

FUNDED BY THE UNITED STATES
DEPARTMENT OF LABOR

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

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



2007

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

AVSI	<i>Associazione Volontari per il Servizio Internazionale</i> (Association of Volunteers in International Service)
BCP	Brick Laying and Concrete Practice
BOG	Board of Governors
C&J	Carpentry and Joinery
CAO	Chief Administrative Officer
CBO	Community-based Organization
CCM	Child-Centered Methodologies
CCT	Center Coordinating Tutor
CDO	Community Development Officer
CMLD	Classroom Management and Learning
COPE	Complementary Opportunities for Primary Education
CPC	Child Protection Committees
CVC	Community Volunteer Counselor
DEO	District Education Officer
DIS	District Inspector of Schools
DRAGON	Decorative Arts and Graphics Vocational School
EI	Education Initiative
GOU	Government of Uganda
HIV/AIDS	Human Immunodeficiency Virus/Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
IGA	Income-generating Activity
ILAB	Bureau of International Labor Affairs
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
LEAP	Livelihoods, Education, and Protection to End Child Labor
LRA	Lord's Resistance Army
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation

MoES	Ministry of Education and Sports
MGLSD	Ministry of Gender, Labor, and Social Development
NFE	Nonformal Education
NGO	Nongovernmental Organization
NREF	Northern Region Education Forum
NSC	National Steering Committee
NUSAF	Northern Uganda
OCFT	Office of Child Labor, Forced Labor, and Human Trafficking
ORACLE	Opportunities for Reducing Adolescent and Child Labor Through Education
P1-P7	Primary School Levels
PTA	Parent-Teacher Association
PTC	Primary Teachers' College
RFP	Requests for Proposals
SMC	School Management Committee
ToR	Terms of Reference
TPR	Technical Progress Report
UBOS	Uganda Bureau of Statistics
UCE	Ugandan Certificate of Education
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Education Fund
UPE	Universal Primary Education
USDOL	U.S. Department of Labor
USE	Universal Secondary Education

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

For just over four years, the International Rescue Committee (IRC) and the Association of Volunteers in International Service (AVSI) have worked in partnership to improve the lives of vulnerable children in war-torn Northern Uganda with a US\$3.2 million grant from the U.S. Department of Labor (USDOL). The Opportunities for Reducing Adolescent and Child Labor Through Education, or ORACLE, made it possible for nearly 6,000 boys and girls to attend school or receive vocational or alternative educational support programs. The project has just ended and this Final Evaluation assesses the significant progress made in an area where fear and terror have been norms for the target population.

It is estimated that 1.8 million have been displaced, out of a total population of 2.7 million in Northern Uganda. The war has been characterized by atrocities including murder, rape, mutilations, and mass abductions of boys and girls. The conflict has left tens of thousands of people dead, and a population of orphans raising families of traumatized siblings. The prolonged crisis posed significant challenges regarding causes of child labor, non-attendance at schools, and suitable response mechanisms. The nature of the conflict affected the extent to which the project could make a difference in the lives of school-age children who were engaged in the worse forms of child labor or were at risk of exploitation. Despite the fact that the region endured a constantly changing situation in which large populations moved to towns and created Internally Displaced Person (IDP) camps, ORACLE provided consistent immediate and long-term solutions.

The Final Evaluation was conducted to identify and assess accomplishments over the life of the project. The evaluation methodology included a two-week field visit in the two impact areas and meetings with beneficiaries and stakeholders. The investigation focused on the strategies, relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, and actual impact of the program. Lessons that could influence future programming were sought.

The project design was relevant and reflected an appropriate approach to changing attitudes and behaviors and meeting immediate educational needs. The strategies employed were practical and intelligent and considered the particular needs of the population.

The project should be commended for remaining focused on using educational strategies as the main vehicle to eliminate the worst forms of child labor. Activities were kept on an operational scale—support to children, training educators, supplying schools, and conducting mass awareness-raising activities. Policy advocacy was done as appropriate and needed. It could be expanded, but it must be recognized that such activities have additional costs. Considering the ongoing conflict and challenges to livelihood faced by the peoples of Uganda's Northern region, which was exacerbated by 21 years of war, the use of the US\$3.2 million grant can be deemed as very efficient. This efficiency is especially true considering the unanticipated costs related to the conflict, which escalated during the project period.

ORACLE enabled nearly 6,000 Northern Ugandan children to escape exploitive child labor, and trained almost 2,000 teachers and educators in improved teaching techniques as well as special skills for helping traumatized children. Among the 182 schools that benefited from the provision of equipment and supplies, improvements in passing rates and better test scores were recorded.

The project staff and volunteers calculated that 98,821 people were exposed to awareness-raising activities and information. Many more are estimated to have benefited from reading Talking Compounds slogans, signs, posters, or other awareness-raising materials.

Awareness-raising on child labor, child protection, girls' education, and children's rights marked the project's initial approach. Because of the development of local institutions such as Child Protection Committees and capacity-building among local government officials, awareness-raising efforts promise to have an enduring effect. Sensitization campaigns also reached multiple constituencies.

Education became more relevant to the children and their communities in Northern Uganda due to ORACLE inputs. Among other things, the project produced superior educational materials that enhanced the quality of teaching and which can be replicated. The provision of equipment and supplies, such as textbooks and duplicating machines, offer an important key to improving the quality of education. It is surprising what the impact of one duplicating machine can have on overall educational performance and retention of students. Pupils became accustomed to taking tests on paper and were more successful when it came time to take standardized qualifying examinations. Educators reported better performance in a variety of schools, despite the issues of insecurity and instability.

Children who had endured unimaginable and undeserved misery benefited from ORACLE's sponsorship. They attended school and received formal education or participated in vocational training. For some children, parents, and other stakeholders, the sponsorship was not long enough. These interested parties wished for extended support for those children who needed it. The argument is compelling, since secondary students especially risk dropping out because Universal Secondary Education is not completely accessible. Some vocational training was insufficient for a life-long profession, as well. The ORACLE-implementing agencies, government representatives, headmasters and teachers, Parent Teacher Associations (PTAs), and School Management Committees have taken steps to find continued means of support for needy children, but the vulnerability of children is excessive in the region. The sponsorship of individual children as a mode of keeping them out of the child labor force is considered necessary and effective, even if the support was time-limited.

Less articulated but significant outcomes of the project included capacity-building through training programs for teachers; government officials, including employees of the Ministries of Education and Gender, Labor, and Social Development; community members; potential teachers in the Teachers College; and children as leaders of school clubs and radio presenters.

Similarly, institutions were built around the ORACLE concept through the development of volunteer groups such as the ORACLE Brigade at Kitgum Teachers College and at Child Protection Committees. The Pader-based *Pe Taje* Dance Group and theatre troupes wrote catchy songs and jingles about ORACLE that reportedly lingered after the events were over.

The ORACLE project provided an excellent environment for expanding the knowledge base on (1) implementing projects to combat child labor in conflict areas in general, and in Northern Uganda in particular; and (2) on effective monitoring of child labor indicators necessary for the

USDOL, in general, and in conflict areas in particular. The monitoring and evaluation and the biannual reporting, while time-consuming, encouraged a high level of internal and external analysis and rethinking. The upcoming Livelihoods, Education, and Protection to End Child Labor (LEAP) project is an appropriate follow-up in which lessons learned through ORACLE may be applied, while the knowledge base continues to expand.

The initiatives of IRC and AVSI were similar despite discernible differences that did not seem to affect project effectiveness. Both implementing agencies placed a strong emphasis on beneficiary participation. Due to their long-term experience in Northern Uganda, the implementing agencies understood the complexities of the issues involved in the area. Further, the IRC's extensive experience in working in conflict situations contributed to its ability to be immediately responsive as demographics changed and as security weakened or strengthened at any given moment.

The ORACLE staff comprised a well-coordinated team of individuals with a great deal of experience. Field staff displayed courage and resilience and performed professional tasks despite the various handicaps associated with war, floods, poor roads, and lack of basic services.

There continues to be a high degree of engagement of multiple stakeholders. With their meager budgets, government authorities in the target region naturally hope for continued collaboration and appreciate any support, whether financial, in-kind, or moral.

The Sustainability Process Workshops marked one of several steps taken to provide a practical and effective exit strategy. The process reflected a pattern of transparency on the part of implementing agencies. Stakeholders at all levels were engaged and demonstrated a level of responsibility for follow-up in many project areas.

As ORACLE's funder, the USDOL should appreciate the knowledge that has been acquired in the field. The partner organizations, IRC and AVSI, began ORACLE with enough experience that they were able to make an immediate impact on the special circumstances of child labor.

The Final Evaluation notes lessons that can be learned from the ORACLE experience and recommends that—

- Effectiveness at curbing child labor and promoting issues related to girls' education can be improved by focusing on more coordination among NGOs working in the region and encouraging local Uganda civil society through capacity-building and institutional development training.
- ORACLE more than adequately analyzed and responded to issues of gender equality. Particularly, the emphasis on and success in changing traditional attitudes and behavior regarding girls in school was noteworthy. The challenge persists to increase the number of female teachers in schools. The insecurity of living in a war-ravaged area and issues related to marital transfers contribute to this phenomenon, but policies to provide girls more opportunities to become teachers would alleviate the shortage.

- The ORACLE project introduced the monitoring of child labor in the region. More research, baseline data collection, and information analysis needs to be done. Just as the monitoring of child labor has begun to take hold in communities, it is recommended that research be participative and include communities for long-term effect.
- For those areas that reflect long-term comprehensive objectives in future projects, specialists should be on staff or readily available.
- Many of the educational materials and training focused on making peace, dealing with violence, and engendering respect. These are important areas to address, even in projects that are not being implemented in the face of terror, as ORACLE was. Introducing teachers and children to concepts of racial and ethnic harmony, anger management, and conflict resolution, even when there is no threat on the horizon, can result in positive long-term consequences.
- Children have different perspectives and ideas that can expand the effectiveness of an activity. Young people should be involved in project design, implementation, monitoring, and other opportunities designed to encourage leadership development.

The conflict that ensued in Northern Uganda was brutal and difficult to comprehend from afar. That the USDOL underwrote the efforts of the agencies working in difficult and dangerous conditions demonstrates the level of partnership that is possible to have between funder and practitioner. Although more research needs to be done, the ORACLE project demonstrated that providing educational opportunities and support to schools is an effective mechanism to prevent child labor and protect children. ORACLE and the implementing agencies built up a base of expertise that can significantly enhance other USDOL programs that effectively fight child labor, and add to a better understanding of the surrounding complex issues (i.e., employment of poor children; school attendance in developing countries; and service delivery in conflict areas).

I INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Since August 2003, the United States Department of Labor (USDOL), through its Office of Child Labor, Forced Labor, and Human Trafficking (Africa Division), Bureau of International Affairs, (OCFT/ILAB) has supported the work of the International Rescue Committee (IRC) and a subcontracting nongovernmental organization (NGO)—Association of Volunteers in International Service (AVSI)—in implementing a project designed to address the worst forms of child labor in Northern Uganda.

Opportunities for Reducing Adolescent and Child Labor Through Education, or ORACLE, has used traditional and innovative approaches to reduce child labor and provide quality education to vulnerable children in the war-torn region of Northern Uganda. In addition to conducting a *massive information campaign in the region concerning the worst forms of child labor, activities have included training educators, community leaders, local policymakers, and officials involved with Child protection; providing equipment and materials to educational institutions; and supporting children who risk being subjected to the worst forms of child labor.* An important component of the overall ORACLE project design, as part of the USDOL Education Initiative (EI), was to hold midterm and final evaluations as a means of assessing the achievements of the project and gaining insight through lessons learned and recommendations. This document marks the Final Evaluation of the project.

