

Activity Report of Field Research

How vocational training affects the perceptions of conflict victims - Case study of Northern Uganda -

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I. Summary

- Abstract

In post-conflict areas, children who experienced violence got traumas and sometimes became insensitive to hurt others.² Therefore, healing these traumas for individuals can be the way of avoiding another conflict. Gulu is one of the post-conflict areas in northern Uganda. This area was influenced by the conflict between the government and an anti-government militant group called Lord Resistance Army (LRA). This conflict affected all civilians, especially children. LRA abducted many children as soldiers and slaves, and many children lost their parents and hid in the bush. Therefore, during the conflict, there were a lot of children who couldn't go to school. Now, in Gulu, there are many young people who don't have enough skills to have jobs. Therefore, this research is trying to see what kind of vocational training can help young people to live and change their perceptions about past experiences .

In Gulu, there is an international organization called Terra Renaissance which offers vocational trainings for ex-child soldiers and economically vulnerable people. Then, through the interviews with the beneficiaries and staffs, I found out that vocational training can change their lives and affect their perceptions. When offering vocational training, it is important to notice that there are several steps and process to affect their perceptions. Students at the vocational school need to have experiences to make them feel better. Therefore, in order to let them have such experiences, substantial and practical contents of vocational trainings are necessary. However, even though these skills and knowledge can change their perceptions, it doesn't mean that they can completely forget their past experiences. At least, they can learn how to deal with their feelings about past experiences. Thus, students can learn not only skills and knowledge to get jobs themselves but also new ways to handle with the experiences of the conflict.

Each person has different memories of the conflict and it is impossible for them to forget. However, vocational training can be one of the tools to empower them to overcome their negative experiences through building self-esteem by getting a decent job, keeping away from thinking about the conflicts and getting connected with friends, family and community members. In order to understand the potential contribution of vocational training, as one of the approaches to prevent conflict re-occurrence, it is important to understand how experiences can affect their perceptions.

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² Search for Common Ground, Foundation for Advanced Studies on International Development (FASID). (2001) "Children and Armed Conflict -Reintegration of Former Child Soldiers in the Post- Conflict Community" P7

- 要約

「ウガンダ北部において、紛争被害者に対する職業訓練の”心”への影響」

過去に紛争を経験した国では、トラウマなどが原因で、子ども達が他人を傷つけてしまうこともある。そのため、紛争後の地域において次の紛争を防ぐためには、一人ひとりの精神面に焦点を当てる必要がある。ウガンダ北部に位置するグルもまた、紛争を経験した土地の一つである。この地域では政府と反政府組織「神の抵抗軍（LRA）」の激しい対立が続き、子ども達を中心にその地域に住む全ての住民に影響を与えた。子どもたちは子ども兵や性奴隷として誘拐されたり、親を亡くし孤児になったりするなどして、学校に通うことができなかつた。そのため、現在のグルにおいて問題となっているのが、若者の就職率の低さである。彼らは紛争中に学校に行くことができなかつたため、十分なスキルや知識を得ることができず、今でも職を得るのが難しいのである。この研究は、個人の意見に注目してどのような職業訓練ならば、彼らの生活を変え、紛争に対する認識を変えることができるのかを探るものである。

グルにある、国際協力NPO Terra Renaissanceは、元子ども兵と経済的に弱い立場の人々に対し職業訓練を提供している。そこの受益者とスタッフに対するインタビューを通して、職業訓練が受益者たちの人生と過去の経験への認識を変えることがわかつた。しかし、職業訓練を提供する際には、認識に影響するまでのステップとプロセスがあることを理解しなければならない。また、受益者の過去についての認識に良い影響を与えるような経験をする必要がある。そのためには、職業訓練の内容が十分で、実用的でなければならない。しかしながら、いくら彼らの認識がスキルと知識をもとに変わったとしても、それは彼らが完全に過去の経験を忘れられるということの意味するわけではない。少なくとも彼らは今、過去の経験を思い出した時のどのように対処するかを知っている。このように、受益者たちは仕事を得るためのスキルと知識だけでなく、紛争の経験をどのように捉えるかという新しい知識も身に付けることができている。

