REPORT OF THE CIVIL SOCIETY EXCHANGE PROGRAM (CSEP) HELD IN URGANDA WITH FRIENDS OF ORPHANS

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These are the places my exchange was concentrated. They included Kampala, LIRA, PADER, GULU and KITGUM. The four regions marked red above formed part of Northern Uganda and mostly considered as the worst and most devastating places where the LRA waged the war, adducting nearly all of its children.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

It is a great honor and privilege, for me to thank the Nexus Fund, for the enormous work done to ensure that my Civil Society Exchange Program (CSEP) was successful. I also owe a great appreciation to Friends of Orphans (FRO) (especially Richard Ricky Anywar) and the entire staff for the support afforded and for granting me the opportunity to explore and experience a new place, culture and ideas. This exchange has greatly impacted both my social and peace building skills.

I would also like to thank students of FRO Rehabilitation Center for their hospitality. Interacting with people who were used as instruments to kill and destroy, now being transformed into productive and responsible citizenship was very empowering and motivating.

I also want to acknowledge the effort of my colleagues and volunteers at Camp for Peace Liberia (CFP), who remained very resilience and delegated to their responsibilities, in carrying out the work and upholding the mission and vision of Camp for Peace during my absence.

Lastly, I want to extend my thanks and appreciation to my Loving wife, Yassah Togbah Learwellie, my son, B. Abel Learwellie and my daughter, Marilyn Learwellie, whose patience allowed me to stay out for two weeks during this exchange.

B. Abel Learwellie
INTRODUCTION

Is it possible to carry out post war developmental agenda, including rehabilitation and reintegration of former child soldiers, orphans, war affected youth without conducting an intensive psychosocial? Friends of Orphans has been working to this end since 1999. In just three days, I have acquired enough than I expected in two weeks. Friends of Orphans, is indeed an incredible organization that is doing so much to transfer vulnerable youths, women and children from disparity to prosperity (Abel Learwellie, 2014).

This report concludes my tenure as a Nexus Fellow at Friends of Orphans in Uganda. It contains valuable lessons learnt and personal perspectives of wars. This exchange was an indispensable opportunity that allowed me to appreciate the people of Ugandan and their culture as well as the beauty of this planet. The Exchange has been very fruitful and enjoyable and has added an added value to my professional journey. I have achieved so much than I expected to have achieved in just two weeks.

Above is a grandmother of 11 orphans children, and she said this to me. “The fighters came and abducted all my children. When they evaded this village, I was arrested and beaten and one of my daughters cried out and said, please stop beating my mother, she was ordered to be killed. Before being killed, seven fighters had sex with her in the presence of me. The rest of my children were raped and abducted. I considered war as the greatest enemy of the human race. It destroys, kills and impoverishes the people who live within it.

I am thankful that you left millions of miles from Liberia to come here to talk to our children about peace and reconciliation. May God bless your stay”.

EXCHANGE GOAL

The goal of the exchange was to establish connection and foster communication and exchange between Camp for peace Liberia and Friends of Orphans in Uganda. It was in the form of content and ideas sharing across the two countries and focused on rehabilitation and reintegration of former child soldiers and ex-combatants.

MAIN REPORT

My arrival in Uganda coincided with series of meetings amongst various civil society organizations organized and sponsored by Friends of Orphans. These meetings were held in
Kampala, the Capital City of Uganda. Core objective focuses on networking and collaboration amongst various civil society organizations along with their co-partners operating in the north and western parts of Uganda.

These organizations work in similar fiction but with different objectives and mission. During this meeting, the issue of duplication was stressed so as to allow efficiency and effectiveness among various NGOs operating in the region. This is my first lesson learned. *That is, in order to have an effective and efficient operation in post conflict developmental process, there must be a combined effort through networking and collaboration. For this this is very crucial!*

Immediately after those meetings, I was taken to the Friends of Orphans operation office, where I met with senior staff and the Board of Directors for acquaintances. I clearly stated my mission and objective of the exchange which was followed by a review of the work plan that was jointly compiled by my supervisor, Richard Ricky Anywar and me. After a friendly review of the work plan, FRO staff consented that it was good and achievable.

On the next day, we departed Kampala for Pader in Northern Uganda. The Pader region is where Friends of Orphans has their headquarters and rehabilitation school. This is one of the regions where the Ugandan Liberation Army (LRA) devastated and left the region and its dwellers very vulnerable. This disbanded rebel group took a heavy toll on the civilian population, using children as instruments of war to kill and destroy their home land. Their actions also left many women raped, thus contacting HIV/AIDS and other diseases that continually threaten their lives even up to present.

