home are the very real reminders that Uganda's road to economic and social recovery will require hard work and perseverance.

Uganda, the name given the territory by the British in 1894, was formed as a result of competition between European powers bent on colonizing Africa and gaining control of the Nile's headwaters.⁶ The problem was the artificial borders drawn up by the British, cut across complex and existent economic social and political relationships.⁷

In 1962 Uganda gained independence. However, within three years Prime Minister, Milton Obote with Colonel Idi Amin at his side overthrew the Kabaka (king) and started a legacy of dictatorships that would leave Uganda locked in a cycle of civil conflict. After Obote, Idi Amin took control and devastated Uganda's people, infrastructure and economy.⁸ His overthrow by the returning Obote, called Obote II by most, proved to be an even harsher existence for many of Uganda's citizens.⁹ These years of mass migration, killing, multi-level corruption, fiscal mismanagement and brutal rule turned Uganda into a wasteland of poverty and sorrow.¹⁰

In 1986 the National Resistance Army mustered enough unity and arms from the southern Ugandan provinces to overthrow the dictatorial regime. With international

³ Haq, 1997: 305.

⁴ Leggett, 2001: 2-9.

⁵ *IBID.* 7-11.

⁶ *IBID.* 7.

⁷ *IBID.* 7-8.

⁸ Fitzpatrick, 2003: 434-436.

⁹ Interview with business owners, Kampala, 27 May 2005.

¹⁰ Leggett, 2001: 9-14.

assistance the newly formed National Resistance Movement (NRM) has turned the country, in many ways, around.¹¹ However, for reasons as diverse as the war in the North and famine in the East, large segments of society have been left out of the “economic miracle” and the struggle to unify the many different peoples who are Uganda remains a constant threat to security and progress for the country.¹²

In the middle of this turmoil are the Ugandan children who are the milestones of societal illness. According to the UN there are roughly 1.8 million children in Uganda who face life as orphans. That number is expected to jump to 3.5 million children by 2010.¹³ Ugandan communities have been somewhat successful at caring for these children as evidenced by the low numbers on the street. However, in the North there are an estimated 1.4 million IDPs; 80 percent of whom are women and children.¹⁴ Thus, the number of practical orphans is much higher. There are a few cities that have street children but by far the most are found in the capital city of Kampala. Kampala is considered one of the safest capital cities in Africa and so offers a greater sense of stability and opportunity to its homeless children.¹⁵ However, with the growing number of children coming to the streets of Kampala, new solutions are in order.

What is Causing the Problem?

The large numbers of street children in Uganda can be attributed to several factors. According to the children we spoke to, loss of parents due to disease, disabled parents, poverty, abuse, shame, stepmothers who treat the new children badly, neglect, divorce and war were the reasons children were on the streets. Interestingly, no child told us that they were on the street because there were more opportunities provided by the local charities or Ministry of Gender, Labor and Social Development (MGLSD). They came most often because of home situations. This means that Uganda will have to spend more energy working on the push factors of street children than on the pull factors and that in all likelihood more children will show up on the streets, perhaps in greater numbers

¹¹ Fitzpatrick, 2003: 438-439.

¹² Leggett, 2001: 9-14.

¹³ This information is available at www.unicef.org/infobycountry/uganda_statistics.html.

¹⁴ *IBID.*

¹⁵ Fitzpatrick, 2003: 461.

Quite a few interviewees and sources pointed to HIV/AIDS as the major reason for the increase in street children in Uganda. It is not necessarily a bad claim, as it is one that is hard to substantiate. Without doubt the HIV/AIDS pandemic has cut into the social fabric of Uganda, but the scale is hard to quantify. Multiple sources exist but often give data that would seem to contradict other equally credible sources. Thus, the impact of AIDS on Uganda's children, while evident, is hard to map. One source estimated that Uganda has 1.1 million AIDS orphans, the most in the world.¹⁶ This would mean that roughly one in four families in Uganda is caring for an AIDS orphan. It would also suggest that there are still far too many children orphaned by the pandemic for communities to absorb, especially with Uganda's poverty rate.¹⁷

Perhaps the next biggest group is the children who hail from the Karamojong region.¹⁸ These children of largely nomadic pastoralist find it difficult to assimilate into urban Ugandan culture. The hard life of their dry, desolate region mixed with tribal fighting both internally and with tribes from neighbouring Kenya causes many children to try for a better life in Uganda's southern cities.¹⁹ However, their language, dress and customs not only make them culturally difficult to work with, as many social service providers have little or no knowledge of their language and customs, but further isolate these vulnerable children.

Another factor in Uganda's child landscape is the conflict going on in the north of the country. A group called the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) has plagued Northern Uganda with raids, child abductions and chaotic sprees of torture, murder and rape.²⁰ The group grew out of the legacy of the Holy Spirit Movement, which was dedicated to fighting for the rights of the Acholi people, who felt betrayed by the NRM.²¹ Joseph Kony, who many consider to be a madman, heads the LRA. He uses his bush army to inflict terror without any discernable cause.²² While more complex than can be described here, the war has been an escalating problem fueled by mistrust, vacillating governmental response and religious fanaticism. The worst atrocities of the LRA are reserved for

¹⁶ Anderson, 2001: 135-136.

¹⁷ Information concerning this issue can be found at www.schoolsandhealth.org.

¹⁸ This assertion is based solely on the numbers of children we spoke with and is not a published or documented statistic.

¹⁹ This was documented by numerous Karamajong children we interviewed.

²⁰ Kilbourn, 1996: 48-49.

²¹ Leggett, 2001: 28-29.

²² Dolan, 2004: 14.

children who are kidnapped from their villages or schools and forced to march to training camps typically found in bordering Sudan.²³ Once there boys are taught to fight while girls are often forced to become domestic slaves and are sexually abused as the “wives” of rebel soldiers. Children who do not complete the training, try to escape or fail to complete a raid are hacked to death by machete at the hands of other children. This horrid desensitization technique effectively numbs children till they become something akin to a machine.²⁴

Since 1986, at least 20,000 children are known to have been abducted by the LRA. This fear drives roughly 35,000 children each night to leave their rural homes and trek into towns to sleep in shelters. Add to that number the children who simply have decided to live at the IDP camps rather than chance the journey and the current picture of Northern Uganda emerges where there are roughly 1.4 million people, 80 percent of which are women and children, in the IDP camps.²⁵ There is also a practically non-existent educational structure that ensures a continued cycle of poverty and despair in the North in contrast to the fact that only a few decades ago a large percentage of the most highly educated Ugandans came from the North.²⁶

Another sub-group of street children are those who have come from other countries. In our interviews we found children from three countries, Kenya, Rwanda and Sudan living in Kampala or at the Kamparingisa National Rehabilitation Center (KNRC). The children we spoke to were willing to endure hardship for the relative calm of Uganda. One even spoke of holding on to the underside of a bus to make his way to Kampala where he hoped for some sort of opportunity.²⁷

One common denominator in all of these is the breakdown of the family once considered to be a pillar of African community. Many stakeholders spoke of the lack of concern for children by families that was becoming epidemic in this region. While poverty is often considered a root cause of street children there are countless cases of very strong families suffering from terminal poverty. Thus, while important, poverty is neither the sole indicator for nor the most basic cause of street children.

²³ Kilbourn, 1996: 50.

²⁴ Leggett, 2001: 28-32.

²⁵ Dolan, 2004: 4.

²⁶ Interview with NGO worker, Kampala, 01 June 2005.

²⁷ Interview with Street Child, Kampala, 24 May 2005.

Problems Street Children Face

Once in Kampala, a street child faces a host of obstacles. While caretaker or parental death from HIV/AIDS and hostility drives many of these children to Kampala, the children often find much of the same hardships once they are in the city. One of the problems is the sheer size of the street child population. Kampala with 1.2 million residents simply cannot handle the influx of children who need a large variety of social services. Kampala is evidently experiencing major growth at the moment and is experiencing infrastructure growing pains from rural to urban migration as people come in search of employment and safety.²⁸ Adding street children to the mix has made things difficult for the government which has implemented the strategy under discussion in this paper.