それぞれの人は、異なる紛争の記憶を持っており、それらを忘れることは不可能である。しかし、職業訓練を終えた彼らは、仕事を通してより良い感じ方ができたり、紛争について思い出す時間を減らしたり、友達や家族、地域の人々とのもつなぎを作ることで、過去の経験を乗り越える力を得ている。新たな紛争を防ぐために、より個人のためとなるような職業訓練を実現するために、どのような経験を持つことが紛争被害者の認識に影響するかを考える必要がある。

II. Research Activity

1. Introduction

After the Cold War, many armed conflicts happened in developing countries. One of the reasons for this is because children who have experiences of violence such as conflicts tend to be insensitive to hurt others and to be anti-social.³ Therefore, it is important to focus on the psychological conditions of children who experienced conflict. Leading their minds to better conditions can be a way to build peace in each individual and to avoid another conflict. Through this research, I tried to figure out that building peace in each person can be one of the ways to avoid another conflict in post-conflict areas. For the case study of this topic, I chose Gulu in northern Uganda. There was a conflict between 1986 to 2006 and affected all civilians. Because it was extremely difficult for children to go to school during that time, the negative impact of the conflict still remains as the fact that many young people cannot get jobs without enough skills and knowledge. However, there is a possibility for them that having a job with some skills and knowledge may lead to better mental conditions and perceptions about their lives and future. In my research, I tried to find out how vocational training affects their perceptions of lives and how it will help to build peace avoiding another conflict though understanding when they feel the change of perceptions about past experiences, current life situations, and future.

(1) Background

Uganda was ruled by the United Kingdom (UK) as a protectorate with “decide and conquer”. The UK wanted support from the elites and middle raking in the south of Uganda, so they treated them more favorably. On the other hand, the north area was less developed and there was a persecution of Acholi people who are the major tribe in the area. Uganda got independent from the UK in 1962, but the influence of the colonial era still remained with a huge economic and political gap between the south and the north. In terms of politics, the state leader was always a problem. In 1986, Museveni beat Okello with National Resistance Army (NRA) and started to rule Uganda. This was the first time for the south leader to have the power since independence and it resulted in increasing anxiety among the people in the north especially Acholi people, then it led ex-soldiers of the former government to organize anti-government militant groups. One of them was called Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA), and they changed the lives of people in the north in the worst way. After they became more extreme and insisting on different ideas about traditions and spirituals from local leaders of Acholi, LRA lost the support of the north people and started to abduct children for soldiers and sex slaves. It is said that 25,000 children had been abducted since the beginning of the conflict⁴. In 1994, they started reprisal killing and mass killing against civilians in the north. During this period, children had to move to town to sleep safely in the shelters every night as night commuters. Also, there were many children who couldn’t go to school because of hiding in the bush from the fights as well as losing economic support from parents for the school fees. In 2006, there was a peace negotiation but ended in failure. Now, LRA is not in Gulu, but still they are active in other countries. As a result of this conflict, the northern part of Uganda was heavily affected by the conflict, and what is worse, it is negatively influencing every individual until now.

³ Search for Common Ground, Foundation for Advanced Studies on International Development (FASID). (2001) “Children and Armed Conflict -Reintegration of Former Child Soldiers in the Post- Conflict Community” P7

⁴ アフリカ日本協議会. 「アフリカ紛争問題タスクフォース FACT SHEET Vo1.2 ウガンダ共和国 北部内戦」 P2

(2) Literature Review

Then, how had we tried to solve these problems and what can we do more? Mentioning these questions, the identification of support providing actors from outside of Gulu and the evaluations of their programs are important. As Sinclair (2002) mentions, it is necessary for children and youth who experienced conflicts to have opportunities of education and recreation for their socio-psychological needs and these activities should be conducted for the mid or long term.⁵ The age range of children and youth is wide and the types of education include from school education to cultural activities. Thus, the mental care program must have enough length of time and diversity to fit the different backgrounds of each child and youth through education and recreation. There are two examples. One is conducted by Terra Renaissance which is an international NGO established in Japan. It has activities in Uganda and Burundi for ex-child soldiers to be reintegrated into society through vocational training and peace education. The other was offered by Mr. Taro Komatsu who used to be a UNESCO staff in Kosovo. He offered a new drama class for local students to offer opportunities for students to be more positive in their futures through creative activities. Also, in northern Uganda since later in the 1990s, actors from outside of Uganda understood the traditions of Acholi and started to use for the reintegration of ex-soldiers. The support organizations and researchers tried to achieve peacebuilding through healing the traumas of the youth and community people and rebuilding a social relationship. For this purpose, they organized groups led by the local leaders and conducted educational activity on Acholi's consciousness of tradition.