As survivals of the LRA radicular war live with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and continue to struggle in fragile society, they fear that the war may regenerate. A survival at the rehabilitation center expressed in a very painful and doubtful mood, “*how can we build houses and send our children to school when the fighters who fight here were not disarmed and we do not know where they have gone. We do not hope for their coming back here, but we do fear that they may come back one day to disintegrate us again*”.

**HOST ORGANIZATION ACTIVITIES**

Friends of Orphans continues to give hope by providing basic social services such as food, shelter, clean drinking water, medication alone with psychosocial counseling services. Friend of Orphans has a center where they are providing mental rehabilitation on a full time basic.
Integrated vocational courses are offered there and psychosocial counseling is intensively done 24 hours on a daily basis. FRO believes that any post war conflict mitigation should be holistic through a two collaborative link. One is the hardware link, which focuses on the physical rehabilitation such as construction of buildings, rehabilitation of roads, hospitals, restoration of electricity and pop boiled water, etc. The second link, which is the software, entails the mental rehabilitation and massive awareness of education. Friends of Orphans has upheld these two links in their work. As they train people in various disciplines in masonry, carpentry, welding, agriculture, driving and auto mechanic, computer education, tailoring, catering and hotel management, drafting, they also employ counseling in all facets of their program as to ensure moral discipline that brings about behavioral change. Students therefore graduate with a renewed sense of mind that is totally molded for social change.

During my exchange program, I also interacted with different people in different sectors of the society. These include teachers, police, local government officials, students, farmers, community dwellers, NGO workers, local chiefs, religious leaders, people with disabilities, children, etc. These interactions helped me to understand their culture from different contexts. They have taught me that we may look different; we all have some similarities in our ways of living.

I also had the opportunity to conduct workshop on peer mediation, building of self-esteem and other peace related topics. I shared with participants my perspectives about war from Liberia and how I have personally managed to cope with the many horrors I went through.
I told them that people in Liberia suffer just like you and today, they are hopeful that there will never be a war anymore and that the development of their country depends on their efforts. I urged them to do away with fear and develop the hope and courage that they can make the difference among their peers and parents. I encouraged the teachers and counselors to also exercise patience and restraints and to know that building a culture of trust and humanity requires total commitment and dedication that takes on a long process.

I also participated in the school opening day celebrations in Pader and Kidgum, Northern Uganda. This program is where students attending the rehabilitation school displayed their products and showcase what they have learned during the interim period of six months. It is intended to give motivation and courage and bring them back into normal social and economic life, in a manner that is ultimately self-sustaining, and also demonstrate to their young peers that their lives are important and have values and their bitter experiences can be made positively meaningful and their participation matters to others.

LESSON LEARNT

1. I have learned that war affected youth can become more resilient and capable individuals in surviving their bitter experiences if they are given attention and moral support.
2. That if young people, especially, formal child soldiers are given adequate attention, they can be transformed, a force for good in society.
3. That community and family support are giant forces in transformative programs for young people
4. That engaging young people into positive activities can shift their behavior from negative past to a positive future.
5. That when people who have suffered greatly from war are psychologically equipped to deal with their PTSD and technically equipped to participate socially and economically into community activities, development program can be sustained.
6. That mitigating mass atrocities involves maximizing the resilience and self-reliance of the community through life skills and other vocational programs.
7. Conflict resolution involves the participation of every one in strategic localities of that conflict.
OVERVIEW OF POST EXCHANGE ACTIVITIES

As outlined in the work plan, Post Exchange activities would continue in both Liberia and Uganda for the Months of April and May, 2014. For Liberia, I would like to highlight three major activities that have taken place in terms of rehabilitation and reintegration.

1. In April, 18 former child soldiers and ex-combatants who graduated from the vocational rehabilitation center under our sponsorship were provided tools and equipment including a minimum startup funding to enable them explore their talents and establish their own enterprises. The startup funds were given in the form of a micro loan scheme that will be paid back for future sustainability.

   A scheduled monitoring and evaluation plan were also put into place to monitor the impacts of the skills and knowledge acquired by them. Most of them are positively engaged in their various disciplines and some have established their own agriculture farms as a result of the training acquired. They hope, never to return to violence and war any more.