The most obvious threat to street children is the risk of acquiring an STD including HIV/AIDS. NGOs are furiously trying to educate street children about the dangers of risky sexual practices, promoting abstinence and some are providing free condoms but turning the tide on this disease among street children is a very tough assignment.²⁹ Street children can acquire HIV/AIDS while being raped or while prostituting and then enter the very casual sexual scene of the street child world. With the frequency of sex and the multitude of partners HIV/AIDS can pass at a feverish rate inside these adolescent sexual networks.³⁰ Access to health care for any Ugandan is not straight forward and for the street child is even more problematic. Thus, the street child who already has trouble accessing medical care, finds themselves in double jeopardy of either not being tested or receiving little or no care once testing positive for an STD.³¹ Further, some children who are HIV positive tend to embrace a fatalistic view of life and simply refuse to accept care even if it is given.³²

For the child who manages to escape the other threats of life on the streets including solvent and glue abuse, malnourishment and violence, there is the problem of

²⁸ Interview with MGLSD personnel, Kampala.

²⁹ Group Interview of NGO representatives, Kampala.

³⁰ Interview with NGO representative, Kampala.

³¹ Interview with NOG representative, Kampala.

³² This was poignantly displayed by a street child interviewee who refused to accept offered care.

access.³³ Kampala's street children are effectively alienated not only from consistent health care but also education. While many NGOs are trying to fill the gaps including the Inter-NGO Forum which brings together any group dedicated to working with street children, the problem is simply too big.³⁴ How do you house, educate, rehabilitate and medicate all these children? The federal government and Kampala City Council have answered this by removing the street children from the streets and trying to resettle them.

Research Methodology

Part 1 Research Collection Overview and Researcher Biographical Information

Before moving into the findings it is necessary to look at the methodology involved in this report.

Central to the research collection was the particularly high standards of risk avoidance during the collection phase that had to be implemented due to the fact that the research was human subject-oriented and primarily focused on children. To ensure we focused all our collection methods around this principle of risk avoidance, we sought the guidelines concerning human subject research from Fuller Theological Seminary. Thus, four principles drove the design and implementation of the research.

First, we considered carefully the subject pool that was needed to collect relevant information. We tried to hone in on those groups of people that would be necessary for the report considering the focused scope of this research. Thus, we limited the groups that we sought to collect information from to street children, children housed at KNRC, MGLSD and government personnel, KNRC staff and Kampala residents and business owners. However, it should be noted that a significant bias towards collection from children was implemented. Our intent was to use information collected from the adult population to contextualize what was collected from the children. In this way the research was highly child driven and their perceptions and understanding was given far more weight than the adults. While this was intentional, adult voices were included to balance possible misperceptions and for insight into the larger social and political context.

³³ Butcher, 1996: 68-72.

³⁴ See www.tigersclub.org/about/advocacy_and_partnerships.html for more information about the efforts of the Inter NGO Forum.

Graph A. Number by Group of Respondents.

Respondent Group	Number Interviewed
MGLSD / Govt. Employees	9
Kamparingisa Staff	3
NGO Staff	20
Street Children (Kampala)	249
Children at Kamparingisa	9
Residents / Store Owners (Kampala)	35
TOTAL	325

Second, the methods used for collection were questionnaires made to serve in individual and group settings as well as focus groups. The questionnaires were designed before the beginning of the research but were significantly changed by the research team upon arrival in Kampala. A day was spent ensuring that the questionnaires were culturally relevant and limited to language accessible to most children. Linguistic challenges were important to consider since Kampala's street children often had migrated to the city and thus spoke any number of dialects and languages.

Third, we intentionally tried to ensure that all respondents understood that they were participating in voluntary research, for which a paper trail existed in order to document our research and informed consent was obtained. Thus, a separate response card for each interview was filled in by the interviewer which could not be correlated to a specific person but did include basic biographical information such as sex and age. For all respondents we developed an informed consent form that was read prior to interviews. This form was signed by adults but we chose to read it and gain verbal agreement from the children.

Finally, all human research must consider risk factors for the respondents. We considered three levels of risk that could come from our research which we delineated as; NO RISK, MINIMAL RISK and MODERATE RISK. Our goal was to make the research as close to NO RISK as possible especially for the children we interviewed. Thus, no names or identifiable features of any child respondent were kept and further we

chose not to correlate even seemingly insignificant information such as sex or area of interview in this report. Our hope was to make the collected information as anonymous and strictly statistical as possible. However, we did collect information that was non-public and in that manor exposed some of our adult, and possibly child, respondents to minimal risk.

Researcher Biographical Information

This research was conceived by Andy Sexton, Oasis International Director – Children at Risk who was then involved in providing technical, editorial and contextual assistance.

Three researchers worked on this project. David Russell the lead researcher is a graduate student at Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, California pursuing a masters degree in cross cultural studies with a focus on urban social development and children at risk. His research background includes a three-year stint in Japan working on research projects for the US government and impact studies for upcoming legislation for the Tennessee Legislature.

Martin Kabanda is a student at Kampala Evangelical Theological Seminary pursuing a degree in pastoral ministry. He is a native Ugandan and has extensive experience working with homeless children. His knowledge of Kampala and ability to contextualize the research as well as willingness to conduct interviews in strange places at strange times was incredibly helpful.

Ann Bett is a social worker from Kenya who is accompanying her spouse in Uganda. Her fluency in Swahili was instrumental in gathering interviews from children from the Karamoja region. Additionally, her work in public health offered insight into much of the research. Ann Bett also was instrumental in designing the survey questions.

Part 2 Statistical Overview of Research.

Kampala was broken into arbitrary geographic zones that correlated to at least one significant area of street children. Efforts were made to ensure that each zone was targeted more than once at different times of the day and on different days. Our adult collection was much more limited since the interviewees were generally centralized at federal offices or at the KNRC facility. The non-government employee adults who were

interviewed were arbitrarily picked as the team canvassed the main streets of downtown Kampala. Business owners were targeted who had stores close in proximity to large gatherings of street children.

The children who were interviewed were often in groups that ranged in size from two to sixteen children. While most often there were less than five children in a group, it should be noted that most of our information was not collected on a one to one basis. The interviews were spaced out over a roughly one month period with the majority taking place between 24 May 2005 and 04 June 2005. The team only conducted interviews on two other days in May which resulted in the list in Graph A.³⁵

Graph B. 03 May 2005 Street Children Interviews

Area of Interviews	Number Interviewed
Entebbe Road	30
Old Taxi Park	38
Shoprite (downtown)	7
New Park	5
Constitution Square	11
Sheraton / Speke Hotel Area	1
Christ the King Church	1
Old Kampala Mosque	10
TOTAL	103

Graph C. 11 May 2005 Street Children Interviews

Area of Interviews	Number Interviewed
Entebbe Road	11
Kyagwe Road (KPC)	2
Shoprite (downtown)	8
New Park	10

³⁵ Graph A also represents the interviews that were collected between 24 May 2005 and 04 June 2005 except that the figures for street children from the other two dates are added to the street children category. The number of interviews with street children for that time period was 73.

Constitution Square	4
Sheraton / Speke Hotel Area	6
Buganda Road	4
Old Kampala Mosque	6
Min Bata (Old Park)	22
TOTAL	73

Part 3 Research Limitations.

We encountered very few limitations in doing this research. However, the ones we did encounter I would like to note for future researchers. Our team was unprepared for the large influx of children from the Karamoja region. This was problematic since the language and dialects of the region are not as well known in Kampala and no one on the research team was able to communicate with these children in their mother tongue. The exception to this was the amount of the children who spoke Swahili. Ann Bett speaks fluent Swahili and could adequately communicate with several of the children from Karamoja. However, the number of interviews we had with Karamoja children is disproportionately small compared to the amount of children from the region we encountered. Additionally, there was inadequate understanding on our team about the culture of Karamoja and we were unable to gauge responses with a high degree of cultural sensitivity. The other limitation we faced was related to language as well. There are many dialects and languages in Uganda and the surrounding countries. For this reason it is highly advisable to assemble a team of interviewers that represents a large breadth of the region.

Access-wise we were duly impressed with how open the federal government and the NGO community were to our research and requests for interviews. However, we were unable to connect with any official or employee from the Kampala City Council. One interview was scheduled but the official never showed up to his office and three other attempts were made to reschedule interviews but all were canceled or disregarded.