(3) Problem Statement / Research Objective and Question

Even though some organizations have successful outcomes, there are still challenges in the education field in post-conflict areas. Firstly, the current evaluation of education programs is mostly undertaken from supporters' perspectives at the national level to present their results more remarkable. Secondly, the quantitative way of evaluations is more common due to the limited amounts of data at school levels. Thirdly, the problem is about the lack of organizations. There are not so many organizations which can implement education programs focusing on mental healthcare due to a limited budget. Thus, the issues of insufficient numbers of organizations to provide mental care and evaluation at school levels from students' perspectives should be addressed.

To realize the importance of education for mental care based on individual conditions, I set up three objectives for this study. One is to conduct research in a qualitative way from an individual's perspective, second is to analyze the effects on minds through conflict victim's perceptions and third is to identify when the conflict victims feel the change of their perceptions through education. To identify which function or aspect of education can help conflict victims, the analysis of the opinions is required from victims themselves through interviews in a qualitative way. The research questions are:

1. How do the conflict victims overcome their past experiences through vocational training?
2. What does "to overcome the past experiences" mean to them?

⁵ Sinclair, Margaret. (2002) "Planning education in and after emergencies" UNESCO, International Institute for Educational Planning. Paris. P51

Thus, in order to realize the impact of education for peacebuilding based on an individual's perspective, it is necessary to know how education help conflict victims and what they really expect from training and education. Therefore, Gulu can be one of the cases as a post-conflict area and graduates from the vocational school operated by a Japanese NGO Terra Renaissance can be important informants on their learning experiences.

2. Study Area

Gulu is located in the northern part of Uganda and is the biggest city in the area. In this area, mainly Acholi people live and speak Acholi. This area had been affected by the conflict from 1986 until 2006. Many people lost their family members and had to live in IDP camps ordered by the government. Especially on children, there has been a heavy influence until now. Because of the conflicts, many children couldn't get enough education during the conflict. When those children become older, it is difficult for them to find a job because they didn't have enough skills and knowledge. This high unemployment of young people in this area is one of the general problems in Gulu. Due to such a situation, some organizations offered vocational training to those young people during and after the conflict. One of them is a Japanese NGO called Terra Renaissance with which I did my research.



Figure 1. Map of Uganda [<https://www.worldatlas.com/webimage/countrys/africa/ug.htm>]

3. Methodology

Terra Renaissance was established in 2001 for the social reintegration of conflict victims through vocational training, economical support, establishing schools, etc. It has projects in Uganda, DRC, Burundi, Cambodia, Laos, and Japan.

Especially in Uganda, they have vocational training, basic human needs support, medical support and microfinance support. Each program takes for three years. For the first one year and a half, students study and get training at school, and for another one year and a half, staffs visit their workshops for monthly

follow-up of their business. At school, they have two courses of vocational training and some other classes. One course is carpentry and joinery course, and the other is tailoring and dress designing course. As for other classes, they have peace education, drama, dance, and music class. Basic education is to learn numeracy, English, writing and reading. Also they have classes about handicraft and small-scale business skills. Sometimes they go to school excursion and activities. Through these courses, the NGO supports two kinds of young people. One is ex-child soldiers, and the other is economically vulnerable youth those who became orphans due to conflict without going to school and unemployed without enough skills. The age range of these students are between 20's and 30's and the student number is 30.

