Mechanisms of Indoctrination and Control

Abducted Children and Youth in Lord's Resistance Army in Northeastern Democratic Republic of the Congo

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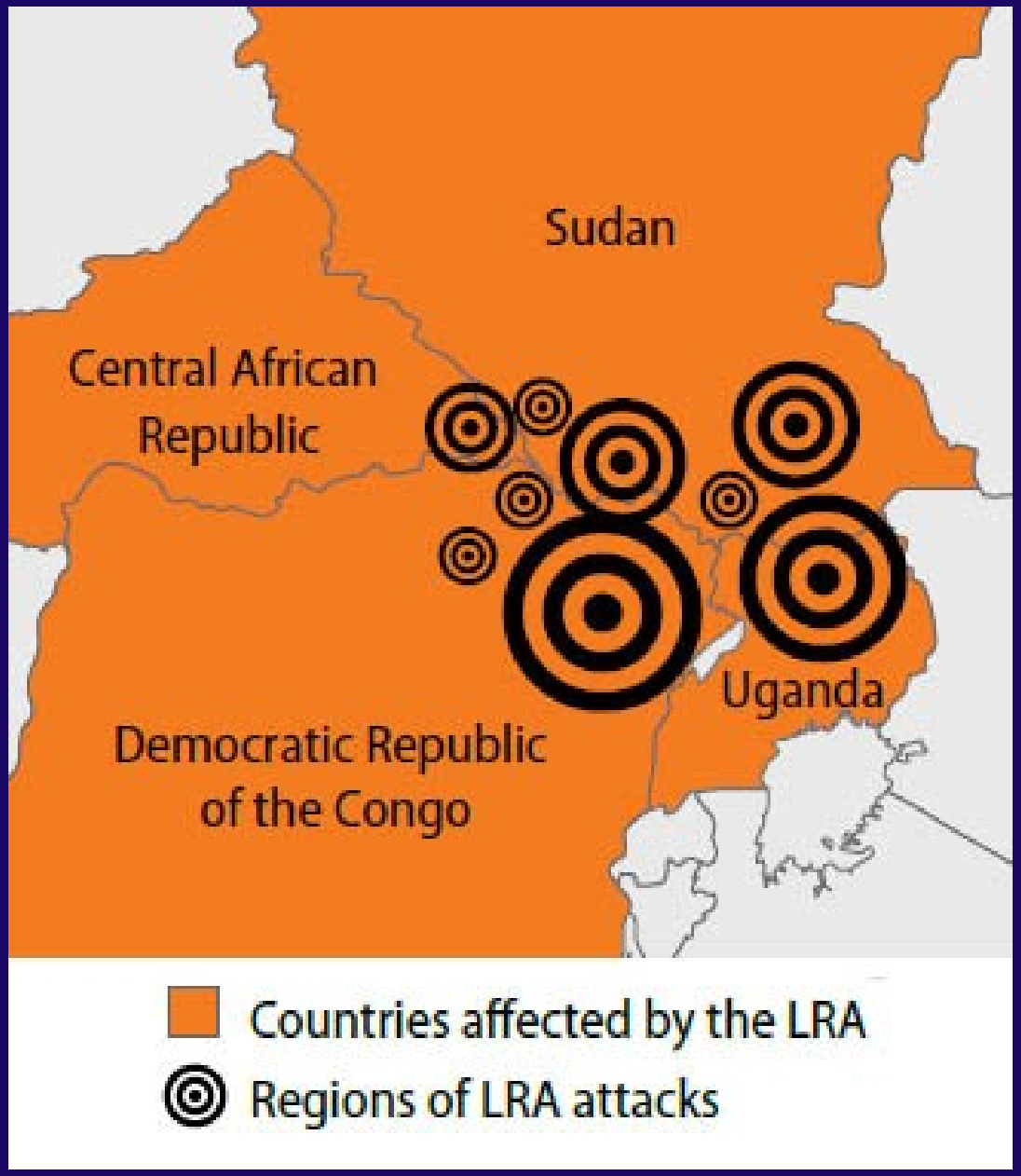
Background

- Approximately 300,000 children under the age of 18 are actively taking part in, or serve as support personnel for, combat situations in more than 100 countries worldwide.

- The Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) is distinct in its widespread conscription of children and perpetration of human rights abuses.