Uganda's Response

The core of Uganda's solution is found at Kamparingisa National Rehabilitation Centre, the place has traditionally served as a youth detention centre that focuses on rehabilitating delinquent children by means of detention, career training and farm labour.³⁶ Today, children come to Kamparingisa either for committing major offenses or as the country's newest response to child homelessness.

The response was formed after two years of planning that took shape mostly in an eight month period before the May 2002 kick-off. The plan originally faced legal challenges inside the government but was pushed through after receiving considerable pressure from Internal Affairs, the tourist board, and an active campaign by different sectors of government interested in improving the quality of life in Kampala. The plan was formulated in large part by the Ministry of Gender, Labor and Social Development and forwarded through the Legal Ministry, Parliament and the office of the President.³⁷

Kamparingisa was established in 1951, by the British Government as a detention centre for young offenders. It comprises 377 acres, seventeen of which are developed and includes housing facilities, staff homes, a clinic, a cafeteria, education space, a soccer pitch, isolation lock down units, an administration building, a conference building and vocational training facilities. It also has a chicken coop and barn for farm equipment. KNRC is intimately tied to its rural community as they share a school building and clinic.³⁸

Kamparingisa has six formal sections designed to handle the needs of the children who come there; domestic, farm, education and vocational training, case work, health and medical and police.³⁹ The domestic section is charged with teaching life skills such as hygiene and basic health principals. The farm section teaches animal and crop husbandry, provides a small stipend for children to use, and provides a product to sell in the community so that other supplies can be secured. The education section provides formal education through primary for children under fifteen and sometimes partners with a secondary school four kilometres away for older or advanced students. Additionally, the education section is designed to teach trade skills to older children who are not able to

³⁶ Interview with KNRC Director, Kampala, MGLSD offices.

³⁷ Interview with KNRC Director, Kampala, MGLSD offices.

³⁸ Interview with KNRC Lead Social Worker, Kamparingisa.

³⁹ Interview with MGLSD Assistant Commissioner, Department of Children and Youth Affairs, Kampala.

attend school. The case work section is charged with counselling, record keeping and manning the houses where the children stay. This section is most intimately tied to the work of resettlement. The health and medical section is charged with providing for the health needs of the entire Kamparingisa community. They give immunizations, administer medicines, perform routine exams, provide maternity and delivery services, and have a monitored facility for the seriously ill. The police station provides services to the entire community and is housed next to the isolation ward by the boys' sleeping quarters.⁴⁰

Before the first intake of children from the streets, Kamparingisa was given a major building overhaul after the First Lady of Uganda, Mrs. Janet Museveni, took an interest in the facility and found support from businesses and friends around the country. The billion plus Ugandan shilling makeover greatly enhanced the facility and made it more suitable for the children there.⁴¹ Not only was a makeover given but additional vocational training equipment was donated or acquired for the influx of new children.

The process began with a team of KCC social workers, with police support, collecting children from the streets. Social workers requested the police support in case the children presented problems during the round up. This initial step resulted in over 500 children, fifty-eight of which were babies, being collected – these children were held in Kampala until trucks could make the rounds from there to Kamparingisa.⁴² Since then, an ongoing procedure where children are sent to Kamparingisa after being rounded up in the city of Kampala every three to four months has ensued.⁴³ The sweeps are kept secret until moments before they start and street children are taken to a holding facility at the police station before being relocated to Kamparingisa.⁴⁴

New children to KNRC have their shirts removed so they can be distinguish from the other children and are given foam pads to sleep on until they are processed.⁴⁵ As many children are hostile at the sudden loss of freedom quite a few are put in holding cells till they calm down and agree to abide by the rules of Kamparingisa.⁴⁶ Because

⁴⁰ Interview with KNRC Lead Social Worker, Kamparingisa.

⁴¹ Interview with KNRC Director, Kampala.

⁴² Interview with KNRC Director, Kampala.

⁴³ This claim was made by the Director of KNRC and verified by various NGO workers.

⁴⁴ Interview with NGO worker, Kampala.

⁴⁵ Interview with KNRC social worker, Kamparingisa.

⁴⁶ Interview with KNRC employee, Kamparingisa.

some children and adults are taken to Kamparingisa who are not homeless, an interview process is started. If the child has a home, they are taken back. For those who are street children the interview process involves getting as much vital information as possible about health, home area, family life and current problems. At this point the child begins the official rehabilitation process which ultimately leads to resettlement if that is possible.⁴⁷

According to the Director of Kamparingisa the rehabilitation phase includes social work, counselling, drug and alcohol abuse help, and opportunities for school, life skills training and vocational training opportunities. The hope is to get children ready for life outside of Kamparingisa. Hopefully that means being resettled into their community of origin and being cared for by family members. All of the repatriations have been handed over to the NGO 'Give Me a Chance', which also attempts to work with regional and district governments to make sure resettled children have follow-up visits.⁴⁸ If resettlements are not in the best interest of the child then a fostering scheme is sought, either informally with blood relations or formally with a family who will have the chance to adopt.⁴⁹

The final piece of the street child plan involves having two social workers on the streets of Kampala. The social workers are hired by the Kampala City Council and are tasked mainly with identifying children who are new to the streets.⁵⁰ These children are typically much easier to work with and are immediately processed for repatriation. The workers also, by virtue of their job, have a keen sense of where street children are gathering and thus can assist police when the round ups are held.⁵¹

Ideally, and by Ministry account, this plan should remove children from the streets, rehabilitate them and resettle them with their families or communities.

⁴⁷ Interview with KNRC Lead Social Worker, Kamparingisa.

⁴⁸ The NGO Give Me a Chance is a well established and largely indigenous NGO with headquarters located in Kampala, Uganda. The NGO has taken a very pro-KNRC attitude and has lent their expertise in resettlement to the government. This NGO also belongs to the Inter-NGO forum.

⁴⁹ Interview with KNRC Lead Social Worker, Kamparingisa.

⁵⁰ Interview with MGLSD Assistant Commissioner, Department of Children and Youth Affairs, Kampala.

⁵¹ Interview with KNRC Director, Kampala.

II. Results

Research Team's Observations

This section of the report is simply an overview resulting from all the interviews conducted. Its intention is to bring some of these perspectives together and paint a picture of what could result from maintaining Uganda's response to children status quo. In our interviews a number of street children claimed to have been at KNRC at least once but that they had left and come back to the streets.⁵² However, this was in conflict to resettlement reports that have been received by the Government⁵³; although these were not made available to the researcher. The Government did suggest, however, that children from Karamoja were difficult to resettle and may have ended up back on the streets.

Whether they abscond or have fled a bad resettlement, a significant number of children end up back on the streets of Kampala. This was verified by the many children we interviewed on the streets of Kampala who told of up to three trips to KNRC and by NGOs interviewed. According to members of the Inter-NGO forum, these children have formed a sort of underground network that exists to help them avoid the police round ups and trips to KNRC. The most serious effect of this underground network is a potentially growing community of children who feel they cannot be seen. This network or networks could eventually produce a very organized criminal infrastructure adept at avoiding detection by law enforcement.⁵⁴ Imagine a whole group of children who grow up and feel no civil attachment to their country and are naturally suited to inducting and indoctrinating new children to the streets into a life of crime. In this regard KNRC or the perceived reputation of KNRC could have some potentially disturbing side effects.

If this line of reasoning seems fanciful consider our interviews with one group of children who granted us a group session only after we met with three boys the day before and did not turn them into the authorities. The boys would seem to be scouts designed to deflect attention away from one of the groups many hideouts. These groups have become sophisticated enough to have multiple meeting places and codes for where and when to

⁵² This was corroborated by interviews of street children in Kampala, government employees, children housed at KNRC and by interviews of NGO workers.

⁵³ Interview with Willy Otim, Commissioner for Children, May 2006

⁵⁴ Interview with NGO worker, Kampala.

meet at rallying points.⁵⁵ The infrastructure of these groups is amazing considering that the average child is only thirteen. Being parentless and unable to be seen has forced these children into criminal activity for the sake of survival. What will happen when the ability to commit crimes increases and the rewards become more and more alluring?

Governmental Response to Kamparingisa

It was the opinion of the researchers that many of the government personnel interviewed were genuinely concerned people working hard to make things better for Kampala's street children and a number of them gave candid comments.