Mainly I did interviews and observations. As for the interviews, I did with beneficiaries, staffs, and teachers of the NGO. Those beneficiaries graduated from the school in November 2018 and started the business from December 2018. I interviewed with 5 beneficiaries with purposive sampling and 2 interviewees were ex-child soldiers and 3 interviewees were economically vulnerable people. I did interviews twice with each through in-depth interviews with a life story approach. Mainly, the 1st interview was about the Terra Renaissance courses and what they learned and enjoyed, and the 2nd interview was about their life histories and perceptions about their past experiences during the conflict, current lives and future plans. As for the first research question, I broke it down into two sub-questions. One is how do they feel about their past experience after vocational training? The other is how and why their perception about current lives and future is changed? I also often observed how they work at their workshops and how to make friends. As for the interviews with staffs, I did with 3 teachers and 1 staff out of 10 total staffs at the school about their perceptions and impressions of the 5 beneficiaries and also how was like the situation of Gulu during and after the conflict. These interviews were more for making my research convincing and for understanding the civilian's lives during the conflict.

4. Research Findings

Through the interviews, I found out that there are several steps for beneficiaries to feel the change of their perceptions and that each of them has a different meaning of “overcome the past experiences.”

Firstly, Step 1 is to learn skills and knowledge at classes. Step 2 is to have practical experiences based on those skills and knowledge. Then, those experiences affect their perceptions as Step 3. For example, after they learned how to make clothes (step 1), they can have a workshop and earn daily and sustainable income (step 2). Then, this makes them feel better and enjoy working (step 3). However, this is not the only way of affecting their perceptions because there are two kinds of experiences within Step 2. For example, they get a carpentry skill at Step 1, and earn money as Step 2-A, and they became able to support their family members as the Step 2-B. As the Step 3, then, they feel self-esteem being able to help their family. Even about the future, one of the interviewees answered that “life was not easy and couldn't think about the future, but now I have a future plan” which also demonstrates the result of three steps to change the perceptions of beneficiaries. Needless to say, the process is not always the same and other activities such as praying and talking with other people affect their perceptions.

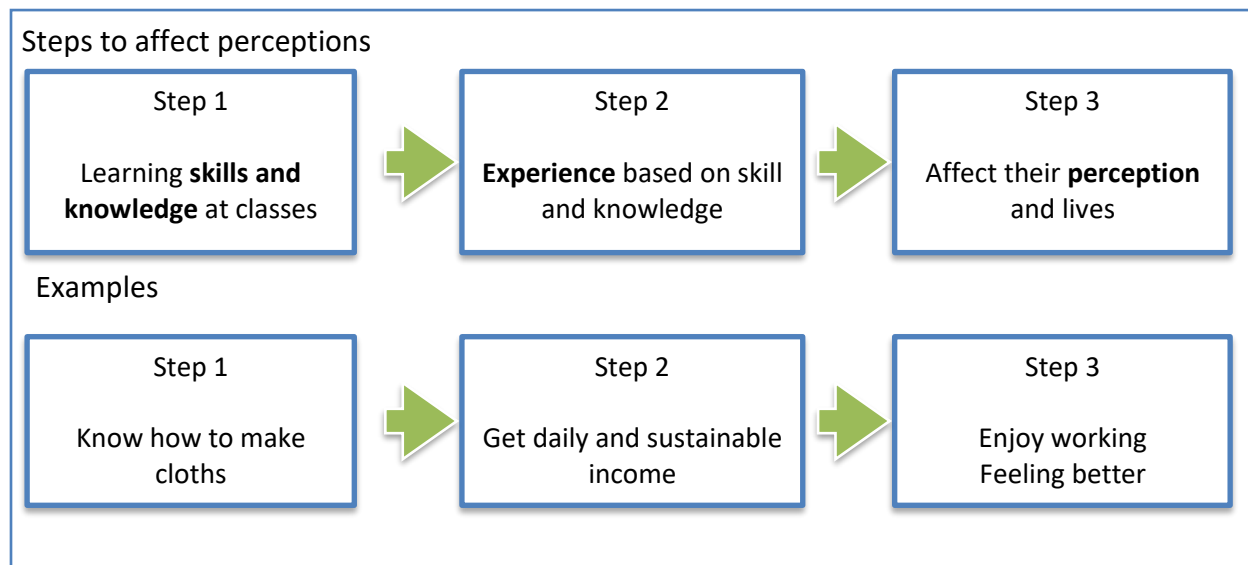


Figure 2. Steps to affect perceptions

Secondly, each of them has a different definition of “overcoming the past experiences.” They answered that it was difficult to forget the experiences of the conflict completely. However, now they can control their feelings with the way they learned from the course of Terra Renaissance such as peace education to deal with traumas. Also, they tried not to think about the experiences by keeping themselves busy with work. Though each of them has different thoughts about past experiences, learning and having people together can help them to feel better.