Sudan
Central African Republic
Uganda
Democratic Republic of the Congo
Countries affected by the LRA
Regions of LRA attacks

SUDAN
Duru
Limal
Dungu
Faradje
Bas Uele District
Haut Uele District
Central African Rep.
Sudan
Uganda
Rwanda

Data Collection

- Thirty-three semi-structured qualitative interviews
- Four communities in LRA-affected areas of northeastern DRC: Duru, Faradje, Limai and Dungu
- Respondents were:
  - Formerly abducted children
  - Family of abductees
  - Community leaders
  - Medical and educational service providers
  - NGO workers

Data Analysis

- Two note takers were present at each interview, transcribing verbatim. Notes were combined to create a transcript for each interview
- Interview transcripts were coded inductively by two researchers to identify key themes
- Interview notes were coded into themes and researchers collaboratively agreed on main messages emerging from qualitative data

Violence during initiation

"It is difficult to leave the LRA because they scare children and say if you try to escape, they will chase you and kill you. They found two boys from the Zande tribe who tried to escape and they pulled other Zande boys from the group and forced them to beat those who tried to escape with sticks until they died."

"If they see you talk with one person frequently, they think you want to run away and they will beat you up."

Isolation and control of communication

“When they kidnap you, you just move without any rest and you can’t talk with each other especially those who were abducted. And if you do, they will say you are planning to run away and they will beat you.”

“When I was kidnapped since I didn’t know their language - they were forcing us and beating us to learn their language .”

Assignment to a new “family”

“There was somebody - the one who abducted me also would give me some food - I was the one carrying his food and his wife’s goods.”

“…Normally when they train other kids to be LRA they put them under someone’s responsibility.”

Strictly defined gender roles

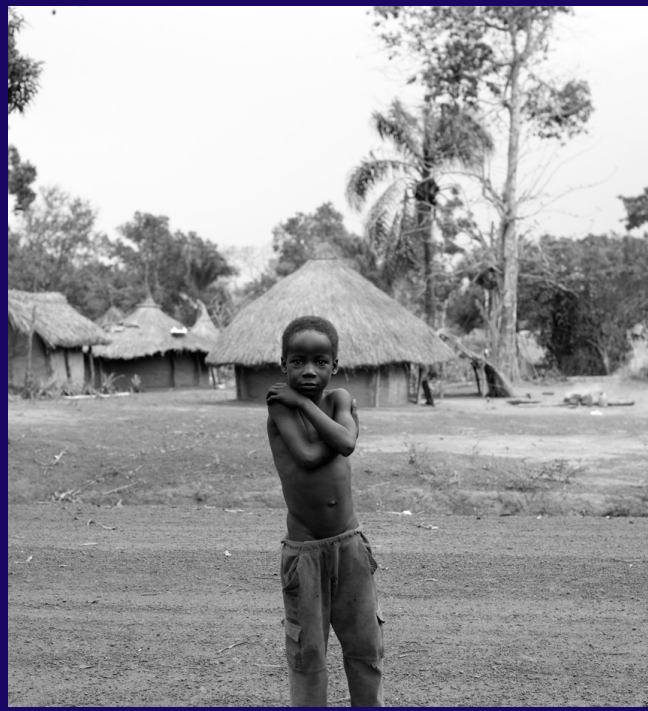
"When they abduct kids, especially girls, they distribute them to the commanders - they say 'You - this is your husband, this is your husband.' Those who are not mature will give to other commanders and say 'You keep this kid until they are old enough to be your wife.' … They just see the height and if you are too small they don't give you as a wife."

"Girls are abducted, they are given to other LRA as wives if they are older than 15-years-old. If younger than 15, they will keep them until they are old enough. [Girls] carry babies, wash clothes and cook."

Strictly defined gender roles

"LRA abducts children and they can be with them for a year or longer. The LRA doesn't want the children to run away with the guns they were given so they have them become combatants. But first they make them porters."

"Boys will be taken, if they don't want to go back home, they will be trained as fighters. They will ask a boy questions to see if he is trustworthy, then they will send him to fetch water, if he keeps coming back, they will train him [as an LRA soldier]."



Witchcraft and drugs

"Most of the time when the kids get the witchcraft and are given the gun, they are low rank and can't go first to become a high commander. Boys in the LRA are transporters, then they give the 'gris gris' and they become LRA."

"They use drugs and 'gris gris' in the LRA to change attitudes…"

Conclusions

- Over its decades-long campaign of abduction, the LRA has refined practices to exert high levels of control over new recruits.

- A number of practices promote the indoctrination of children in the LRA :
  - Control of communication
  - Breaking and re-forming social ties
  - New identity formation
  - Control by perceived magical forces

- This understanding is critical for improving reintegration programming