The major concern by most Government personnel was lack of adequate funding. The Director of Kamparingisa was quick to point out that running this type of program is very expensive. Many employees complained that issues related to street children received too little attention and were too low a priority in the Government. This problem has created issues at a variety of levels. The Director told us that he was only allocated thirty staff, while sixty are needed to provide services for the street children and the offenders.⁵⁶ Government set salaries are low which often precludes quality applicants from applying and accepting positions. Subsequently, quality care is diminished as it is often given by under trained or unqualified people. In presenting this to the Government, it was highlighted that the Director himself is only an employee with no power to recruit employees. The Government recruits all staff and the employees' salaries are stipulated under law, the salaries being consistent across the spectrum of all services. The Director also felt that needed supplies are not provided creating a tough environment in which to rehabilitate children.⁵⁷ One employee let us know that medicines were desperately needed and none were available thus many illnesses simply had to remain untreated.⁵⁸ However, later conversations with the Director of KNRC suggested that he felt the supply of medicines was improving, Horizont had provided enough drugs and the dispensary was now open. It was also highlighted that there are two sources for medicines: Mpigi District and also GTZ.

⁵⁵ Interview with Street Children, Kampala.

⁵⁶ Interview with KNRC Director, Kampala.

⁵⁷ Interview with KNRC social worker, Kamparingisa.

⁵⁸ Interview with clinic staff at KNRC, Kamparingisa.

There was a food shortage as well which had been linked to corruption. According to Ministry personnel on the week we did our research, food had been bought but no trace of it could be found and it had not reached Kamparingisa.⁵⁹ The other option for food is NGOs but this requires coordination which does not always happen, thus sometimes Kamparingisa is unable to adequately supply its wards the nutrition they need.⁶⁰ Another inter-governmental problem which exacerbates the food situation is the lack of coordination between KCC officials conducting the round-ups and the staff at KNRC. In particular, if food is prepared for 200 children and then a large number arrive from the streets directly before a meal then all the children and staff must go with proportionately less food.⁶¹ Also the children often come in a very poor condition, including being sick, malnourished and dirty.

Facility wise there are some real concerns as well. At the time of this writing, Kamparingisa had no power, running water or functioning toilet facilities. It is true that power is a nationwide problem in Uganda and load-shedding is widespread. This has knock-on effects for other facilities, for example, there is a borehole on site, but without power, it is not possible to pump running water. As a result, during the day the children have to walk 1.4 kilometers to fetch water and the lack of adequate supply creates a whole host of cleanliness and sanitary problems.⁶² Firewood has to be found each day for the meals to be heated.

There are not enough beds to house all the children so some sleep on the floor while most share a bed or blanket or both. Some children who were smaller were three to a bunk-bed mattress and only had one blanket.⁶³

A range of problems related to the children were expressed as well by a significant number of government employees we interviewed. With over forty languages in Uganda and children at Kamparingisa coming from at least three other countries (Rwanda, Kenya and Sudan), there is a profound language barrier between some children and staff. This problem is intensified with the influx of Karamojong people whose language and culture are different from the rest of Uganda.⁶⁴ Finally, adults are housed at

⁵⁹ Interview with KNRC social worker, Kamparingisa.

⁶⁰ Interview with foreign aid worker assigned to the MGLSD.

⁶¹ This example was given during an interview with KNRC employees, Kamparingisa.

⁶² Interview with KNRC social worker, Kamparingisa.

⁶³ Interview with KNRC Lead Social Worker, Kamparingisa.

⁶⁴ Interview with KNRC Lead Social Worker, Kamparingisa.

the facility in some cases and sleep in the same area as children.⁶⁵ This creates a situation where someone with a criminal or psychological problem could be sleeping in an open hall with a child without proper supervision.⁶⁶

KNRC was not originally designed for street children and the staff are trained to deal with child offenders and not the complexity of issues that street children have, which understandably has caused some difficult issues for the centre. These issues include problems which range from under funding, to dealing with the children, to communication problems between different levels of government.⁶⁷ Additionally, since Kamparingisa does not address the push and pull factors, a new group of children show up to Kampala virtually every day threatening to further burden the already fragile programme.⁶⁸

NGO Response to Kamparingisa

It would be hard to summarize, or even form a coherent NGO response to any government programme where more than twenty autonomous agencies were involved, but a common response has emerged as well as a few commonly held critiques of the KNRC plan. This commonality could be the result of the work being done by the Inter-NGO Forum which has networked the majority of NGOs working with street children. The network provides group discussions each month where information is shared and some consensus might be reached about Kamparingisa. However, the majority of the NGOs who work with street children insist that their problems with Kamparingisa are based on observations of the situation in Kampala and at Kamparingisa since the KRNC programme was launched.

It is worth further exploring the Inter-NGO forum before moving to their critique since understanding what it does is key to understanding how the NGOs have responded. The Inter-NGO forum was started as a networking opportunity for Kampala's street children NGOs. It was meant to link agencies in an effort to better understand the problem of street children as realized in Kampala and capacity build within the individual NGOs as they formed partnerships and learned from each other.

⁶⁵ Interview with KNRC children, Kamparingisa.

⁶⁶ According to KNRC social workers this risk is mitigated by only keeping adults with older adolescents.

⁶⁷ Interview with MGLSD employee, Kampala.

⁶⁸ Interview with NGO worker, Kampala.

One of the more pronounced benefits of the Inter-NGO forum has been to differentiate legitimate NGOs from charlatans (known locally as brief casers) and bring credibility to authentic agencies. A number of NGOs have been formed for the sole purpose of soliciting funds by unscrupulous means.⁶⁹ There has been outrage by the media and with the general public for these organizations, which have led to a marred image for the sincere groups who are doing something to help the children on the streets. Often, the media will lump all NGOs together, which has created a unique set of problems for NGOs' fundraising efforts and credibility.⁷⁰

Out of the Inter-NGO forum a group emerged who partnered together to provide services for the children at KNRC. The Kamparingisa Support Group (KSG) is made up of any forum member who actively and consistently works at KNRC. This group has been able to focus the services available to children at KNRC and ensure that the under-funded facility is given extra support to handle the vast needs of the children. The KSG is mainly made up of larger, better funded NGOs who have access to suitable transport, however, many with vehicles have offered rides to social workers from other NGOs. In particular the Tigers Club and Give Me A Chance both offer to take anyone who wishes with them on their weekly runs to KNRC. Even with this offer it seems that the bigger NGOs still do the majority of the work at KNRC while the smaller ones have either focused their attention on the children still in Kampala or on different types of services for at risk children.⁷¹ The groups who do go to KNRC provide an extensive list of services for the children including hygiene training, life skill training, informal education, STD awareness training, vocational skills training, counselling, drug and alcohol rehabilitation, athletics, arts and crafts, religious input, resettlement and donate a wide variety of supplies including clothes, blankets and medicines.⁷²

Aside from formulating a response to redirect NGO services to KNRC, the NGOs were fairly candid about their view of Kamparingisa. The research team was genuinely surprised by the consistency of the critiques. With the exception of two workers who were very positive about KNRC, the other eighteen interviewed had responses that ranged from mild acceptance to near hostility. Most could be categorized as having

⁶⁹ This critique was echoed often from government employees, NGO workers and adults in the community.

⁷⁰ Interview with NGO director, Kampala.

⁷¹ Focus group at Inter-NGO Forum meeting, Kampala.

⁷² Focus group at Inter-NGO Forum meeting, Kampala.

acquiesced to the idea of KNRC being the new paradigm they must work with and were more interested in how to solve the current problems.