Working in the Kitgum and Pader districts, where the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) presence has had a dominant presence for 21 years, the two organizations brought organizational strengths together to respond to the special circumstances of the region. The International Rescue Committee, founded in 1933, had been operational in the Northern District of Kitgum, Uganda, since 1998.¹ The IRC works around the world in areas that are frequently in conflict, or recovering from conflict, providing relief and rehabilitation, promoting civil society, and addressing human rights issues.² AVSI has been working in the area of education, among other things, in Northern Uganda since 1984. AVSI is an international NGO founded in Italy in 1972. The organization supports human development in developing countries with special attention to education and the promotion of the dignity of every human person, according to Catholic social teachings.³

While each organization stems from different development traditions, they share much in approach and values. In the Northern region, the two groups had coordinated their separate programs in the past when appropriate. The collaboration for ORACLE was thus entered into with mutual expectations of conscientious and professional project implementation. The collaboration appeared to be relatively free of internecine political problems. The project officially ended on November 2, 2007. A new USDOL-funded program, Livelihoods, Education and Protection to End Child Labor (LEAP) that follows in ORACLE's path, will also involve the two groups in the same geographical region, plus the Karamoja region.

¹ Now the districts of Kitgum and Pader.

² Available at <http://www.theirc.org>.

³ Available at <http://www.avsi-usa.org>.

Child Labor in Northern Uganda

Ugandan children have long been engaged in the worst forms of child labor through such activities as stone quarrying, brick making, market vending, and demanding agricultural activity as a natural expression of traditional cultural practices. However, since the war has created a population of displaced families facing desperate poverty, these practices have increased and become more strenuous on children. Further, and even more unsettling, parties to the conflict have abducted children and exploited them for soldiering and early forced marriages.

Over the past 21 years, the region has been terrorized by conflict. As the abduction of children by the Lord's Resistance Army escalated, boys and girls of school age were beaten, raped, and forced to become guerilla fighters or concubines. Once abducted, they experienced heinous treatment, including being forced to kill other children, parents, and relatives or repeated rapes. The risk of abduction created a bizarre phenomenon called "night commuters," which comprised tens of thousands of children and adults who walked miles each night from at-risk Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) camps to spend the night in buildings resembling warehouses. At dawn, they would return to their camps.

As people fled to and from villages to the relative safety of camps in towns, whole schools moved with them. The lives of pupils and teachers were severely disrupted. Educational opportunities decreased despite the introduction of national policies of Universal Primary Education and Universal Secondary Education.⁴

The ORACLE project responded to the establishment of the IDP camps by supporting existing learning centers that enabled community schools to retain some integrity even as they shared resources and space. The project also provided important economic, physical, and psychosocial support to vulnerable children. These children—ORACLE project beneficiaries—represent the chaotic society of Northern Uganda: orphans due to war, poverty, or Human Immunodeficiency Virus-Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (HIV/AIDS); returned abducted children; girls who have been forced into marriage and childbirth due to war or harmful traditional practices; children who head households of siblings and other relatives affected by the war; and children of extremely destitute families. The implementing agencies have helped foster a greater understanding of the importance of Education for all children, and especially girl children, and have changed attitudes toward child labor among the general population. Further, by working closely with government officials, the ORACLE project has built capacity, respect, and greater awareness among Northern Uganda educators.

Over the four-year period, the project environment went through several transitions. Promises of peace have been juxtaposed against periods of high insecurity.⁵ The ORACLE program has responded to the instability with practical approaches. As the ORACLE project comes to a close, peace talks between the government and rebel Lord's Resistance Army continue, but people in the region remain vigilant. The tenuous cease-fire has created a sense of security and the peace talks offer hope. Displaced people have begun to move out of the overcrowded camps and head

⁴ Uganda Free Secondary Education starts February 19, 2007, Source: Reuters.

⁵ Uganda Rebels Release Peace Dove, BBC Thursday, November 1, 2007.

for their home villages. Most have established satellite IDP camps, located somewhere between the safety of the towns and the uncertainty of their home villages. Problems inherent in the original IDP camps are showing up in these satellite camps. The population is dense, and providing proper sanitation and uncontaminated water continues to present a challenge. Further, the unusually strong rains caused floods, which destroyed homes as well as latrines that had been built in camps and at schools. The floods, which washed out roads and bridges, hindered routine follow-up and monitoring by ORACLE staff. The most vulnerable IDP's, including children, continue to live in the camps after able-bodied adults have returned home. Although arable land is said to be increasingly accessible, talk of planted land mines dissuades peasants from beginning agricultural production immediately. Further, the uncertainty over actual peace prospects still discourages many people from leaving the congested IDP camps.

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II EVALUATION OF ORACLE

2.1 FINAL EVALUATION OBJECTIVES

The four-year ORACLE project began August 2003 under a USDOL Cooperative Agreement with IRC. An extension was granted in 2007, taking the project to November 2007. This Final Evaluation marks the end of the four-year project. Evaluation, whether it occurs while a project is in progress or at its end, informs and provides useful lessons from which positive changes can be made in implementing projects. As stated in the Terms of Reference (ToR), the specific goals of the evaluation process were as follows:

- Help individual organizations identify areas of good performance and areas where project implementation can be improved.
- Assist the Office of Child Labor, Forced Labor, and Human Trafficking to learn more about what is or is not working in terms of the overall conceptualization and design of Education Initiative projects within the broad OCFT technical cooperation program framework.
- Assess the degree to which objectives relevant to the country-specific situation they address have been achieved.
- Assess progress in terms of children's working and educational status (i.e., withdrawal and prevention from the worst forms of child labor; enrollment, retention, and completion of educational programs).

Further, OCFT and IRC staff hoped to gain insight on perceptions, attitudes, and awareness around child labor and education concerning key stakeholders and identifying gaps that the next project could try and address; and to examine the level of national capacity to address child labor issues and opportunities for improved collaboration with other stakeholders not previously engaged.

The scope of the Final Evaluation was (1) per request by OCFT, to specifically assess the degree to which responses to the Midterm Evaluation conducted in 2005 were incorporated into the second half of the project; and (2) to review and assess the impact of all activities over the life of the project (August 2003–November 2007). Issues of project design, implementation, lessons learned, reliability, and recommendations for future projects were to be included. This final exercise was conducted to evaluate the impact of the project in meeting the specific goals related to combating child labor among the target beneficiaries.

Following a description of the methodology used to compile the report, the first section of the document reviews progress made after the Midterm Evaluation. The second section of the report addresses the evaluation goals by appraising concept and design issues (3.1: Project Design), describing progress made according to the ORACLE project objectives (3.2: Impact), examining performance (3.3: Project Implementation, 3.4: Project Monitoring and Measurement, 3.5: Project Management), studying capacity (3.6: Partnership Coordination and Effectiveness), and assessing

potential for replicability (3.7: Sustainability and Replicability). The report's Conclusion ends with Lessons Learned, Best Practices and Innovations, and Recommendations.

2.2 METHODOLOGY OF FINAL EVALUATION

The ORACLE project end date was November 2, 2007. Floods and other complications resulted in the final evaluation being pushed closer to the end date of the project. Given the time limitations and the recognition that the evaluation could essentially represent the final step of the project, special attention was paid to the exit strategy and prospects for sustainability in the evaluation.

The evaluator, in some consultation with the OCFT, Macro International Inc., the ORACLE Education Advisor, and the Deputy Education Advisor, developed an evaluation methodology that was appropriate in view of the requirements of the ToR, the local situation and conditions. The full text of the methodology is added to the ToR in Annex 1.

The evaluation focused on the project as a whole by looking at project design, recurring elements in project management and approach, implementation, and replicability. Lessons learned have been identified and recommendations made that may be of value to LEAP or programs in other countries.

Project Document Review

Documents deemed pertinent to project design and implementation, including the original project documents, the midterm evaluation, Technical Progress Reports (TPR), questions and answers between IRC and the USDOL's OCFT office, the project logical framework, and many auxiliary documents, were analyzed before arrival in country. IRC and AVSI staff provided additional materials, including pedagogical materials, in Kampala. Following an extensive desk review of the literature, a 10-day field visit was made to IRC and AVSI country offices in Kampala and the two project areas in Kitgum and Pader Districts. The field visit was conducted from October 24 to November 2, 2007. The travel up-country to Pader and Kitgum took place from October 28 to November 1, 2007. Modifications to the evaluation plan regarding scheduling were made as deemed necessary. For a full description of the itinerary, see Annex 1, Part 2.

The evaluation approach consisted of an in-depth, rapid investigation through visits to multiple primary and secondary schools and learning centers, vocational training programs, public markets, government offices, night commuter centers, and other project sites. The methods for collecting information included individual interviews, district and town council offices visits, school and classroom observations, and stakeholders' discussions, all of which provided a rich source of information.

Individual Interviews and Focus Group with Stakeholders

Individual interviews and focus group discussions were conducted with stakeholders at many levels, beginning with ministerial focal points; the Assistant Commissioner in Charge of the Child Labor Unit at the Ministry of Gender, Labor, and Social Development; and the Assistant

Commissioner in Charge of Special Needs Education at the Ministry of Education and Sports. While in Kampala, interviews were held with country directors of the implementing agencies, IRC and AVSI, and U.S. Embassy personnel in the policy and economic sector who have a special interest in child labor. A security briefing was also held at the U.S. Embassy. Senior staff of the USDOL-supported projects of ILO-IPEC HIV/AIDS Induced Child Labor project and KURET—Combating Exploitive Child Labor through Education—in four countries were interviewed in Kampala.

At the project sites in the northern region of Uganda, headmasters and deputies of 10 primary and secondary schools as well as the principal, deputy, and music teacher of the Kitgum Core Primary Teacher Training College were interviewed. Key government officials, police, and politicians at the district, county, and town levels made themselves available to be interviewed, a fact that demonstrated a high level of engagement in the fight against child labor.

Individual Interviews and Focus Group with Project Beneficiaries

Focus group discussions were held with actual beneficiaries of the ORACLE project in primary schools, secondary schools, and the Kitgum Core Primary Teacher Training College (PTC). In-depth interviews and focus group discussions were held with a number of individual beneficiaries of vocational training, and alternative education programs. Further, the evaluator witnessed and spoke with a handful of beneficiaries *at their workplaces*, including 3 house painters, 16 seamstresses and tailors, 2 managers of their own “saloon,” (a boutique selling mostly hair salon products), and 4 catering graduates working in restaurants in Pader and Kitgum. It should be noted that some of the interviewed beneficiaries were 19 and 20 when they were interviewed. However, these young adults informed the evaluator that the training and support that they had received ended when they reached age 19, if not before. There was no evidence that beneficiaries were older than age 18, and indeed, the concerns about the age requirement demonstrated that communities were aware of the age limits for beneficiaries.

Throughout the interviews with direct beneficiaries, individual testimonies of the hardships endured underlined the vulnerability of all of the youth population in the region. Many of the children had escaped or been rescued after being abducted for indoctrination as LRA guerrilla fighters or concubines. Most were of school age when they were seized from their villages in Northern Uganda. Consequently, they missed key benchmarks and moral lessons that a normal childhood would have offered. Some beneficiaries were children who had escaped LRA captivity only to be recruited into the government’s armed forces.⁶

Briefing with Stakeholders in Kampala

At the end of the field mission, a half-day meeting at IRC offices in Kampala offered the evaluator the opportunity to present the preliminary results and invite stakeholders to give their feedback. The discussion further informed the final evaluation exercise.