Thus, steps and the process differ from each other and getting skills and knowledge cannot solely change their minds, but the quality of experiences such as earning money to support families and talking with friends will affect their perceptions. Moreover, they try to find their own way to feel about their past experiences through their experiences and learnings.

5. Discussion

Based on my research findings, I found out answers for my research question. I tried to figure out the answer for the first research question by asking their perceptions about not only the past experience but also their current lives and future plans. Therefore, it is possible to say that the change of their perception about their past experiences is not the only thing which can empower conflict victims to overcome them. Perceptions about lives and the future also affect how they feel about their conflict experiences. Also, just going to school is not enough to change their perceptions. They need to learn skills and knowledge as much as they can have some experiences letting them feel the change of their perceptions. One of my interviewees joined vocational training in the past at a different school for three months. He told me that it was not practical, so he didn’t get a job and started farming instead. Therefore, how much vocational training can equip students skills and knowledge is more important to enable them to have some experiences based on what they learnt. In order to use skills and knowledge fully in daily lives, the contents of vocational training should be practical. For example, at the carpentry and joinery classes of Terra Renaissance, they learn how

to make many kinds of furniture such as desks, chairs, and sofas to meet their customers' needs. Thus, what kind of practical experiences they can have based on their learnings at school will affect whether they can overcome their past experiences. Once they build practical experiences such as earning money or better relations with family and community members based on their learnings, they can enjoy their work and they have the next goal to realize their future plans.

The second research question is "What does 'to overcome the past experiences' mean to them?" It became clear that they feel the change of their perceptions through the vocational training and their experiences. However, this doesn't mean that they can "forget" their past experiences. When I interviewed with them, it seemed hard and sad for them to talk about it. However, through the experiences based on skills and knowledge and the class contents teaching how to deal with traumas and to build relationships with others, now they know how to control feelings about past experiences. For example, they know how to keep themselves calm by being alone when they remembered their experiences. Also, having work and talking with people can give them time not to think about their past. At their workshops, I saw them working with enjoying and talking with neighbors. Therefore, "overcome the past experiences" doesn't mean to forget their experiences of conflict but to handle and live with the experiences.

Through the research in a qualitative way from individual perspectives, it was found out that vocational training needs to be practical enough to enable conflict victims can build practical experiences. Through those experiences and learnings, they can control their feelings about past experiences.

6. Conclusion

My research is trying to see what each conflict victim perceives their past experiences after they learned at vocational trainings. It is important to do research from the individual perspective because focusing on psychological conditions of each person is essential to avoid another conflict. However, evaluations of education have been conducted at mostly national levels and not so many organizations can offer students education programs for mental care. Therefore, I did my research in Gulu where all civilians were affected by the conflict in a qualitative way of interviews at Terra Renaissance.

Through the fieldwork, I found what kind of vocational trainings can let conflict victims change their perceptions and overcome their past experiences. Vocational training has to be very substantial and to be practical as much as students utilize those learnings as skills and knowledge in daily lives. Building new practical experiences, conflict victims can change the perceptions about the past, present, and future. However, even though they have different perceptions compared to the past, it doesn't mean they can forget the memory of conflict completely. At least they can handle their feelings.

Thus, in order to realize the vocational training for better mental conditions to build peace in post-conflict areas, class contents and practice provided are the keys.

● Acknowledgement

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in Uganda and Japan. I appreciate all of the respondents who spare time for my interviews. Lastly, I would like to thank all the people who provided me such a great opportunity to experience Africa in this program, Global Leadership Training Program 2018.