The most often heard comment was that the government had not initiated KNRC out of concern for children but other interest. In their mind Kamparingisa was designed as a clean up exercise. These interests were identified as economic but the NGOs also felt that there was no obvious increase in tourism or business in the city as a result of this round up approach. Most felt that Kampala had a growing street child population that was still a massive issue and could not be taken care of simply by sweeping them off the streets and out of sight. Government officials pointed out that the round-up approach could be justified and was covered by Article 20 of the CRC, since the streets are not a suitable environment for children to grow up and develop in. From the Government's point of view, it is fulfilling its duty by removing the children from the streets as it was concerned about the impact this environment had on the children. Government insists that the NGOs' comment about personal interest is incorrect – the Government has ratified that CRC and want to stand by it.⁷³

One NGO worker expressed the view that since no designated outlay of funds was made available to KNRC to care for the children adequately, the public got cleared streets while the children got something akin to an internment camp.⁷⁴ It is interesting to note that no official budget exists, and the government dodged all attempts at acquiring expense records for KNRC when it is the centrepiece of the entire country's response to street children.⁷⁵ The lack of funds made available and the lack of outside accountability for existing funds has created an atmosphere of speculation and opened the MGLSD up to potentially unnecessary criticism.

The NGOs we spoke to were asked to offer an alternative to Kamparingisa. It was obvious from the response to this question that the great majority of NGOs had not formulated any viable alternative. The only response given was a system that allowed children to choose whether or not to go to KNRC rather than being forcibly rounded up and removed. However in August 2001, an alternative proposal was presented to the government by the Inter-NGO Forum which according to the NGOs was dismissed out of

⁷³ Interview with Commissioner Otim, May 2006

⁷⁴ Interview with NGO employee, Kampala.

⁷⁵ Result of interviews with three MGLSD employees, Kampala.

hand.⁷⁶ The Government disputes this and says that they have a personal letter from one of the NGOs thanking them for their work with street children.

The next most lodged complaint was the facility condition and level of services available to children at KNRC. Some expressed this opinion with near outrage while most NGO personnel were upset to some degree. The complaints largely mirrored what the government employees had said, but tended to go further by speculating about the ramifications of poor and non-functioning facilities. The conditions most mentioned by the NGOs were the lack of medicines and no running water. If a highly contagious illness were introduced to KNRC it would not be possible to quickly treat it since medicines are not typically available. Some NGOs reported children suffering for days in bed because medicines could not be secured to treat common ailments. Another reported that numerous children have eye infections that affect their vision and threaten their long term ocular health. A number of the children reportedly have been diagnosed as HIV+ and thus have compromised immune systems that cannot afford to be exposed to other children who are contagious and not properly treated.⁷⁷

The lack of water also creates a whole list of problems beyond the inconvenience of having to carry it long distances each day. Dehydration, poor sanitary conditions leading to the spread of disease and contamination are only a few of the problems that are unnecessarily introduced to KNRC.⁷⁸ Toilets that cannot be flushed are worrisome to some because of the conditions created when flies and mosquitoes begin to nest in human faeces. While water is the major issue, many NGO personnel pointed to the smorgasbord of problems which add up to a facility that in their minds is not child friendly. Many say that KNRC was designed to be a prison facility and not made to handle the myriad of serious problems faced by street children. This statement was agreed by Government, which reinforced that KNRC was only meant to hold street children as a temporary measure whilst another facility was completed.⁷⁹

Most of the NGOs also had a strong aversion to the mixing of street children with serious offenders, this was again echoed by the ministry as a concern who reinforced that

⁷⁶ For a full account see the Inter NGO Forum Report entitled M.O.R.E., 2001 available from the offices of Tigers Club NGO, Kampala, Uganda.

⁷⁷ Interview with NGO personnel corroborated by KNRC social worker, Kamparingisa.

⁷⁸ Interview with NGO director, Kampala.

⁷⁹ Interview with Commissioner Otim, May 2006

KNRC was only supposed to be a temporary measure⁸⁰. Nonetheless, it is a temporary measure which is currently a large part of the Government's strategy on street children and since KNRC still serves as a detention centre, it houses children who have been convicted of a major offense and sentenced by the Ugandan courts to confinement. Due to there not being enough personnel to handle the large numbers of street children and young offenders who reside at KNRC, all of the children are kept together. At the same time offenders who at one time had a programme geared specifically toward their rehabilitation have seen it dissipated as resources have been put into trying to manage the large influx of street children.

According to many of the local NGO workers, and easily verified by many casual conversations about the town, the word Kamparingisa is infamous in Ugandan society and has been used as the 'boogeyman' to scare children into behaving in a way that parents find acceptable. This has created a situation in which children who go to Kamparingisa can be severely stigmatized.⁸¹ For street children this means an additional layer of unfair labelling that is added to the ones they already carry. Street children often ask what they have done to deserve going to KNRC and sometimes wonder if it is simply a problem that "they are alive" according to one NGO respondent. Further, it falsely creates the assumption in the public mind that street children are delinquents and should be treated as such.

Many NGOs also spoke to the fact that some children at KNRC do not have access to any rehabilitative programs. Instead they are either forced to work or just wander around or play. While this might be appealing in some degree to a child accustomed to the freedom of the streets it does not help the child develop. Since KNRC is tasked mainly with rehabilitation it is disturbing that many NGOs offer the only help that some children receive.⁸² These same NGOs maintained that they were happy to offer the services but felt their help was limited and not enough to ensure the children receive anywhere close to the care they need.

The fact that children are provided with education in a local school whilst at KNRC is an important and commendable feature of the centre. However, some features of the education provision were highlighted as problematic by some NGOs. Since many

⁸⁰ Interview with Willy Otim, Commissioner for Children, May 2006

⁸¹ Interview with NGO director, Kampala.

⁸² Interview with NGO employee, Kampala.

of the children are behind they need catch up in course work which, according to a number of NGOs (in contrast to government reports) is not offered at KNRC. This results in students who might attend classes but not gain much from the lessons.⁸³ Additionally, many students are simply not offered any educational opportunities. Some of this can be linked to the stigma of being from Kamparingisa and sharing a school with children from the surrounding area.⁸⁴ Many of the teachers reportedly treated the KNRC students differently and even called the children names such as “bad kid” or “street kid” in front of their peers.⁸⁵ The government has partly remedied this by not forcing KNRC students to wear specific uniforms and by working with the educators. There are also concerns about the quality of education offered at the local school.⁸⁶

The Community Responds

By and large the community has been happy with the significant decrease in street children. Most point out that the children were simply a nuisance while other saw the children as criminals. There is an interesting mix of feelings for residents and business owners. On one hand they appreciate that the children no longer present a problem for the community while on the other they disagree with how the KNRC plan has been implemented. For most, however, it would seem that the end justifies the means.

Repeatedly we heard how bad things were before the children were taken away. Many reported having to pay to have vehicles protected or they would end up vandalized or missing parts such as headlights.⁸⁷ Evidently, gleaning from our interviews, going into the city was a hardship because of the number of child beggars who gathered around during any visit.⁸⁸ A number of residents also complained about the problems of crime that were perpetuated by the children.

Business owners complained that without adequate security the children crowded around store fronts and either hassled or stole from their customers. The result was customers who went elsewhere to avoid the harassment or chance of being robbed. Store

⁸³ Interview with NGO employee, Kampala.

⁸⁴ Interview with child at KNRC, Kamparingisa.

⁸⁵ Interview with NGO worker, Kamparingisa.

⁸⁶ Interview with NGO worker, Kampala.

⁸⁷ Focus group with mostly European expatriates, Kampala.

⁸⁸ This sentiment was echoed frequently in interview with residents of Kampala.

workers also complained about shoplifting being a problem forcing them to raise the prices on all their goods.

We also heard from a number of respondents that even though KNRC is vitally important to Uganda's future, it has not been adequately explained to the public. This was proven by the number of residents who had no idea children were sent to KNRC and assumed that maybe the children simply had been taken home or the situation in Uganda was just getting better.

Those few residents who were well informed about KNRC expressed concerns about the children Uganda was producing. This group tended to feel a sense of duty to the children and felt they should be the highest priority for Uganda. However, most felt that the levels of corruption and unnecessary bureaucracy within the government would smother any effort regardless of how high minded the ideals. Many community members went on to say that a high percentage of families in Uganda care for more than their own children, thus many children simply cannot be absorbed and are left to fend for themselves. However, the residents felt that these children deserved the same opportunities as other children.

Kamparingisa through the Eyes of a Child

By far we interviewed more street children than any other group. We tried hard to ensure we heard from solid representative members of the other stakeholders, but we wanted more than anything to hear from the children themselves. If this report is skewed, it is biased toward the voice of the children. This was not the original plan but it soon became obvious that while the children were the group most affected by the KNRC plan, they had the least ability to speak into the process.