⁶ Interviews with students at DRAGON Vocational School, October 31, 2007.

2.3 MIDTERM EVALUATION

The Midterm Evaluation was conducted by independent evaluator Dr. Florence Kiragu Nyamu in March 2006. The report was published May 2006. The midterm evaluation identified the achievements of the project as *increased awareness* among the larger target population and the *successful implementation of a wide variety of activities* that contributed to the improved access and quality of Education in the region. These activities included, among other things—

- The distribution of scholastic materials and payment of school fees
- Teacher training
- Alternative options for difficult cases such as child mothers
- Vocational training programs

The evaluation noted that the ORACLE Project was well-integrated into the national and district educational system, and suggested increased collaboration between the ORACLE Project and the National Child Labor Unit. Areas of concern that were identified included the unique context of the project within the regional conflict; the limitations of support to providing educational opportunities; ambiguities surrounding concepts of the worst forms of child labor; and problems encountered in monitoring child labor withdrawal.⁷ These areas are described below, followed by a table that depicts how these and all of the concerns cited in the midterm evaluation were addressed by IRC and AVSI.

Conflict Context

In the initial stages of the project, the unexpected escalation of conflict increased the project costs and limited the monitoring of the project. More specifically, the obligatory use of armed escorts increased budget costs and limited staff accessibility to the project site.

Staff time in direct contact with beneficiaries was limited, making monitoring and followup extremely difficult.

Inadequate water and sanitation facilities resulted in unanticipated health calamities, nutritional deficiencies, criminal activity, and other extreme poverty conditions for displaced persons. Increased inaccessibility to fields resulted in complete halting of any agricultural productivity and most other forms of durable income-generating activities. Later, as the security situation changed, populations moved either into camps or out of camps, and tracking direct beneficiaries to determine withdrawal, prevention, retention, completion, or dropout rates was difficult for ORACLE staff.

⁷ ORACLE Uganda Midterm Evaluation Final Report, pp. 18, 20–22, 27–28, 34–37.

Educational Access and Limitations of Support

At midterm, the evaluator found that the individual support given to beneficiaries was limited according to the nature of the various programs. For example, in Pader, children were supported in traditional education programs (primary and secondary schools) for two years; while in Kitgum, the support was for one year. Vocational training in tailoring, catering, and other activities varied with three-month, six-month, or nine-month programs. The length of these programs was considered “too short for students to gain practical skills to enter the competitive job market.”⁸

Concerns were raised about formerly abducted children who returned after extended periods in the field. Boys and girls who have spent several years away from school missed opportunities for traditional education in primary school. Girls who were abducted frequently have returned with babies, making it difficult to attend classes. Further, the effect of the traumas and general chaos that some children experienced frequently caused them to lack the ability to effectively participate in traditional education programs. In the view of project stakeholders, the target population should include children who are beyond the conventionally accepted ages for students. These students missed their opportunities for schooling and are now older youth and young adults.

Aspects Related to Child Labor

While project implementers wholeheartedly focused on educational support as an opportunity to reduce child labor, ORACLE staff and members of the target population struggled with rigid definitions and concepts of child labor. The midterm evaluation cited vagueness about the “worst forms of child labor” among many stakeholders, including parents and beneficiaries. The midterm evaluation questioned the selection of beneficiaries according to level of vulnerability, suggesting an orphan was chosen over a child with physical handicaps “who might be more at risk of child labor.”⁹

“The ORACLE Project Is Extremely Data-Heavy”¹⁰

Difficulties in collecting and tabulating data on beneficiaries in order to determine the USDOL common indicators (withdrawal, prevention, retention, and completion) were cited as a weakness by the midterm evaluation.

During the Final Evaluation, these and other specific issues raised by the ORACLE midterm evaluation were specifically addressed point-by-point with IRC and AVSI staff, as well as with other pertinent stakeholders. The following table depicts the weaknesses raised and how ORACLE had addressed the problems by the end of the project.

⁸ Ibid., p. 20.

⁹ Ibid., p. 20.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 22.

Table 1: Recommendations for Midterm Evaluation and Project Responses

Midterm Evaluation Suggestion or Comment	ORACLE Resolution or Response	Page #
Access to Education Issues		
Every child fits the definition of vulnerability.	ORACLE has treated the issue of formerly abducted children sensitively and innovatively. The psychosocial training given to teachers, head masters, police, probation officers, and others who must interact with this particular segment of children has been very effective in helping them rehabilitate and reintegrate with society. Among other things, the ORACLE Project has created innovative alternative education programs for child mothers. The vocational training programs have produced young responsible adults who are finding work, even though they wish that they had extended training. Communities have been sensitized as well to recognize that these children were victims in need of reintegration.	18–20
It takes longer to rehabilitate formerly abducted children, and some were too old to enroll in primary school. Many formerly abducted girl children have babies, which created a situation that made rehabilitation and formal education extremely problematic.		
The time limitation on the amount of support given to beneficiaries (two years in Pader, one year in Kitgum) posed a problem as parents continue to be unable to provide for their children after support ends.		
Vocational courses were too short (three-, six-, and nine-month programs) for students to have gained practical skills or to be able to have performed well on government grade tests.		
Limiting support to a certain age so that children who were excluded from education because they returned from abduction at an age older than the requirement further excludes such youth.	This issue is frequently raised by educators and other concerned stakeholders and it is unfortunate. However, ORACLE explicitly addresses child labor and beneficiaries were children. While the project did help more than 6,000 children, it could not serve every child in the two districts who qualified. When possible, AVSI and IRC referred families and individuals to other more appropriate organizations to help young adults who were formerly abducted children.	18–20
Children with handicaps are not adequately catered to in the project design.	While the project does not have any component that specifically focuses on children with handicaps, <i>there are beneficiaries who are physically handicapped.</i> ^a Many beneficiaries are emotionally troubled and receive psychosocial support. Handicapped children are considered vulnerable and thus are assessed within the process of beneficiary selection and are not excluded from the project.	34

Midterm Evaluation Suggestion or Comment	ORACLE Resolution or Response	Page #
The number of female teachers was significantly lower than that of male teachers.	<p>Given the special circumstances of young girls within the context of the Northern Uganda ethnic cultures, as well as the war-related experiences of returned girl abductees, female teachers must act as role models and guidance counselors. Unfortunately, female teachers are few. The number of female remained significantly lower than that of male teachers. The number of female teachers remains significantly low. In fact, some schools have no women teachers.</p> <p>While it is acknowledged that the presence of at least one female teacher as a role model and source of feminine information is beneficial for the development of young girls, the reality is that identifying and supporting female teachers is extremely difficult given the unstable and insecure environment. Further, women teachers who are married tend to follow their husbands to other school districts.</p> <p>ORACLE continued to encourage young women beneficiaries to study at the Primary Teachers College and other training colleges, and to encourage the PTC to provide special attention to young women student teachers. Eligible girls received remedial training. In keeping with the overall objective of encouraging education for girls, emphasis was placed on the specific circumstances of girl pupils as part of the curriculum for new teachers.</p>	35, 37
Scheduling at Kitgum Training College sometimes poses a problem.	Due to the cultivation of good relationships and the enhanced understanding regarding ORACLE's value, the district education offices in both Kitgum and Pader have cooperated and overcome these problems.	25
Security and Monitoring Issues		
The level of insecurity made certain parts of the districts inaccessible.	On November 1, 2006, the Government of Uganda and the Lord's Resistance Army agreed to renew the Cessation of Hostilities that had originally been initiated in August. Since that time, armed escorts have been unnecessary for the most part, although ORACLE staff continue to proceed with caution. More of the district is accessible and staff can work longer hours.	20
The mobility of beneficiaries made tracking difficult.	Teachers and community members have been trained to monitor and record the activities of beneficiaries. The program design for LEAP has developed a community approach that should resolve some of these issues.	22

Midterm Evaluation Suggestion or Comment	ORACLE Resolution or Response	Page #
Due to insecurity, continued follow-up of beneficiaries was difficult, if not impossible, as beneficiaries moved from camp to camp. Followup of individual beneficiaries was labor intensive. The movement of beneficiaries was difficult to predict and follow.	ORACLE staff has become more competent in tracking down individual beneficiaries. Further, teachers and community leaders have been trained in doing follow-up so that as learning centers dissolve and schools are reestablished, individual beneficiaries have been monitored. Still, the mobility of some beneficiaries continues to pose a problem for monitoring against the USDOL common room indicators. Some beneficiaries, especially those who received vocational training in building construction, are reported to be gainfully employed in Juba, Sudan.	18
The original database was not user-friendly.	ORACLE resolved the database problem with the assistance of a monitoring and evaluation expert who was able to compile useful data required for the project.	21
There was no data entry clerk.	There was a data entry clerk at the time of the midterm evaluation.	21
Monitoring tools were time-consuming and labor-intensive.	The project improved its capacity and capability in collecting information needed concerning beneficiaries. Forms were streamlined. By training teachers and community volunteers to fill out monitoring forms for individual beneficiaries, data collection improved. Some problems persisted because beneficiaries migrated to satellite camps as far away as Juba, Sudan, or Kampala, so tracking them was difficult, although not impossible. Families offered followup information.	21
"The ORACLE project is extremely data-heavy." ^b		22
Management and Budget		
An office in the Pader district would ensure better coordination of follow-up activities.	Given the widespread mobility and intermittent security issues, creating another office seems like a questionable strategy. The lack of an office in Pader did not seem to create any coordination issues for IRC staff, who were very efficient in keeping in touch with one another through written materials, internet, mobile telephone, and regular radio communication. Such a move questions the cost-effectiveness of this idea even for the new LEAP project. At any rate, the IRC is well established in the target area with an office in Kitgum, while AVSI will operate out of their Pader office.	20, 27
At the midterm of the project, ORACLE, through lead agency IRC, required an increase in the budget due to added costs of monitoring beneficiaries who had moved from target areas.	The IRC officially requested a no-cost extension and budget modification for the ORACLE project in February 2007, but due in part to numerous programmatic and accounting issues—such as the omission of the current and proposed budgets in the original request package or the amounts in the project revision form not corresponding to figures in the proposed budget—USDOL did not approve the request until July 2007. ^c Although granted, the modification took nearly a year to process, and came a few weeks before the official end date of the project. The delay in receiving the funds caused unease for project implementers.	28