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III. Reflection to the GLTP in Africa

There two reasons why I participated in GLTP. One is the necessity to spend time in the field as long as I can in order to build trustful relationships with interviewees. The other is the importance for my research to get some advice from a local supervisor at the host university in Africa. In order to focus on the perceptions of conflict victims, I wanted to conduct my research in a highly qualitative way. To understand how they overcame their past experiences through vocational training, I needed to ask their past experiences as well. As GLTP allows me to stay in the field for 3 months to do conduct my research, I could start building the relationship with each interviewee to make them feel free to talk with me about their experiences during the conflict period and how they feel about them for this highly qualitative research. Additionally, it became possible to have perspectives and advice from a local supervisor. Having a supervisor and learning at a local university enables me to refer to their own local perspectives which I cannot learn from literature. With those reasons, I decided to participate in the GLTP.

I stayed in Uganda for almost 3 months from January 28th to April 18th in 2019 and conducted my field research in Gulu. Even before I left for Uganda, it was imaginable how sensitive to ask about their perceptions and their past experiences, life and future. Therefore, I started to build relationships with interviewees and to be friends with them for the first 2 months. During this period, I visited their workshops or houses, talked with them about their family and culture and had some local foods. I tried to learn their cultures and customs such as greetings and religions especially and also to make them know about me such as why I came to Uganda and what I am going to do for my research. I learned that it is very important to have trustful relationships with colleagues or neighbors to help each other in their community. I also learned how religious they are. I met many people who believe in Christianity. One of my friends answered that one of the ways they overcame conflict was their faith. Thus, I felt these two elements are very significant to understand their background and characteristics. When I started spending time with them, I tried to be just curious about them and to enjoy with them as natural and usual as possible to make good relationship then I started and did interviews on how vocational trainings affect their lives twice with 5 beneficiaries and once with 4 staffs of the NGO with life story approach after two months.

It was my first time to go to Africa and Uganda, so there were many challenges which I had never expected. Firstly, I realized that the conditions of Gulu were different from what I learned and expected from the literature. I decided to change my focus of interviewees after I realized the different conditions of Gulu. Initially, I was going to do an interview only with ex-child soldiers. However, I learned that all of the people in Gulu were affected by the conflict not only ex-child soldiers. Therefore, I changed my focus of interviewees to any young people who got vocational training at the NGO. It was a good decision to reflect what is really happening in Gulu. Secondly, I sometimes got confused with the differences of their customs. Especially time management was the most difficult for me. Sometimes I waited for my interviewee for one or two hours and it changed my initial plan. Because of this, I felt like I had to rush for my readings and preparation for other interviews. However, later I learned that I needed to respect their customs and to make the use of the time when I was waiting for my interviewee. Those two were the big challenges for me, but I learned what the real situation of Gulu is, who were the real conflict victims, and the importance to learn how to deal with the situation.

Some skills to build relationships at the places where I had never been with the new people would help my career development the most in any field in the future, but I hope to get opportunities to work in developing countries as my first career in a private company. Many Japanese companies are trying to support the concept of SDGs and one of those companies focus on poverty reduction in South East Asian

countries. Therefore, in this company, I will try to connect people in Japan and people in those Asian countries. I would like to help poverty reduction through the business for sustainable development, and at the same time, I also would like to tell to the people who live in Japan how is developing countries.

As I have been mentioning, this GLTP program helped me in many aspects, not only my master's research but also my career development. Staying in Uganda for 3 months with full financial support made my data collection successful through the trusted friendship with the local people. I also learned not only knowledge about the field site but also skills to build a relationship which it'll be important for my career development and my entire life. Additionally, one of the most interesting points of this program is that all GLTP participants study about Africa on different kinds of a research subject. There are participants who study education, agriculture or industry, but all of them study about Africa as a common point. From the participants of this program, you can learn other aspects of Africa which you didn't know only from your field experience. Participants can get not only skills and knowledge for your research and your career but also a human connection with other participants, UNU staff, and supervisor of the local university. Therefore, I strongly recommend you to join this program.



Terra Renaissance: Classroom for tailoring course



Carpentry workshop run by beneficiaries



Gulu main market



Staff of Terra Renaissance



Beneficiaries and staffs of Terra Renaissance