A number of comments were reported less than ten times each but were heard from children in more than one geographic area of the city. Comments that were made less than ten times and only by children in one area unfortunately had to be dismissed as they might be nothing more than a fabricated tale shared with friends. Thus, because of time restraints the validity of these comments was measured by the number of different groups that reported them rather than actually verifying them with further observations.

On a positive note, children had some good things to say about KNRC. All but a few told us that the buildings you stay in are among some of the best in Uganda. This correlates well with the work of the First Lady, Mrs. Janet Museveni, who has secured many needed improvements for the children. Many also told us that the best part was having a bed. Even though most pointed out that two or three share a bed they all enjoyed the sleep. Sleep is a precious commodity on the streets as abuse and theft are common, and this part of KNRC by far was the most heralded benefit.⁸⁹ Children also spoke of the benefits of being able to play and have friends.⁹⁰ Children on the streets often base their relationships more on pragmatic survival concerns and can usually ill afford the luxury of a friend.⁹¹ Many children also said that the education is a positive feature of KNRC.⁹² Many Kampala children considered going to KNRC simply as being able to go to school. Another consistent theme we heard was that life on the streets meant not knowing if and when you would eat next. While the KNRC children complained about the quality of the food, children on the streets of Kampala thought that any food on a consistent basis would be good.

Children were by far the most concerned about the quality of care available at KNRC. Almost all who had been kept there spoke of having received corporal punishment, either officially or often unofficially, or of hearing that “beatings” were standard fare at the centre. Government officials rejected this claim, pointing out that KNRC staff are trained and are well aware of UN standards of childcare. The official cited a case in Naguru (a facility similar to KNRC), where a member of staff was fired for committing such an offense. He said that only the headmaster can punish anyone and he must record the incident. He also expressed concern about taking what street children tell you seriously.⁹³

Many street children also questioned if the centre had been designed to get rid of them or to help them. They pointed to the lack of vocational training available and the inconsistent nature of the education they receive at KNRC.⁹⁴ The general consensus

⁸⁹ Kilbourn, 1997: 22.

⁹⁰ Interview with group of children at KNRC, Kamparingisa.

⁹¹ Kilbourn, 1997: 21.

⁹² Various interviews with street children, Kampala.

⁹³ Interview with Commissioner Otim, May 2006

⁹⁴ Many of the children we interviewed in Kampala had been to KNRC at least once.

among children at KNRC and on Kampala's streets was that KNRC is more about hiding the problem of street children instead of helping them.

A disproportionate amount of the children in Kampala we spoke to, told us that they had been to KNRC before and had either run away or left a bad resettlement. This points to a severe problem with either the rehabilitation process, the living conditions or the resettlement process. However, these comments would be consistent with an understaffed facility that did not have enough resources to provide adequate counselling. It also gives credence to the scattered comments we heard that district governments were not capable of handling the follow up care needed for successful resettlements. Another conclusion is that there is in fact a great deal that happens at KNRC which is offensive to children or not in their best interest. Perhaps KNRC fails to provide enough up front care to work with children who have just been taken off of the streets, particularly since it was not designed for the purpose of rehabilitating street children. These children are accustomed to an inordinate amount of freedom and any kind of restraint can be a challenge for them.

Many children were keen to point out the things that make KNRC an unsuitable place for street children. Although the buildings were nice, a number were emphatic that it is nothing more than a prison or holding place. One child summed up quite a few respondents' attitudes with the comment that KNRC was not a place for children, it has no solutions just digging, slashing grass, hard work, fetching water and beatings.⁹⁵ We heard about the beatings more than any other comment. The consistency of this comment regardless of where in Kampala or when the children were interviewed is provocative, but it was repeated by nearly all of the KNRC children we interviewed as well. This cannot be easily explained away other than the anti-corporal punishment rule is at least purposefully disregarded by a few employees and perhaps unofficially sanctioned as well by senior leadership. It is hard to imagine system wide abuse if it is not purposefully ignored unless leadership is all but completely disconnected from the situation.

The issue of the work being too hard for a child is harder to quantify. Many children spoke of the problem but it is hard to make a correlation between what a child experiences at KNRC and what they would be expected to do in a typical Ugandan family. My experience was that many children in traditional home settings fetch water

⁹⁵ Interview with street child, Kampala.

and many were involved with fishing or agricultural work. This may in fact be a case where trading the attitudes of the street with a formalised program is simply tough and the children complain. You cannot blame the Government for children who do not appreciate the value of hard work. However, it would be good if some record keeping and oversight were given to make sure that the amount of work required of children was in line with societal norms.

We heard the following comments less than the ones above; however, we heard these enough times that they are worth mentioning. Children spoke of the use of small jail cells by the staff to handle newly arriving children and children who misbehaved.⁹⁶ These cells which from our observations are less than 3 metres are devoid of beds, plumbing and adequate air circulation. The children who told us about the cells also said that you do not get food or enough water while you are in there and that many children became sick.⁹⁷ It is believable that children do get sick as the smell alone is pungent. Add to that the dramatic temperature changes that happen from night to day at KNRC and a child with no access to proper bedding or health care would surely be at a severe risk. Another problem with the cells is that they are the only form of sanctioned discipline save more work afforded the staff.⁹⁸ A little infraction can subject a child to the cells where they often must share the space with other children. Five boys were crowded into one of the tiny cells and some were crying out and screaming when I visited KNRC. Some children spoke of month or more stays even though this claim was refuted by KNRC personnel.⁹⁹ These claims by the children about being locked up in isolation rooms was disputed by Government officials we spoke to, who said that the isolation rooms are not used for street children, but only for violent offenders, and that official policy states that denial of food is not allowed to be used as a punishment.¹⁰⁰

A few respondents reported that some children who go to KNRC disappear and are never seen again.¹⁰¹ Uganda's tier two ranking on the US State Department's Trafficking in Persons Report sets the backdrop for a sinister scenario in this regard.

⁹⁶ Interview with child at KNRC, Kamparingisa.

⁹⁷ Interview with child at KNRC, Kamparingisa.

⁹⁸ Interview with KNRC social worker, Kamparingisa.

⁹⁹ Interview with street child, Kampala.

¹⁰⁰ Interview with Commissioner Otim, May 2006

¹⁰¹ This comment was made by street children in Kampala but corroborated with an interview with a KNRC employee.

However, no other NGO or Government personnel had heard even a rumour of trafficking so perhaps there are other explanations. It is feasible that some children might misinterpret the resettlement process and confuse that with trafficking. However, it is worth mentioning because enough groups of children believe it happens and it stands in the way of them going to KNRC.

Some of the female respondents claimed that boys often raped the girls as adequate protection was not provided.¹⁰² Other girls claimed that not only the interned boys but the staff were involved in rape. One said that two members of the staff forced a few girls to perform sexually for other staff and community men for a profit.¹⁰³ These rape claims were also rejected by Government officials we spoke to, who said that the girls are kept isolated and protected by a female staff person and so rape would not be possible. There is also a police post located next to the centre, so the police would know if rape had been committed.¹⁰⁴

Children were quick to point out that the centre could in fact be a very good place if, as one child put it, they were concerned with making “good Ugandans and not just out for their own gain.”¹⁰⁵ This comment was echoed by a number of children who thought if a few changes could be made they would definitely prefer KNRC to the street.

III. Discussion of Results

Evaluating Kamparingisa against the CRC

Much work needs to be done in the area of evaluating KNRC against the various conventions and charters that Uganda has signed and ratified for the purpose of protecting children and promoting their rights. While Uganda has ratified an impressive list of human rights documents I will focus on the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). This convention, while not exhaustive in the area of basic human rights, represents the best example for the specialized needs of children and even makes strides in pursuing cultural rights.¹⁰⁶ Additionally, the MGLSD personnel we

¹⁰² Interview with street child, Kampala.

¹⁰³ Interview with child at KNRC, Kamparingisa.

¹⁰⁴ Interview with Commissioner Otim, May 2006

¹⁰⁵ Interview with street child, Kampala.