Midterm Evaluation Suggestion or Comment	ORACLE Resolution or Response	Page #
Awareness About the Worst Forms of Child Labor		
Vagueness about child labor.	<p>Thanks to radio programs and campaigns, as well as theater and commemorative day celebrations, there is less ambiguity about what constitutes child labor and the worst forms of child labor in Northern Uganda among community populations, educators, and government officials.</p> <p>Much more needs to be done on the national level to engage key policymakers. Uganda has made a few efforts at the national level to combat child labor, but an 8-hour drive through the countryside south of the target region toward and around Kampala revealed many instances of child labor and no evidence of awareness.</p>	20
Sustainability Issues		
An exit strategy was needed to ensure a smooth transition.	<p>An exit strategy process was initiated immediately following the midterm evaluation. The purpose was to create appropriate mechanisms for rolling over ORACLE activities to the broad community—government, community leaders and beneficiaries—in a participative and transparent manner.</p>	20
A practical plan to sustain the positive effects of the project was not included in the program design.	<p>A sustainability strategy institutes mechanisms to ensure that project activities can and will continue after the project ends. Within the context of the <i>Sustainability Process</i>, contingencies concerning the threat of insecurity and instability were discussed. Local leaders, educators, and government officials assumed roles and responsibilities in the interest of sustaining the achievements already gained. Sustainability committees were formed.</p> <p>As far as creating an exit strategy, ORACLE was transparent with stakeholders about the end of the project. Project staff communicated with parents and beneficiaries to prepare them for upcoming needs once ORACLE closes. The IRC and AVSI identified potential NGOs and other sources of sponsorship support.</p> <p>Documents and files were duplicated and shared with relevant stakeholders, such as district-level government officials and headmasters. These files included lists of ORACLE stakeholder groups, teachers trained, training modules used, and lists of material support that had been given to schools. Head teachers at primary schools were strongly encouraged by ORACLE staff to mobilize parent meetings, lead SMCs to officially communicate the end of ORACLE support, and to encourage parents to plan ahead of time to provide scholastic materials and other school requirements for the following academic year. These steps had been completed at schools visited during the evaluation.</p>	38

Midterm Evaluation Suggestion or Comment	ORACLE Resolution or Response	Page #
Policy Issues		
<p>Increased collaboration was needed between the ORACLE Project and the National Child Labor Unit (CLU).</p>	<p>In Kampala, the IRC increased its participation in the National Child Labor Unit by building a supportive relationship of communication and transparency with the Ministry of Gender, Labor, and Social Development (MGLSD) and other child labor focal points, including the Assistant Commissioner for Special Education at the Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES).</p> <p>ORACLE strengthened coordination with USDOL project grantees KURET and International Labour Organization-International Program on the Elimination of Child Labor (ILO-IPEC). The three projects meet regularly and are developing strategic approaches to advocate for more attention to child labor in the country.</p>	20

^a There was at least one child, if not more than one, with an obvious physical handicap in each focus group during the final evaluation.

^b Ibid., p. 22.

^c From USDOL, in DRAFT_1-_ORACLE_Final_Evaluation_USDOL_Comments_11.26.07[1].doc

III FINAL EVALUATION: FINDINGS

3.1 PROGRAM DESIGN

Overall, the ORACLE program design presented a logical and practical approach to help an extremely vulnerable, sometimes volatile, target population of child beneficiaries. The program involved appropriate participants as key stakeholders. Besides the targeted beneficiaries, their support system (families and local communities) were drawn into the decisionmaking and implementation of some activities.

Although the primary focus was education, the project by necessity involved a broad range of local government officials and politicians in nearly every sector, starting at the district level, and reached to counties, subcounties, and towns. The list of collaborating agencies was extensive and included MoES, MGLSD, district education officials, PTC, vocational schools, center coordinating tutors (CCTs), headmasters, School Management Committees (SMC), Board of Governors (BOG), Parent Teacher Associations (PTA), the Community Development Offices (CDO), and other NGOs.

The components of the project were *logically integrated* to contribute to the prevention and elimination of child labor in Northern Uganda through the objectives to: (1) improve community awareness of and attitudes toward the educational and developmental needs of children through capacity-building of child protection and education networks in the communities by way of sensitization, mobilization, and participation; (2) enrich the quality of the educational environment for children at risk of economic exploitation by focusing on augmenting the number and skill base of teachers through training and material support; and (3) ensure access to children at risk of exploitation through material support, transitional and nonformal education programs, and family-based poverty-reduction strategies.¹¹ It is possible to extrapolate how these objectives and the project design were derived from the USDOL Child Labor Education Initiative goals to—

- Raise awareness of the importance of education for all children and to mobilize a wide array of actors to improve and expand education infrastructures (including leveraging of resources).
- Strengthen formal and transitional educational systems that encourage working children and those at risk of working to attend school.
- Strengthen national institutions and policies on education and child labor.
- Ensure the long-term sustainability of these efforts.

¹¹ The evaluator recommends writing the objectives in active voice.

“...smartly designed project in that it took into account many of the unique challenges of Northern Uganda...”

—*ORACLE Education Advisor, Nina Papadopoulos,
who arrived in Kampala after the project
document and design had been developed*

The ORACLE project focused on awareness-raising and strengthening education opportunities to children in Northern Uganda. Activities designed to strengthen or inform policy were not formally articulated in the project design, but were deemed integral in the implementation. Since the project was located in the isolated region of Northern Uganda, activism on policy issues remained regional. In Kampala, ORACLE staff contributed to the Government of Uganda (GOU) efforts to fight child labor through its role as a member *ex officio* of the National Steering Committee.¹²

The issue of gender was carefully integrated into the program. Each component of the project made reference to gender and girls, who were seen as primary participants and beneficiaries. Further, women played a major role in project implementation.

Sustainability of the localized activities was addressed obliquely in the project design, but needed to be revisited toward the end of the project. The fourth goal of the Education Initiative, which concerns the sustainability of efforts, can be interpreted in a variety of ways. By building and strengthening national institutions and policies on education and labor, the Education Initiative creates sustaining bodies. Other manifestations that typically demonstrate sustainability include resource allocation, creation of new staffing patterns, or the establishment of supporting institutions. The ORACLE Project engaged in an innovative planning activity that involved widespread participation and strengthened the commitment of stakeholders located in the North, including the establishment of Sustainability Committees.

The objectives of the ORACLE Project comprise the following components:

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.
3. **Access to education** for vulnerable children and other children at risk of exploitation in target districts.

¹² Although not a government official, the National Steering Committee (NSC) has regular participation by individuals and representatives of NGOs who have an *ex officio* status. USDOL grantee, KURET, also has an *ex officio* role, but ILO-IPEC is considered an official member as a representative of the UN body. *Ex officio* is a Latin term that means, “by virtue of office or position.” A representative of ORACLE has consistently attended NSC meetings and provided insight on the situation of child labor in the Northern Region. More about their contribution to the NCS is described on pages 35-36.

Recurring Elements in ORACLE Project Management and Approach:

- Extensive
- Thorough
- Coherent
- Effective
- Efficient
- Appropriate
- Flexible
- Responsive

Thus, the evaluation sought to identify the strongest areas of *impact* related to the above components and verify the nature of the impact. Each objective was evaluated in terms of its effectiveness in curbing child labor in the region. By nearly every account with stakeholders, it appears that the ORACLE Project had an extensive impact in the two target areas: Pader and Kitgum districts. Several general themes emerged that contributed to the achievements, strengths, and weaknesses of the project according to program design, project implementation, partnership coordination and effectiveness, project monitoring and measurement, and budget management issues. Other areas worth noting included achievements in capacity-building, institution-building, replicability, and sustainability. Finally, lessons learned, recommendations for future projects, best practices, and innovations were also teased out of the many interactions with multiple stakeholders.

3.2 IMPACT

Together, the Kitgum and Pader districts are believed to have a population of more than 2 million people.¹³ The project is well-known and appears to be well-integrated into the development strategies of the region. *The project reached nearly 6,000 children who were identified as direct beneficiaries. A total of 1,969 teachers and educators received training and 182 schools benefited from the provision of equipment and supplies. It was calculated that 98,821 people attended sensitization events and were exposed to pro-child messages. This number does not include random radio listeners; peripheral audiences; visitors to schools with talking compounds; and people who might have read signs, posters, T-shirts or other awareness-raising materials.*

¹³ Calculated on the estimated figures from a variety of reliable sources that the 1.6–1.8 million of the internally displaced comprise 90% of the total region’s population.

For the most part, the 6,000 direct child beneficiaries comprise individuals under the age of 18 who, due to war-related calamities, have been eclipsed from the school system and have been involved in the worst forms of child labor. Many are boys and girls who have been orphaned as a result of the war or HIV/AIDS. Among them, a large number are the heads of households of younger siblings. Others are youngsters who have returned from the bush after being abducted or fraudulently recruited into the Lord's Resistance Army, where they were exposed to horribly inhumane treatment that continues to traumatize them. This treatment included being forced to murder, and being raped or forced to marry and bear unwanted children.

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.

From the beginning, ORACLE activities of awareness raising and sensitization have served as the primary entrée into communities. The awareness-raising campaigns focused on the six ORACLE project themes of child labor; children's rights; the importance of education to children in general, especially education for girls; the role of parents and the community in education; and the quality of education. These themes are complex and especially sensitive in the context of the culture, so a variety of methods to attract different audiences and influence the opinions of all stakeholders was necessary.

In Pader district, nearly 600 community sensitization campaigns in 12 subcounties were conducted by project-organized Child Protection Committees (CPCs), Child Rights clubs, and Community Volunteer Counselors (CVC), as well as by groups tapped by the project such as police and community leaders, local dance and theater troupes, and local politicians. The groups used music, dance, drama, poems, community meetings, posters and debates to raise awareness. ORACLE provided "Talking compound" materials to schools in Pader and Kitgum.

Commemorative days including Labor Day, World Day against Child Labor, and The Day of the African Child provided appropriate and effective launch pads for sensitization campaigns. Indeed, the 2006 Day of the African Child became a weeklong event.

When the number of beneficiaries is calculated to include participants in the awareness-raising component, the numbers of people reached with sensitization methods is quite impressive. The effect of sensitization is hard to measure, but is a recognized method of raising awareness that results in behavioral change. The awareness and sensitization efforts show promise in continuing to be one of the project's most successful objectives.

2. **Quality and relevance** of education in conflict-affected areas.

The project has endeavored to build a higher quality of education that is appropriate and relevant to the conditions through the provision of a broad range of scholastic teaching and learning materials to primary and secondary schools, teachers' colleges, and unqualified teachers under the Teacher Development and Management system. Further,

training in teaching and psychosocial, hygiene and sanitation, reproductive health, and child-centered methodology was provided to educators and other relevant members of the target communities.

3. **Access to education** for vulnerable children and other children at risk of exploitation in target districts.

Project activities to provide access to education for the needy children of Northern Uganda have focused on support to primary and secondary school students, including direct sponsorship of children for remedial education, secondary education, vocational, and nonformal classes. As compared to conditions before the project started, the program made significant progress in increasing access of education to the target population.¹⁴

3.3 PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION AND PERFORMANCE

Creating an Informed Public About Child Labor

Drama, theater, songs, dances, radio broadcasts, commemorative days, posters, and T-shirts were among the multiple tools successfully used by ORACLE to promote child protection and rights and girls' access to education. The materials were well-made so that they continue to be seen all over the project area. The messages were easy to read and understand, usually in Luo, the local language.¹⁵ The T-shirts are durable, of good quality, and are worn by many citizens.

Talking compounds is the name given for graphics and slogans in English and Luo, which are painted on walls of schools (school compounds) and on metal signposts that are planted throughout school yards. Bearing positive and directive slogans such as "Be punctual," the talking compounds make the school yard a pleasant and interesting, even exciting, place to be. The talking compounds are made of sturdy materials, as well. School walls are also painted with educational messages. One school visited by the evaluator had drawings of the heart, lungs, and other human organs on the walls at the end of each building.

Sample slogans of talking compounds:

- Don't accept gifts for sex
- A blood test is the only way that shows AIDS
- Protect your environment, protect your community
- Parents should not force their children into early marriage
- Promote girl education

¹⁴ This statement is based on interviews, charts, and files shared with the evaluator in primary and secondary schools.

¹⁵ Luo, Acholi, and Lango are three mutually intelligible languages of the region.