¹⁰⁶ Donnelly, 2003: 218.

interviewed pointed frequently to this document as the reason for instituting KNRC. Thus, if the CRC was a major impetus for implementing KNRC then continual review is necessary to make sure the programme is living up to the standards it was built upon. Frequent evaluation against this standard serves also to ensure that KNRC evolves at a pace consistent with the social changes and problems in East African society that produce street children.

There are some areas of the CRC that KNRC addresses more than adequately. Street children inherently are denied access to survival, health, safety and educational rights. In these areas KNRC provides for children much better than the streets of Kampala. There are a number of CRC articles that are met by KNRC and rightly used to justify the implementation of the plan. Specifically articles five, twenty eight and thirty one deserve more attention.¹⁰⁷

Article 5. States parties shall respect the responsibilities, rights and duties of parents or, where applicable, the members of the extended family or community as provided for by local custom, legal guardians or other persons legally responsible for the child, to provide, in a manner consistent with the evolving capacities of the child, appropriate direction and guidance in the exercise by the child of the rights recognized in the present Convention

Article 5 clearly spells out the primacy of families and communities in raising children. Kamparingisa has a mandate to not only rehabilitate children but to resettle them as well. KNRC partners with an NGO who handles the majority if not all, depending on whom you ask, the resettlements. Kamparingisa also provides a mattress, blanket, clothes and a small stipend to children who are placed back in their communities and does follow up visits to check on the success of the resettlement according to the director. However, this claim was disputed by some of the children we interviewed who told us they had returned to the streets after an unsuccessful resettlement.¹⁰⁸ Regardless, with over 200 children resettled to date in their homes or communities, KNRC is attempting to comply with this article.

¹⁰⁷ All references to the CRC can be found in Byrne, 1998: 75-87.

¹⁰⁸ Focus Group discussion with street children, Kampala.

Article 6. *1. State Parties recognize that every child has the inherent right to life.*
2. States Parties shall ensure to the maximum extent possible the survival and development of the child.

Article 6's priority of survival is perhaps most addressed by KNRC. KNRC deals with this article in that it removes children from the dangers they face on the streets. Children are given a place to eat, sleep and learn as opposed to the often vicious cycles of begging, drug use and exploitation they face without proper adult care. It is fitting that this article more than any other was mentioned by MGLSD personnel as being fulfilled by KNRC. In fact people who disagree with the KNRC model wholly find it difficult to offer a better, realistic solution for ensuring this article of the convention is fulfilled.¹⁰⁹

Article 28. *1. States Parties shall recognize the right of the child to education and with a view to achieving this right progressively and on the basis of equal opportunity, they shall, in particular:*

- (a) Make primary education compulsory and available free to all;*
- (b) Encourage the development of different forms of secondary education, including and general and vocational education, make them available and accessible to every child, and take appropriate measures such as the introduction of free education and offering financial assistance in case of need;*
- (c) Make higher education accessible to all on the basis of capacity by every appropriate means;*
- (d) Make educational and vocational information and guidance available and accessible to all children;*
- (e) Take measures to encourage regular attendance at schools and the reduction of drop-off rates.*

¹⁰⁹ This was evidenced by interviews with NGO personnel and in the Focus Group at the Inter-NGO forum, Kampala.

2. States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to ensure that school discipline is administered in a manner consistent with the child's human dignity and in conformity with the present Convention.

3. States Parties shall promote and encourage international co-operation in matters relating to education, in particular with a view to contributing to the elimination of ignorance and illiteracy throughout the world and facilitating access to scientific and technical knowledge and modern teaching methods. In this regard, particular account shall be taken of the needs of developing countries

Article 28 of the CRC focuses on the importance and universal need of education. Apart from informal education programs offered by NGOs, children on the streets are effectively denied education. At Kamparingisa children can attend the local school and make up deficiencies caused by non-attendance at a catch up programme that is offered by a Kampala based NGO. Many children we interviewed pointed this out as the best thing about KNRC. Interviews revealed that KNRC has an extensive bill at the school but fees are promised for all the children who go there from KNRC.¹¹⁰ So far the school has overlooked the lack of payment and continued to let KNRC children attend. Hopefully this arrangement will be allowed to continue and the students will not have to forgo this important right due to fiscal concerns.

Article 31. 1. States Parties recognize the right of the child to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child and to participate freely in cultural life and arts.

2. States Parties shall respect and promote the right of the child to participate fully in cultural and artistic life shall encourage the provision of appropriate and equal opportunities for cultural, artistic, recreational and leisure activity.

Article 31 of the convention gives children the right to have time for rest, leisure, play and recreation. KNRC has a wonderful football pitch and many of the students we

¹¹⁰ Interview with KNRC Lead Social Worker, Kamparingisa.

saw at the facility were playing a group game. A number expressed that having friends to play with was a good thing about Kamparingisa.

KNRC addresses some of the more commonly overlooked human rights that are denied street children, but creates new problems in many other ways. Below is a list of some of the more obvious oversights that have arisen because of KNRC.

Article 3. 1. In all actions concerning children, whether undertaken by public or private social welfare institutions, courts of law, administrative authorities or legislative bodies, the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration.

2. States Parties undertake to ensure the child such protection and care as is necessary for his or her well-being, taken into account the rights and duties of his or her parents, legal guardians, or other individuals legally responsible for him or her, and, to this end, shall take all appropriate legislative and administrative measures.

3. States Parties shall ensure that the institutions, services and facilities responsible for the care or protection of children shall conform with the standards established by competent authorities, particularly in the areas of safety, health, in the number and suitability of their staff, as well as competent supervision.

Article 3, section 3 stipulates that State institutions responsible for the care of children shall conform to the standards established by competent authorities. According to the Director, the centre is undermanned by fifty percent and quite a few of the staff are there because no one else applied for the position. If the director is the one who scripted the plan for KNRC then it would follow that he is Uganda's expert. But even he, by his own admission, stated that there are not enough competent staff to accomplish KNRC's mission. This is particularly important when you consider the fallout created by a severely understaffed facility. Diminished programming and the ability to adequately monitor the children are two of the bigger areas that are affected by even a small lapse in staff. KNRC can only hire half of the needed employees ensuring that glaring problems will spring to life in every facet of its programme. Additionally, with no medicine supply there is no way that the health stipulation of this article can adequately be met.

Article 16. 1. *No child shall be subjected to arbitrary or unlawful interference with his or her privacy, family, home or correspondence, nor to unlawful attacks on his or her honor and reputation.*

2. *The child has the right to the protection of the law against such interference or attacks.*

Article 16, section 1 puts forth that children are to be protected from unlawful attacks on their honor and reputation. The decision to place the street children in a facility notorious as a detention centre creates another set of problems for children after they leave. Since most people we talked to knew Kamparingisa only as an institution for Uganda's worst juvenile offenders there is the potential for an automatic association that follows any child who has been there. A public information campaign could help alleviate the stigma of Kamparingisa, but this seems unlikely in light of the current fiscal problems of the MGLSD. It is understandable that financial reasons led Uganda to implement the rehabilitation centre at the existent Kamparingisa facility since it was already equipped to handle children but the psychological cost to children are high enough that future centres should avoid this mistake.

Article 19. 1. *State parties shall take all appropriate legislative, administrative, social and educational measures to protect the child from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse, while in the care of parent(s), legal guardian(s) or any other person who has the care of the child.*

2. *Such protective measures should, as appropriate, include effective procedures for the establishment of social programmes to provide for necessary support for the child and for those who have the care of the child, as well as for other forms of prevention and for identification, reporting, referral, investigation, treatment, and follow-up of instances of child maltreatment described heretofore, and, as appropriate, for judicial involvement.*

Article 19 is intended to protect children from abuse of any kind, neglect, maltreatment and exploitation. The gross understaffing precludes KNRC from being able

to monitor or assure this right. With an eerie regularity children spoke of the harsh treatment including beatings that they received at KNRC from both staff and other children. An anti-corporal punishment policy is in effect at the centre but it obviously is overlooked by at least some of the staff at the centre. Children both at Kamparingisa and on the streets who had fled both reported the incidents and their frequency. One girl reported leaving because she was pressured by a staff member, who acted as her pimp, to have intercourse with other staff members.¹¹¹ She said she received money but some girls did it for extra favours at the centre.

Article 20. 1. A child temporarily or permanently deprived of his or her family environment, or in whose own best interest cannot be allowed to remain in that environment, shall be entitled to special protection and assistance provided by the State.