- Avoid bad touches
- Respect each other
- Wash hands before eating

The interactive (call-in) radio broadcasts were cited by many stakeholders as having influenced attitudes and behavior regarding the various messages of early forced marriages for girls, corporal punishment, harsh child labor, and access to education for girls. More than one beneficiary interviewed related how they made contact with ORACLE through listening to the radio program because the shows underscored their plight as formerly abducted children or orphaned heads of households. The radio programs invited people to call from home and participate in the *Kabake*, or dialogue. The number of people who called, their location, and comments were documented.

Parents and community members attest that the ORACLE-supported learning centers and schools become welcoming places not only for children, but also for parents. Parents are seen as members of the ORACLE target population and participate on School Management Committees and in Parent Teacher Associations.

For the most part, the awareness-raising activities were based on standard principles of sound marketing ideas and information dissemination. ORACLE staff viewed their challenge to change attitudes and behavior among the target population as an advertising campaign. An internal evaluation to gauge the impact of the sensitization campaigns on attitudes and behavior toward education and child labor was conducted by ORACLE in July 2007.¹⁶ The resulting report concluded that AVSI and IRC took different approaches to awareness-raising, but that both were effective. The IRC conducted a mass campaign approach and “invested resources in building the capacity of local groups to carry out its activities. It worked with women and youth drama groups, formed Child Protection Committees, and regularly engaged district officials in weekly sensitization campaigns.”¹⁷ Targets for campaigns were set. AVSI’s approach was through staff-beneficiary interactions; and training sessions with teachers, students, SMC and PTA members, and Local Council leaders. In five sessions, the groups identified root causes and created action plans to combat child labor and increase children’s participation in education services. The findings were inconclusive regarding a cause-and-effect relationship between ORACLE project activities and the changes observed because awareness was not addressed in the baseline data survey. However, the qualitative data gathered was informative and valuable regarding general perceptions of ORACLE’s impact. The internal investigation identified good practices and lessons learned:

- Ensure participation of target audience in field testing of key messages.
- Ensure that key messages address the costs of changing behavior.

¹⁶ Internal Evaluation on Attitudes, Actions, and Awareness Toward Education and Child Labor in Kitgum and Pader Districts of Northern Uganda—July 2007.

¹⁷ Ibid.

- Develop different methodologies for the different key target audiences.
- Support activities that help remove barriers to the desired behavior of school attendance and withdrawal from the worst forms of child labor (WFCL).
- Use community groups, which proved effective in reaching the target audience.
- Identify participatory processes and steps for moving awareness into action.

The findings of the internal investigation were confirmed during the final evaluation. The net effect of the awareness-raising and sensitization campaigns implemented by ORACLE has led to a greater sense of urgency and response by officials and community members to keep focused on the deeply embedded social and psychological conditions in the region.

Direct Support for Education

The project objective—*ensuring access to education for vulnerable children and other children at risk of exploitation in target districts*—afforded direct service to children who would have otherwise been eclipsed from the available educational systems. Without ORACLE support, they would have been fully engaged in child labor or at risk to begin working.

The most important direct assistance under this objective also became the most controversial at the project's end *because it was time-limited*. Extremely vulnerable children—orphans, former abductees who had been child soldiers or rape victims—received support in the form of school fees and other types of needed financial support. Officials in Kampala and the two districts, educators, and community leaders shared the opinion that this project input was an essential element to successfully keeping children out of child labor and in schools. Beneficiaries were either already engaged in child labor or risked becoming engaged in child labor.

Children who participated in the program were interviewed and evaluated by social workers. Special attention was made to ensure privileged or unqualified people did not take advantage of the program. Beneficiaries and implementing partners reported that the selection of beneficiaries was thorough. Although the application process might be considered complicated and even time-consuming, it was cost-effective because it ensured participation only by those who genuinely qualified. The implementing agencies could be certain that those who received support were genuinely at risk. The Initial Assessment form used for beneficiary selection can be found in Annex 10.

Over the life of the project, school kits were furnished to needy primary and secondary students. The kits contained exercise books, pens, pencils, erasers, rulers, mathematic sets, soap, toothbrushes, and toothpaste. School bags, slippers and sanitary packets were also distributed. *According to district education office officials, headmasters, and teachers, the effect of the support resulted in diminished rates of dropout, better discipline, and improved academic performance.*

Some children were enrolled in vocational skills training programs. Vocational programs offered training in carpentry and joinery (C&J), bricklaying and concrete practice (BCP), tailoring,

catering, house and sign painting, pottery, and hotel management. Alternate education and remedial programs helped children, especially child-mothers, transition into other educational and vocational opportunities. All of the ORACLE vocational training and skills training was offered through private vocational training, because the ORACLE support did not fit within the regulations for public vocational training. While beneficiaries received adequate vocational education, higher quality control would have enhanced their skills. Some of the private educators were not as skilled as they might have been. For example, after three months of tailoring training, products such as school uniforms had unfinished seams and unraveling edges. This turns out to be the level of tailoring that is acceptable to the poor, who buy these uniforms. After three months of training, a higher quality of tailoring could have been achieved had there been a higher degree of capability on the part of the trainer and a higher degree of market demand.

The individual sponsorship of thousands of children in the schools and other learning programs has been important to the two target districts. Children who otherwise would have been eclipsed from learning and becoming productive members of their communities reported that they felt respected, recognized, appreciated, and perhaps most importantly, responsible. While the program design regarding age and time limits of beneficiaries was described as rigid or constraining by several stakeholders, another perspective is that *such an approach provides unambiguous qualifications to implementers and potential participants*. In a region where the definition of a *vulnerable child* encompasses nearly every child in the region, implementing agencies can benefit from clear and transparent guidelines for who qualifies and who does not. Although this explanation may be confusing to community members, who may feel excluded and possibly resentful, the project budget was not limitless. It is unfortunate that some children were denied such a beneficial program. However, if there is transparency and a logical and repeated explanation of the various components, including the age limits, project implementers should not be affected by such complaints.

Some of beneficiaries have proved to be extremely resourceful and able to find continuing opportunities. The problem of ensuring that sponsored students will continue in school and not resume child labor after their sponsorships of one to two years ends is a persistent flaw in the original program design. As it is understood by the evaluator, the LEAP project addresses this weakness by supporting the start-up of productive income-generating activities for families. It is hoped that such activities will serve as a vehicle for ending poverty and provide income to families so that they may finance their children's further education. However, that still does not respond to the general consensus among the beneficiaries, families, and district education officials and head masters, that the straight sponsorship aspect of the project should be extended for five years and that individual students should continue to receive assistance.

Thus, what was seen by stakeholders as important scholarship support created an attitude of dependency that challenges any concept of sustainability of the project. This attitude is unfortunate because the scholarships gave a tremendous boost to schools and to pupils, a fact that is acknowledged by all. Children whose sponsorship ended, but who need extra time in school, are in fact proving to be resourceful. Further, the implementing agencies have been able to successfully provide referrals for those who need continued assistance, particularly in the public school system. This dependency issue reared its head time and time again at focus group meetings in the course of the evaluation. While it is true that more support would doubtless help

more children, the followup project to ORACLE called LEAP is expected to address some of the issues of poverty and the need for income-generating activities head on. Further, it must also be recognized that appeals for more assistance are linked to legitimate rhetoric often employed to draw attention to the overall marginalization of the northern region and the need for national policies to address that reality.

Girls in Education

District education officers, their deputies, elected officials, and headmasters appreciated the work of ORACLE and recommended increasing training for female teachers and improving girls' enrollment at all levels. Girls who benefited from the program included escaped abductees, orphans, and other girls who headed households. Many of the formerly abducted girls are child-mothers. Others had returned and were ignored and rejected by their communities. The Alternative Education program developed by ORACLE has successfully mainstreamed beneficiary girls into formal primary programs or nonformal vocational skills training courses.

ORACLE has clearly met the challenge in emphasizing the importance of girl's education among local district officials, local educators, and child protection and community development officials. All headmasters and teachers who were interviewed placed a strong emphasis on girls' educational achievements.

The project targets for support to girl children in education were surpassed, either through traditional schooling, vocational training, or alternative education activities. The awareness-raising surrounding the importance of girls in attending school was very successful. Girls' right to go to school and the benefits of girls' education is better understood among the traditional population. Most of the girls who pursued vocational training have been successful in finding work, although most girls interviewed wished to receive additional training.

Capacity-Building

The second project Objective, *Quality and relevance of education in conflict-affected areas*, was manifested through the strengthening of quality in teaching, through improved skills such as Child Centered Methodologies (CCM) and Classroom Management and Learning (CMLD) through the provision of scholastic aids, uniforms, equipment, and textbooks. Teachers and educators received training in psychosocial skills, child-centered methodologies, and hygiene and reproductive health. Given the horrendous trauma that the majority of the beneficiaries have experienced due to the 21 years of war, the training of teachers in psychosocial issues, including identifying problems and providing counseling, was prescient and appropriate.

More than 1,000 teachers in the two districts received training in Child Centered Methodologies, which resulted in better classroom management and clarity about their roles.¹⁸ Training teachers in hygiene and reproductive health resulted in creating an institutional environment which enhanced the incentive for girls to attend school. Not only did teachers become more comfortable helping girls with their unique issues, but the school was more alluring because it offered much needed information and counseling.

¹⁸ Memo from Olwoch Dickens, AVSI, October 23, 2007, to Joyce Wanican, IRC.

Throughout the ORACLE region, the schools reported higher performance on standardized national tests, better grades, and fewer dropouts than previously recorded. For example, according to the Deputy DEO in Kitgum, two previously isolated primary schools saw dramatic improvement in subcounty primary examinations. He attributed the successful results to ORACLE's support to schools to improve the quality of education. ORACLE had supported the schools in 2004 with an assortment of books for English, mathematics, science and social studies starting from primary five to primary seven.

“Kwarayo Okuti and Kitgum Atidi primary schools registered division 1 (first grade) in the 2006 primary leaving examination, [the first time] since the history of their existence. Further, the boy who got division 1 from Kwarayo Okuti was among the best five pupils in the district.”

—*Assistant District Education Officer in Kitgum*

In 2006, more than 90% of the ORACLE beneficiaries who began Primary Four (P4) qualified for the secondary school, while the national average was 70%.¹⁹

Monitoring and evaluation are two different activities that are linked and complementary. They should be articulated as part of program implementation from the beginning, and scheduled as an ongoing collaborative process in which beneficiaries and other key stakeholders have an opportunity to work together to assess a project and make necessary modifications. Ideally, monitoring involves process, input, and impact monitoring. Evaluation uses results of monitoring to assess changes that have occurred to the beneficiaries and their lifestyles as a result of the project. ORACLE had the IRC monitoring and evaluation (M&E) specialist, a competent professional who worked with AVSI and IRC to develop adequate M&E systems, and provided necessary consultative support to the partner agencies. There was ample evidence, through interviews and visual observations by the evaluator, of the M&E, training, and reporting capabilities related to ORACLE of the two implementing agencies in the two districts, even though the project had ended.

Vocational Training and Alternative Education Options

According to ORACLE staff, an estimated 80 to 90% of children who received vocational training are using the skills obtained in a productive fashion.²⁰ Indeed, ORACLE graduates are encountered in Pader and Kitgum working at their trades in market stalls, small shops, hotels and restaurants, and other workshops.²¹ In several instances, ORACLE staff members have found

¹⁹ Memo from Ngira Nehemiah, M & E Specialist, ORACLE. November 14, 2007.

²⁰ See photographs in Annex 7.

²¹ The Mayor of Pader was not so sure. As he ate dinner in a restaurant catered by formerly abducted girls, he worried about the long-term effects of the trauma on individual adolescent teenaged mothers, and how the psychological issues will impact their success. The discussion was mostly theoretical, but demonstrated the level of concern and understanding of the enduring and intractable challenges the region will face.

From September 2007, ORACLE TPR: “ORACLE staff has involved local police officers as well as the Mayor’s office in the Pader Town Council to guide CPC members on how to proceed with bylaw creation. The activity of linking the CPC to the Mayor’s office has served as an effective step toward handling over responsibility to the CPC for sensitizing and addressing exploitation of children through the taking of concrete action. Progressively reducing CPC dependency on ORACLE should assist in empowering the groups to take up other initiatives regarding child protection in the future.”

that graduates attributed nontechnical aspects of the training as having helped them to get a job after completion. For example, they cited discipline, punctuality, and attention to detail as characteristics that they learned. Due to the awareness-raising campaigns, as well as the psychosocial counseling to these vulnerable children, communities are shown to be more sensitive of the need to accept former abductees who are trying to reinsert themselves in their communities.

Developing Leadership

Other important areas of capacity-building took place within the context of the ORACLE project. Community volunteers, dance and theater troupes, and youth and women's groups also benefited from training in awareness-raising techniques, and in some instances, simple approaches to dealing with conflict and crises.

Workshops and strategy meetings involving various levels of government officials, educators, parents, community leaders, and volunteers were held, where complex issues related to child labor were discussed and strategies proposed. Instances such as these strengthened the capacity of leaders across the broad range of stakeholders. Capacity-building workshops focusing on awareness-raising and monitoring child labor were held for Child Protection Committees, School Management Committees, Parents Teacher Association, and local councilors.

In the schools and other ORACLE learning settings, children's organizations such as Child Rights Clubs and Peace Clubs were organized, out of which emerged noticeable leadership among the youth. At the end of the program at the DRAGON Art and Design Vocational Training Centre, where students learned pottery, weaving, knitting, decorative arts, graphics, painting, carpentry, and joinery, two graduates were enlisted to become teachers for the next group of students. At the Kitgum Primary Teachers College, the establishment of the KTC Brigade led to the emergence of leaders among beneficiaries, notably a young student, who realized his skills as a music teacher and is now called "Omar ORACLE."

3.4 PROJECT MONITORING AND MEASUREMENT

The history of the displacement of people between villages and towns to IDP camps, and then to satellite camps and villages has been a pervasive characteristic of the project. The extent of mobility of the population cramped the data collection capabilities of the implementing agencies. Despite that, both IRC and AVSI have approached the collection of data for the USDOL common indicators with a high degree of professionalism. The two implementing agencies first endeavored to better understand the definitions of terms and the underlying purpose for collecting data; and when the original database software program proved untenable, they modified and created a functional database collection tool.

The implementing agencies devised, among other systems and mechanisms for effective M&E, a "Monitoring Tool for Sensitization Campaign" that calculates audience size and topics presented, and requests subjective analysis of the events. This tool continues to be used by local child protection committees. The evaluator attended one spontaneous awareness-raising event, a dance and drama performed by a predominately women's group. The IDP camp population was

drawn to the drumming and dancing, and eventually nearly 200 men, women, and children attended. The local volunteer drew up the report on the form.

Other forms were designed to monitor, tabulate, and conform to the database for calculating USDOL statistics of common indicators, which are the withdrawal, prevention, retention, and completion of children to avoid child labor. In general, the forms are easy to understand and fill out so that teachers, headmasters, and community volunteers now participate to some degree in the monitoring of beneficiaries.

Despite early issues over the development of a user-friendly database, the implementing agencies were able to arrive at a fairly high degree of capability in tracking beneficiaries. Routine monitoring and evaluation mechanisms, as well as the collection of baseline data, were components in the original ORACLE project design. However, the level of understanding on the part of the implementing agencies regarding the monitoring of USDOL common indicators and the requirement to track all the beneficiaries were unclear. Certainly, both agencies have experience with monitoring individual beneficiaries. The unusual circumstances that resulted in beneficiaries migrating to disparate locations and the insecurity of travel that made the workday shorter were clearly not anticipated in the original commitment to collect data. The flexibility on the part of the implementing agencies, as well as on the part of USDOL in arriving at a suitable mechanism for calculating beneficiaries, is noteworthy. However, the cost of tracking 100% of all beneficiaries in the face of transient population demographics, floods, and security issues seemed high. It would seem that an open dialogue between the USDOL and implementing agencies would result in a more agreeable conclusion for future projects operating under similar conditions.

One reason that reporting to USDOL specifically regarding the status of ORACLE beneficiaries was problematic was due to the academic calendar in Uganda. Following national examinations in November and December, school holidays run through to early February. The results of the examinations do not appear until late January or early February, so for the first reporting period of each year, ORACLE staff was not able to report whether children had passed or failed, or calculate withdrawal or dropout numbers. Staff reported that such figures would nonetheless be incorporated in later TPRs. Ultimately, given the monitoring and evaluation system, the project was able to determine the extent of beneficiary change in behavior and report decreased withdrawal and dropout rates and improved academic performance.

3.5 PROJECT MANAGEMENT

Staffing

Both IRC and AVSI had highly professional and trained staff members with ORACLE who were reportedly effective at their work and respected by the stakeholders. The observations by the evaluator of ORACLE staff who remained onsite at the time of the evaluation, and who were largely responsible for arranging all aspects of the evaluation field visit, confirmed this. It was evident that ORACLE staff perceived the evaluation as a positive learning opportunity. The evaluation was tightly organized to optimize the collection of information. The Monitoring and Evaluation Specialist was not only skilled and knowledgeable in USDOL requirements, but

also committed to the program's objectives. AVSI and IRC Program managers were competent and well-organized.

Despite the risks of working in a conflict zone coupled with routine administrative and operational challenges, the staff of the two partner organizations implemented the project activities efficiently.

Reporting

The USDOL is required to report on the worst forms of child labor in 141 countries and territories that receive U.S. trade benefits. The Labor Department must also report to the Office of Management and Budget with similar information to justify expenditures. While such reports are a long way away from the dusty IDP camps of Kitgum and Pader Districts, the funds that supported ORACLE existed because of the bureaucratic measures taken in Washington, DC. Therefore, the USDOL requires biannual reports from its grantees. Regular and comprehensive reporting through the submission of TPRs that included an account of achievements, budgets, contextual updates, information regarding pertinent GOU policies, and decisions that affected the program, were submitted in an apparently timely fashion.

Reports were comprehensive, interesting, and informative. Both organizations coordinated their reporting and IRC, as the lead agency, compiled and filed the biannual reports. IRC sufficiently responded with followup answers to requests for clarification that were sent by USDOL following each TPR. This Q&A format preferred by USDOL appears to serve as a means to demonstrate reception of the TPR, and may be an attempt to keep dialogue open with the implementing agencies, but seemed a bit excessive and bureaucratic. While it is understandable that UDOL needs documentation, the TPRs are already rich with information. If the questions are genuine requests for clarification, a telephone call should suffice. This aspect of reporting is an area where team work between implementer and contractor could be enhanced.

Budget and Financial Management

The ORACLE project faced unique problems because the original project designers could not reasonably anticipate the vagaries of the 21 years of conflict, especially considering the monstrous eccentricities of the LRA leaders. Despite the upheaval, the incidence of child labor, including soldiering, was apparent and the support to formerly abducted children and other vulnerable children was a logical and practical approach. The grant of US\$3.2 million was used efficiently. Staff functioned competently and professionally. There was no evidence of superfluous spending. Expenditures were economical and resourceful, especially considering the amount of children served, teachers trained, schools equipped. Less tangible expenditures included building social capital among the community and government, establishing trust, and supporting national efforts to address policy.

3.6 PARTNERSHIP COORDINATION AND EFFECTIVENESS

International Rescue Committee and the Association of Volunteers in International Service

The International Rescue Committee and the Association of Volunteers in International Service have several decades of experience working in conflict-prone areas worldwide. They have established systems to monitor security issues and operate in insecure environments. Further, with slight discernible differences regarding their approaches and philosophies, the two share a strong value of community empowerment and human promotion that signify progressive development methodologies.

In Uganda, both the IRC and AVSI have a long history and large operations in Northern Uganda. As a consequence, they are respected and well-connected. They are perceived as being committed to the region and through the ORACLE project have demonstrated a commitment to children's protection issues that is appreciated by district officials and town Council members. Both agencies bring unique strengths to the project. The groups basically divided the two districts as spheres of influence for practical reasons, but brought specific institutional strengths to the forefront when required. For example, AVSI provided specific training in psychosocial counseling, as it is a specialty of the organization. As the lead agency, the IRC played a representative role in policy advocacy activities in Kampala. In the words of key personnel, it was a "nice collaboration" that "works well."²²

The Government of Uganda

The project has enjoyed a respectful working relationship with the Government of Uganda at several levels. No perceived conflicts between government and implementing agencies existed in the two target regions. In fact, the relationship between IRC, AVSI, and government officials appeared to be one of mutual respect and collaboration. It is worth noting that the conditions for civil servants (and even politicians) in the northern region are harsh. Those Ugandans who remain are, for the most part, sincerely committed to the needs of the population. At the project's onset, the issues of WFCL and girls' education were not immediately embraced by officials. The first steps of awareness-raising included an appreciation for process and participation that was sufficient to build a group of committed stakeholders in the region early on in the project.

At the moment, Uganda has a mixed record when it comes to legal mechanisms to prevent child labor and protect children. The country has not ratified ILO Convention 138, but it ratified ILO Convention 182 on June 21, 2001.²³ The Children's Act of Uganda comprehensively incorporates international standards on children's rights into domestic law. Uganda is a signatory of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), the African Charter, and the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Involvement of Children in Armed

²² From interview with Lucia Cantrell (AVSI) and Nina Papadopoulos (IRC).

²³ Convention Concerning the Prohibition and Immediate Action for the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labor (ILO No. 182), 38 I.L.M. 1207 (1999), *Entered Into Force* Nov. 19, 2000; African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, OAU Doc. CAB/LEG/24.9/49 (1990), *Entered Into Force* Nov. 29, 1999; ILO Convention 138 Concerning the Minimum Age for Admission to Employment.

Conflict, all of which ban the use of child soldiers under the age of 18. Under the Ministry of Gender, Labor, and Social Development, the Orphans and other Vulnerable Children Secretariat theoretically studies and creates responsive policy for problems of orphans and vulnerable children. A final benchmark is that a National Child Labor Policy was launched on May 1, 2007.

As has been mentioned, direct work on policy issues was not part of the ORACLE objectives. However, the vulnerability of the target beneficiaries and the regional nature of the conflict that underlie ORACLE's purpose require acknowledgment of policy deficits. While Uganda has the legal mechanisms, the applications of the policies are weak. This is an area where more work could be done by grantees of the USDOL. As a project of the USDOL, ORACLE identified the MGLSD and the Ministry of Education and Sports as appropriate partners. The IRC serves as an ex-officio member of the National Steering Committee on Child Labor. ORACLE participated in a Child Labor Enforcement Workshop in December 2006, where policies and laws related to child enforcement were identified. It was viewed by ORACLE staff and the MGLSD as an important coordinating effort for those involved in stopping child labor in the North. In describing the workshop, the Assistant Commissioner, Head of Uganda's Child Labor Unit, noted the leadership role played by ORACLE:

“ORACLE has played a key role in combating child labor in Uganda. As the first intervention for child labor in [an area with] armed conflict, it was not easy. Children who had been abducted were not readily accepted. When they returned to their communities, they were frequently traumatized. Now, communities are working with formerly abducted children. We can point to numbers of children withdrawn from child labor.”²⁴

The relationships that have emerged with both ministries and ORACLE-implementing agencies are important ones that should continue to develop.