2. States Parties shall in accordance with their national laws ensure alternative care for such a child.

3. Such care could include, inter alia, foster placement, kafalah of Islamic law, adoption, or if necessary placement in suitable institutions for the care of children. When considering solutions, due regard shall be paid to the desirability of continuity in a child's upbringing and to the child's ethnic, cultural and linguistic background.

Article 20 section 1 makes it clear that the Government has a responsibility to provide special care and protection for street children. The question is whether forcibly rounding them up and placing them at a detention centre, which is understaffed and resourced, is actually special care and protection.

Article 20, section 3 states that children who are cared for by the State or are adopted should have continuity in relation to their ethnic, religious, cultural and linguistic background. This article becomes problematic for the Karamajong children who find reintegration difficult. When the staff at KNRC put western style clothes on a child or teaches her to read she is at that point cut off from her people.¹¹² This scenario is difficult in that there really is no good option for dealing with this article for the children from Karamoja. It is a catch-22 for the MGLSD since they are required to educate and

¹¹¹ Interview with street child, Kampala.

¹¹² Interview with KNRC Lead Social Worker, Kamparingisa.

rehabilitate children but in doing so make some anathema to the communities that the process is supposed to prepare the children to re-enter. This complex problem will require some very imaginative solutions if Uganda hopes to fulfill the stipulations of this article.

Article 24. 1. *States Parties recognize the right of the child to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health and to facilities for the treatment of illness and rehabilitation of health. States Parties shall strive to ensure that no child is deprived of his or her right to access to such health care services.*

2. *States Parties shall pursue full implementation of this right and, in particular, shall take appropriate measures:*

(a) *To diminish infant and child mortality;*

(b) *To ensure the provision of necessary medical assistance and health care to all children with emphasis on the development of primary health care;*

(c) *To combat disease and malnutrition; including within the framework of primary health care, through, inter alia, the application readily available technology and through the provision of adequate nutritious foods and clean drinking-water, taking into consideration the dangers and risks of environmental pollution;*

(d) *To ensure appropriate pre-and post-natal health care for mothers;*

(e) *To ensure all segments of society, in particular parents and children, are informed, have access to education and are supported in the use of basic knowledge of child health and nutrition, the advantages of breast-feeding, hygiene and environmental sanitation and the prevention of accidents;*

(f) *To develop preventative health care, guidance for parents and family planning education and services.*

3. *States Parties shall take all effective and appropriate measures with a view to abolishing traditional practices prejudicial to the health of children.*

4. *States Parties undertake to promote and encourage international co-operation with a view to achieving progressively the full realization of the right recognized in the present article. In this regard, particular account shall be taken of the needs of developing countries.*

Article 24 mandates that children should receive the highest attainable standard of health care to include treatment of illness and rehabilitation. Once again the clinic is not enough to ensure that children are cared for. Arrangements with hospitals and proper medications must be made available. A number of children were ill during our team's visits and no treatment was available. Many of the sick children were feverish and lethargic and the nurse indicated that they were probably suffering preventable side effects of sickle cell anemia. However, no treatments were available for any condition.

Article 37. (b) No child shall be deprived of his or her liberty unlawfully or arbitrarily. The arrest, detention or imprisonment of a child shall be in conformity with the law and shall be used only as a measure of last resort and for the shortest appropriate periods of time.

Article 37. (b) explicitly states that children shall be deprived of their liberty only as a last resort. It goes on to stipulate that any incarceration should be for the shortest appropriate period of time. This article more than any other captures the worst infraction by KNRC. By using round-ups and sending children to a functioning detention centre, the State is effectively incarcerating children. Interestingly, the staff asked each child we were allowed to interview if they were street children or remand children. It was only by the responses that any distinction could be made since all were kept together and had the exact same programme. The round-ups are problematic as well in that they do not offer children any choice. There is no input at all as the children are simply rounded up and held in a containment area until they can be transported to KNRC.

Article 37. (c) Every child deprived of liberty shall be treated with humanity and respect for the inherent dignity of the human person, and in a manner which takes into account the needs of persons of their age. In particular, every child deprived of liberty shall be separated from adults unless it is considered in the child's best interest not to do so and shall have the right to maintain contact with his or her family through correspondence and visits, save in exceptional circumstances;

Article 37. (c) addresses the need for children deprived of liberty to be separated from adults who are also incarcerated. KNRC is supposed to fulfil this article but in actuality it does not. Adult males are kept in the same building with boys as young as five and six. However, no problems have been reported because of this situation and no child we interviewed expressed either displeasure or concern because of the arrangement. However, there are very real reasons that adult offenders need to be kept away from children and this scenario could eventually create a problem.

IV. Recommendations

- Allegations of physical and sexual abuse, trafficking and disappearance of resources should be immediately and urgently investigated by the relevant authorities.
- The forcible round up of children found on the streets should be immediately stopped and a total strategic plan or synergistic solution for the situation of street children in Kampala should be developed. This should be done with the full cooperation of key government ministries, NGOs and the street children themselves, including preventative measures that address the issues pushing children to the streets. For the street children to realistically participate they need to be empowered with the skills necessary to fully contribute.
- The policy that child and adult offenders and street children not be mixed together, should be fully implemented.
- Place KNRC under the authority of an independent board to be composed of government officials from multiple ministries and a spectrum of accredited NGOs and this board be given responsibility and the task of overseeing a pre-approved budget that can adequately cover the reasonable expenses of rehabilitating and resettling children.
- Listen seriously to the children's suggestions for improvements at KNRC which include, in order of priority, better vocational training, no corporal punishment, more suitable educational opportunities, better food, no use of jail cells and caring staff.

- The preparation process prior to resettlement must be professional and thorough. A conducive environment must be established, relationships of trust formed between children and their key workers to include necessary counselling and rehabilitation.
- Ugandan government should commit to a study of the long term affects of KNRC in terms of future cost benefit, propensity for developing criminal networks and psycho-social effects on the children who have been placed there.
- Further and comprehensive research...(see below)
- The NGO Board should be strengthened to enable it to monitor and evaluate the activities of NGOs and therefore ensure that all NGOs are credible and professional. This maybe a step towards restoring the image of NGOs working effectively with street children.

Further Research Possibilities

As this research was carried out mainly in a two week period to explore the issues discussed there is much that needs to be studied. There simply are too many stones that need to be overturned before Uganda can confidently feel that it has a clear picture of how it can effectively make a difference in the lives of street children.

Specifically, it would be interesting to see a study done on why children from so far away are making their way to Kampala. What pull or push factors are involved in these decisions? This research would be very helpful in developing intervention strategies at a local, national and regional level. There are two areas specific to this research that I feel would be very beneficial. One would be a closer look at the huge influx of Karamojong people. Several questions need to be answered as this group would, on first observation, comprise the bulk of new people coming to Kampala. Another area of research that desperately needs attention is the connection between the conflict in the North and the children who are coming to Kampala. This is a nuanced problem that needs dedicated research.

Further research also needs to be done on the plan, procedures and oversight of Kamparingisa. KNRC must be loosed from its shroud of secrecy. Sunshine laws like those instituted in the United States would serve the public well. There simply is no

discernable transparency concerning the budget and spending at KNRC. An accurate understanding of the chain of command and accountability practices the MGLSD has in place would serve not only the public but the government of Uganda.

Perhaps the most important piece of research needed is a very in depth look at the operation of KNRC. If a team could survey the day to day life of KNRC over a significant period of time it would produce the results really needed to inform productive change. A substantial enough observation period would help not only to reveal the problems at KNRC but could develop a more adequate framework for understanding how they could be fixed. This paper has painted the picture of KNRC in a somewhat two dimensional manner that could use breadth and contextualization. There is ample room for the input of social service and social science perspectives

It is worth keeping in mind that very imperfect conditions led to children being on the street in the first place and thus any solution will be limited and problematic. Finding solutions for the problems of hurting children is neither a quick process nor a simple one. Flexibility and imagination coupled with committed and strategic partnerships between all stakeholders are needed. Treading these choppy waters will be uncomfortable for all, but children who have already suffered innumerable heartbreak are too important to be cast aside once again simply because the solutions require hard work.

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