An interesting feature of Uganda's Children's Act is that it allows and encourages local government action and attention to protecting children. Village councils, or Local Council 1 (LC1), as grassroots administrative structures, may enact certain bylaws to protect children. A number of communities in the two districts have established such bylaws that promote children attending school and fine parents who prevent school attendance; prohibit early or forced marriage; or ban child labor. Two Child Protection Committees in Pader proposed the creation of bylaws to (1) ban practices that deny children's rights to education, and (2) to protect children from harmful labor practices. The establishment of bylaws is an important step toward building sustainability around the fight against child labor. ORACLE staff worked with local police officers and the Mayor's office in Pader Town Council to guide CPC members on how to proceed with bylaw creation. Bylaws, somewhat akin to municipal ordinances, can be established by any community group, but must be submitted by Local Council 1 for approval to Local Council 3 (county-level) before becoming official. Local Council 1 members are responsible for enforcement, including levying fines or turning culprits over to the local police. The ORACLE internal evaluation on awareness-raising calculated "...sixty percent of respondents who knew of a parent that had been fined by Local Council because their children

²⁴ Ms. Harriet Luyima, Assistant Commissioner, Head of Child Labor Unit.

were out of school on any given day. However, it must be stated that no one could produce a written document with bylaws. Local Council 3 members indicated that no bylaws had been submitted for approval and government-line ministries at the county or district level all stated that no bylaws have yet been sent to their offices.”²⁵ During the course of the final evaluation, similar anecdotes were reported by community volunteer counselors. This type of community activism by ORACLE stakeholders suggests the appropriateness of civic education linked to the fight against child labor, and makes credible the idea that the sensitization campaigns positively affected communities.

The major challenge for new initiatives is to inject new life and energy into those areas where policy can be applied and bring about change in attitudes and behavior. Officials and politicians with whom the evaluator spoke in the Northern districts appear ready to adopt and apply policies to enable children to pursue education as opposed to child labor. Therefore, it would seem that more advocacy in the capital city is necessary for reforms in the northern region to take place. Indeed, the treatment of children in the entire country approaches exploitation and national policies will help the LEAP target population, as well.

United States Department of Labor

Considering the typical relationship that one often finds between home office and field office, grantee and donor, or faculty and administration, the USDOL-ORACLE relationship appeared to be one of benign support. This makes sense, given the expertise on the ground that IRC and AVSI demonstrated. One area where this relationship could be strengthened would be if USDOL provided more opportunities for substantive dialogue between donor and grantee. Conferences were held to provide this opportunity, but it was not clear to the evaluator or to representatives from grantee organizations in Kampala that shared objectives were met during the past conference. Overall, USDOL played a supportive role to grantees.

The USDOL’s decision to work with the IRC and AVSI, with their professional expertise and experience in the region, demonstrated a thoughtful and coherent approach to ending child labor in Uganda and in East Africa. Indeed, as negotiations to bring an end to the conflict continue in earnest, it is satisfying to know that the USDOL has contributed to supporting people who have lived more than 20 years in the throes of one of Africa’s longest running conflicts.

3.7 SUSTAINABILITY AND REPLICABILITY

Sustainability Process

The midterm evaluation addressed the need to have an **exit strategy** as the project drew to a close. Some projects end and leave good feelings, but little else. ORACLE, as a project within the Education Initiatives of the USDOL, aimed to ensure some aspects of continuity of the progress that was made in the Northern region of Uganda. To this end, ORACLE invited stakeholders into a participative and transparent process to soften the end of the project, and to

²⁵ Internal Evaluation On Attitudes, Actions and Awareness Towards Education and Child Labor in Kitgum and Pader Districts of Northern Uganda, JULY 2007, p. 18.

build sustainability around certain aspects of the project. In November 2005, ORACLE team members and key district officials met and identified project components with the best likelihood for being self-sustaining. Sustainability Committees were created for Kitgum and Pader districts with membership from the communities, schools, and district.

A Joint District Sustainability Committee Meeting was held March 13–14, 2007, in Gulu. Members participated in a thoughtful and action-oriented process that led to the Joint Strategic Sustainability Action Plan. The plan included realistic objectives:

- Uphold and sustain nonmonetary ORACLE achievements.
- Continue advocacy, both locally and nationally, on issues of child labor.
- Integrate activities and benefits from the project into school, subcounty, and district plans, as well as other NGO/community-based organization (CBO) programs serving youth and children.
- Develop, implement, and revise as necessary the Sustainability Action Plan
- Coordinate and network with all community stakeholders to ensure maximum results.
- Develop monitoring tools to ensure quality and accountability.
- Hold Sustainability Action Plan progress review meetings.²⁶

It appears that the Sustainability Committees continue to be committed, based on information shared at interviews with committee members. During the evaluation, stakeholders, including community volunteer counselors and district officials, offered actual examples of how advocacy, awareness raising, and monitoring activities are continuing, including meetings and awareness-raising events scheduled after the end of the project.

“We participated in the sustainability process, and it was very helpful and productive. In fact, we have created structures to continue. We will continue to work as a team.”

—*Vice Chairperson, Pader Town Council*

Engagement of Stakeholders

Stakeholders to the ORACLE project include any and all who have a viable interest in the outcome of the project. In general, ORACLE stakeholders—parents, teachers, children, community leaders, government authorities, and the general public—have demonstrated a fairly high level of engagement through their willing participation, accessibility, and knowledge of the project. In both target districts, stakeholders on the ground were receptive and available to participate in the evaluation. This reception was appreciated and noteworthy, given the short notice. This was especially true in the case of the District Education Department since the

²⁶ See, Sustainability Report, March–September 2007.

scheduling of the evaluation coincided with a great deal of activity related to posting of teachers and the distribution of text books and materials. Both the District Education Officer and the Deputy District Education Officer took time from important meetings with teachers to share their observations about ORACLE. In both target areas, despite the short notice, government officials were available on time, even in the early morning hours, and shared observations and anecdotes that demonstrated government engagement.

“...ORACLE brought sustainable structures to the fight against child labor...”

—*Harriet Luyima Assistant Commissioner,
Head of Child Labor Unit,
Ministry of Gender, Labor, and Social Development*

Similarly, members of various community-based committees, including Parent Teacher Associations, School Management Committees, Child Protection Committees, and awareness-raising groups such as dancers, singers, and actors easily mobilized to demonstrate their attachment to the importance of fighting child labor. Audiences to awareness raising events seemed comfortable and engaged, as well. Focus group discussions and open dialogues with IDP communities and from beneficiaries showed a keen understanding and awareness about child labor. Personal and collective anecdotes as well as awareness-raising activities such as dancing, songs, and drama showed a familiarity with ORACLE.

Institution Building

An unanticipated outcome of the ORACLE project was the establishment of groups who communicate anti-child labor themes and work voluntarily to help children. *Pe Tage* and the Kitgum Core Primary Teachers College Brigade are two examples of institutions that emerged out of the project that hold the promise of continuing to promote education and fight child labor.

Pe Tage

Pe Tage, which means Unshakable in the local language, is a dance troupe, which developed in an IDP camp located in Kineni, Pader District. The group sings and dances, and performs dramatic and comic theater about child labor, girls and education, and other themes concerning children’s rights. They are very popular and always draw a large audience. Like other troupes that either existed before ORACLE, or were formed as a result of ORACLE, these groups are institution on assets to the fight against child labor and voices for the region.

Kitgum Core Primary Teachers College Brigade

The Kitgum Core Primary Teachers College Brigade was organized by ORACLE beneficiaries. The group of volunteers helps vulnerable children and conducts sensitization campaigns, extolling girl education and combating child labor in IDP camps. Through lively and interesting musical programs, they encourage parents to send their children to school. Members have made instruments and composed songs so that they can use music as a vehicle for educating people about the themes of ORACLE.

“I personally feel a great deal of relief for the ORACLE students. This is something where we have excelled. If any sector of education has benefited from ORACLE, it is the Primary Teachers College. Because of those new teachers, ORACLE will have a great multiplier effect.”

—Principal of Kitgum Primary Teachers College

The group has had an impact on the College (KTC) as well as in the IDP communities. The principal of the Teachers College considers the Brigade to be an important organization that has contributed to the discipline of all the students on campus. On weekends and evenings, when students were idle on campus, the Brigade offered opportunities for students to come together and make and play musical instruments, compose songs, and sing. The Brigade choir now sings in both the Catholic and Protestant church services on campus. Nonbeneficiary students were equally attracted to the Brigade, and ORACLE was cited by the principal as being responsible for the establishment of other clubs at the KTC as well.

Replicability

Given the unique circumstances of Northern Uganda in which the ORACLE project functioned, the innovations taken to respond to a frequently changing and often dangerous situation may not be replicable in normal education and anti-child labor projects. However, the project produced a number of innovations that are replicable. These include forms and mechanisms for monitoring beneficiaries and assessing the impact of awareness-raising events, samples of which are included in the Annexes to this report. The talking compounds are effective and practical learning devices that can be applied universally. The manuals that were developed for psychosocial and other trainings are of the highest quality and very usable.

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IV CONCLUSIONS

4.1 LESSONS LEARNED, BEST PRACTICES, AND INNOVATIONS

Seemingly Insignificant Support Has a Big Impact

The value of supplying scholastic materials and equipment cannot be underestimated. The provision of a duplicating machine to each ORACLE learning center and/or school would certainly compete as the single most cost-efficient input of the ORACLE project. The Gestetner units, with a hand-turned ink drum, coupled with the manual typewriters, were distributed after teachers described having to write all examinations on the blackboard. The system was time-consuming and confusing for pupils. Further, examinations written on blackboards did not conform to the all-important final examinations, which were printed on paper. Once these two simple machines were brought in to the learning centers, teachers could prepare quizzes each week. Children became accustomed to taking examinations on paper. Teachers were able to track students' performance, and consequently see where more emphasis was needed on a particular subject. In every school visited during the final evaluation, as teachers reported improved test scores and passing rates, they attributed it, at least in part, to the duplicating machine.

Radio as an Appropriate Awareness-Raising Tool

As the most used media technique in Africa, radio programs are an important instrument for disseminating information and news. In Northern Uganda, ORACLE used the radio as an awareness-raising tool with apparent success in the Kitgum District. In nearly every interview and focus group in the district, a radio program sponsored by ORACLE was mentioned as an effective tool that influenced popular opinion about many issues related to child protection.

Besides spot announcements, which reminded the listening public to watch out for the worst forms of child labor or to join in promoting girl child education, the talk show and call-in program, *Kabake*, had widespread appeal. The 24 weekly programs have become institutionalized. In the local language, *Kabake* means debate, and the subjects—what constitutes child labor as opposed to helping out in the household; how corporal punishment negatively affects children's health; and girls in education versus early marriages, for example, grabbed the listening audience. Calls, which were registered and documented, came from as far away as the Sudan border. According to Lucy Otto, the probation officer in Kitgum district, the program was lively and welcomed debate, but always ended with positive pro-child messages. Guests on the program included Otto herself, as well as other district officials, police officers, representatives from the education and NGO community. School children such as Brian and Judith, who met with the evaluator during a visit to Akwane Primary School, participated on air.

In recognition of their role in awareness-raising, the vocational skills training Child Rights Club at Rachkoko Vocational Training Institute were given free air time on a local FM radio station in Rachkoko to raise awareness on the five ORACLE themes.²⁷ The program gained great popularity in the community and empowered children to fend for their rights.

Involving children in the programming built their presentation capabilities and confidence. Further, child listeners were likely to pay attention to their peers. ORACLE radio programs helped to create acceptance for the fight against child labor and early marriages.

While radios are generally found even in the poorest huts in the IDP camps, the telephones needed for call-in are not. Also, the radio component of the ORACLE project only operated in Kitgum because the radio transmissions were found to be inadequate or too costly for the Pader potential audience. Still, the radio has enormous practical use as an instrument of popular education and social communication.

Improve Skills Training Through Conscientious Selection of Teachers

Often in the course of the evaluation, project beneficiaries reiterated their distress that the support was ending and they wanted more extensive training or further support through the traditional education system. It was refreshing when the evaluator visited the DRAGON Art and Design Vocational Training Centre, and trainees voiced their pleasure at what they had gained and their sense of satisfaction with the training they had received. Further, they stated an earnest desire to help others in the same situation, rather than grouse about not having received enough training. The trainees who received vocational training at Dragon had similar profiles of vulnerability as trainees in other vocational-technical programs, but the difference in attitude rested in the relationship between teacher and students.

At Dragon, the teacher was already known to AVSI because he had helped produce psychosocial training materials. His ability was known, as was his commitment to the betterment of his community. He accepted the ORACLE beneficiaries as trainees in a variety of graphic and decorative arts. After graduation, nearly every one of his beneficiaries had a job and some were working together. To achieve this level of success, it may be that teachers need to be chosen more carefully in the quality of vocational education adhered to as rigorously as the traditional education was assessed. What made the students less concerned about needing further training was clearly because they were ready to enter the marketplace with productive skills.

Acronyms and Long-term Vision

ORACLE was an imaginative acronym for Opportunities for Reducing Adolescent and Child Labor through Education, a specially designed program addressing the needs of the population in Northern Uganda. Not unusually, when songs and plays were written to sensitize populations about child labor and other subjects, ORACLE was mentioned. ORACLE became institutionalized in the minds of the population over the four-year period. As a fairly objective acronym, perhaps it can be used again. One lesson to be learned from the ORACLE program is

²⁷ The six themes were child labor; children's rights; the importance of education to children in general, and especially girl-child education; the role of parents and the community in education; and the quality of education.

that such a program could be perceived as more than a short, four-year project with an innovative acronym, and could instead be introduced and established as a vision for a long-term future.

4.2 RECOMMENDATIONS

Since the ORACLE project has closed, the following recommendations are specific observations and suggestions for similar projects designed to fight child labor.

Ways to Improve Effectiveness

Coordination Among NGOs

There are many NGOs working in the region engaged in a huge variety of activities, from individual sponsorship of children to community development. Some were formed simply to address the crisis in Uganda, while others had international programs. Although their intentions are, for the most part, charitable and compassionate, the differing approaches and questionable competence is worrisome. There should be more coordination among these NGOs. Agencies such as AVSI and IRC could provide mentoring to some of the newer groups through coordinating workshops and bodies such as the Northern Region Education Forum (NREF).

Local Uganda civil society should be encouraged. Some of the community groups supported through ORACLE need capacity-building in organizational training. Improved quality of education, issues of the worst forms of child labor, and harmful traditional practices are substantive areas that could be introduced as topics of training to local NGOs.

Specialists

For future projects, the personnel component should focus on the most appropriate needed skills. ORACLE had excellent program managers and monitoring and evaluation specialists. For income-generating and similar programs, a high level of capability is needed. In ORACLE, the vocational skills trainers were outsourced and, as a consequence, did not always provide a consistent quality product. For future vocational skills training, conscientious trainers should be identified, and possibly the subject of advanced training.

For activities such as skills training, policy advocacy, social science research, or the development of income-generating activities that will no doubt surface in LEAP, specialized resources should be readily available. It is recommended that for those areas that reflect long-term comprehensive objectives, specialists should be on the staff or available.

Accurate Research

The Northern region is ripe for social science research. There is a paucity of reliable information, both quantifiable and qualitative. Census-level statistics about IDP populations, for example, vary, but local authorities and the Uganda Bureau of Statistics (UBOS) should be vested with those tasks. *The ORACLE project introduced monitoring of the status of child labor in the region.* This monitoring should be seen as a launch pad for other types of child-focused research

that can inform programming. With accurate reporting on the status of children working, advocacy for anti-child labor and pro-child protection policies will have more effect.

Conducting *social science research* as a contribution to policy development is another area where the fight against child labor can be sustained. For ORACLE, research would have added to the expense of the project, and the lack of security in the North certainly made such activities difficult, if not impossible. There is a paucity of social science research done on the actual situation of child labor in all of Uganda. The data collected in the context of ORACLE was quite comprehensive regarding numbers of beneficiaries according to USDOL common indicators, and contributes to that knowledge base. This information can contribute to national statistics, as well. If it were part of a longitudinal study or another form of social science research, it would be an even greater benefit to the Uganda Government in development-planning and its own efforts to fight child labor.

Conferring and Collaborating To Fight Child Labor

Child labor is a pernicious niche in the overall scheme of human development. The USDOL's commitment to supporting the most effective programs possible to thwart the rise of harmful child labor through programs such as the Education Initiative is a logical approach. Recognizing that social development is a long-term process, planning and budgeting requires a common vision. USDOL needs to work with grantees on project designs that recognize the long-term needs and the short-term funding realities to create sustainable programs. Such projects come about through initiating dialogue, collecting and sharing information, and performing thoughtful analysis. Project planning that involves beneficiaries and other stakeholders all along the intervention chain has proven to minimize problems and bring about desired results. It is known from the initial planning that monitoring according to the USDOL common indicators is required and will beneficially affect project outcomes. Therefore, the first steps in awareness-raising of local leaders, and the creation of Child Protection Committees and other locally based institutions, should incorporate training for volunteers who are committed to and capable of monitoring child labor. From the outset, the organization of such groups must be deliberate and transparent. Such a strategy is economical. The creation of a voluntary monitoring component in the local institutions (CPCs, SMCs, and schools) from the beginning is a cost-effective method of monitoring the common indicators.

A rapid appraisal that identifies the geographic situation, as well as other constraints (such as possible political issues) is another strategy to inform planning. In the upcoming LEAP, the implementing agencies have addressed the problem of too widespread a target population by incorporating a mapping activity early in the project to identify high-risk areas and holistic support through a whole-school and whole-community approach.²⁸

Process-driven, inclusive project planning takes advantage of local knowledge so that money is not wasted on activities that are meaningless to constituents. Waste was not a particular problem with ORACLE, but it is a concern for income-generating activities and vocational training. Local people know what products are marketable, for example, and marketing experts know when

²⁸ E-mail from Nina Papadopoulos, December 7, 2007.

there has been a saturation of a product. They check on the quality of training and the product. Bringing the two together—local people and specialists—ensures a greater predictability of success at the outset and is cost-effective.

USDOL's ILAB should be able to rely on potential grantees to engage in process-oriented activities that build project ownership while establishing sound project elements. USDOL may also promote process as a required criterion in its RFPs. Also, adequate time should be given for process-driven planning and project start-up.

Sometimes the monitoring and reporting requirements of USDOL were not fully appreciated by implementing agencies, especially those that had been working in regions where child labor was taken for granted and monitoring was a major challenge. USDOL should conceptualize the training of grantees as an *opportunity to share experiences* and build on the immense knowledge base that the ILAB and Education Initiative projects are generating, while inviting, recognizing, and documenting field-based expertise.

Policy and Peace

The volatility of the northern region will continue to have repercussions for the entire nation. Groups working anywhere in Uganda should recognize that what happens there can affect programs elsewhere. The country is in a precarious position and issues of peace, cultural harmony, and ethnic interchanges should be promoted within the framework of the education programs. Peace Clubs in Acholi-land should promote peace on the nation, not just in the northern region.

Policy on Child Labor

To see lasting results in policy development to combat child labor in Uganda requires a substantial commitment, such as a formal component of a project, or a self-standing project, that is based in Kampala and has adequate resources. The CLU is weak, but capable of making a difference. Increased training, advocacy, and relationship-building, and institutional collaboration among the relevant ministries, including MGLSD, MoES, and others, such as the Justice Ministry, would lead to a more effective power base from which to launch policy initiatives. The USDOL itself could also be a powerful advocate with a single visit by the USDOL Director. Also, USDOL's success in other countries could inform a visiting consultation of either CLU focal points from other countries visiting Uganda, or CLU principals visiting other countries, especially within Africa.²⁹

However, every implementer of any development project should (1) recognize the role of the project in overall existing government policy; and (2) be alert of relevant policy decisions. ORACLE-implementing agencies AVSI and IRC were exemplary in recognizing the unique role that they played in delivering services to children and government facilities (e.g., schools) as a consequence of weak government policies. Where appropriate, the agencies were able to advocate effectively for the target population with the government.

²⁹ "We have tried to bring education in more closely but have yet to find a real champion in the MoES to engage in the NSC" (Nina Papadopoulos).

A positive aspect of ORACLE's project management approach was that the project confined itself closely to its stated plan. This disciplined approach led to consistent achievement of goals. The one area where ORACLE expanded its work was in playing a small but significant role in advocating for child labor policies at the national level. ORACLE representation on the National Steering Committee and in the USDOL grantee forum added value to the NSC, the work of the USDOL grantees, and the project itself. Regional officials respected that aspect of ORACLE activities, benefited through briefings and trainings, and were more inclined to work against child labor.

Increase Opportunities for Girls and Women

Girls in secondary school should continue to be targeted for remedial or bridging courses. Also, a specific project that would expressly target and attract more young women to become teachers nationwide, and more female teachers who take jobs in the districts would also enhance conditions for girl students. Teachers colleges could promote the study of certain policy issues, including identifying incentives that would attract female teachers to the field.

Much has been done by ORACLE to sensitize teachers, both male and female, about the special needs for girl pupils. Schools have arranged special rooms and provided hygiene and reproductive health information, but more can be done in this area to encourage more girls to come to school.

Celebrate the Participation of Children

With children and youth as the primary beneficiaries of the ORACLE project, most of the activities involved them in a very positive manner. Dance troupes and theater groups composed of adults brought children into their awareness-raising programs. Adult leaders clearly perceived their role as mentoring as they introduced child actors and actresses to the audiences.³⁰ Children participated in radio programs and commemorative day events held in the North. At schools and some vocational educational programs, children took leadership roles. There was evidence that due to the child-centered methodology teaching, teachers encouraged children to become leaders more than ever.

However, as an increasingly important percentage of the population, children can play an effective role in bringing about positive change. As they excel in school and are involved in drama and sports, they should also be involved in decisionmaking and problem-solving related to projects in which they are beneficiaries themselves. The ORACLE project has produced a large number of trained and educated young people who are now at the point of being young adults. They need platforms for sharing ideas. They will also need training and opportunities to experience their rights and responsibilities in a civil society. Building networks and exchanges between children in the North and those in other regions of Uganda or elsewhere would provide a logical extension to the peace clubs and child rights clubs that were started under ORACLE.

³⁰ Activities that occur outside of school time. Participation is purely voluntary.