2. Also in April, 35 new group of youth including former child soldiers, ex-combatants and other war affected were recruited, provided with psychological orientation and sent to the Lutheran Vocational Institute for nine months of training. While at the school, they will receive psychosocial support during the nine months of training. They will also undergo nine months of training in various disciplines such as agriculture, auto mechanic, carpentry, electricity and plumbing. Constant follow-up and monitoring will be carried out in making sure that the students remain on their campuses during the time of the training.

3. Four workshops in conflict resolution, peer mediation and support, trauma management, good human rights practices and effective communication were held for 120 youths both in and out of school. At these workshops, practical life experiences were shared by participants as a means of giving each other moral support.
RECOMMENDATIONS

Having being involved with conflict for over a decade, whereas working to end violence in a volatile society, whereas traveling across Africa, Europe and Americas, whereas being provided an opportunity by Nexus Fund to work in another conflict zone (Uganda), whereas understanding how rehabilitation and conflict prevention strategies are carried out, I strongly recommend the following to Nexus for possible consideration in the Civil Society Exchange Program (CSEP).

1. In order to make this exchange replicated and more comprehensive, the Founder and Executive Director of Friends of Orphans come to Liberia and provide us with his expertise and wealth of knowledge as a former child soldier from another conflict zone.

2. That, as part of program extension, Nexus should include a follow on project budget into their program. For this will allow exchange fellows to continue with strategic projects after the exchange.

3. I also recommend that Nexus should include the following information on their website: history of past fellows and their activities as well as profiles.

CONCLUSION

It has been a time of renewed intervention and great wealth of learning in my professional journey. Though the time of the exchange was short, but it has given me new lens to see the world from another standpoint and has also given me the strengths and vision to cultivate new strategies in ending mass atrocities in the world. This collaborative effort that has developed between Ugandan based organization and Camp for Peace in Liberia with support from the Nexus Fund will go a long way in the fight to end mass atrocities.

May God greatly bless the hands that contributed to the successful completion of this exchange program?

THANK YOU AND MAY GOD RICHLY BLESS YOU!

Respectfully submitted:

B. Abel Learwellie
Nexus Fellow/2014
Appendix A

THE STORY OF B. ABEL LEARWELLIE
SURVIVING THE TRAUMA OF WAR
LIBERIA

I am B. Abel Learwellie from Liberia. I was born on May 16, 1974 in Salala, Lower Bong County.

I begin a man at the age of sixteen years when I was recruited as a child soldier against my way in 1990 during the Liberian civil war.

We finally felt prey to the reality of rumors on April 14, 1990 when influx of soldiers from the national capital Monrovia pull to the battle front in eastern Liberia. Hurriedly, my Mon collected us from school and told us to pack our bags and leave from Gbarnga because the rebels were engorging on the town. Everyone was running hatter scatter in all directions and we headed for Lofa where our parents originated. In route to Lofa on that day, we took with us half bag of rice (our stable food) and few personal effects. We were stopped at a military checkpoint for inspection and our food and clothing were taken from us. This was the beginning of my trauma and I knew that we were heading for hell. Sadly, we left the checkpoint and continue our journey to Lofa. We arrived to our final designation (Yarpua) to be precise the following day. The sad story was that we had no food left to eat and we had to go in the bush to look for bush yam and other bush food for our survivor. This really pin me down and I felt that the entire world was coming to an end.

We got adjusted to the situation after few weeks of stay in our home until June 1990 when we saw a group of guys who called themselves intelligence of the rebel group and told our Dad that the rebel would enter any time, so they warm our Dad to leave the village and go to exile along with his children. Our Mon and Dad decided to leave the next day and encouraged us to go along with them into Guinea. But my sisters and brothers felt that the war wasn’t for young people and children and so they told my parents that they wanted to stay in the village and I decided to stay with them.

While sitting outside of our thatch house one afternoon in July 1990, we heard sound “ca-ta-ca, ca-ta-ca, ca-ta,ta, kpa,kpa,kpa”, everywhere was gun firing around the village and the rebels finally entered the village. We want human blood! Who are you! Who is a soldier here! We will kill everyone! Where is the Kru people! Where is the Mandigoe man! These are some of the words the rebels were saying! During the war, two major tribes were the main enemies of the Charles Taylor Rebel Movement. The Krus were kinsmen of former military junta leader, Samuel K. Doe and the Mandigoes were accused by the rebels of linking sensitive information about the movement to the military janta. This was my very first time to see rebel with gun and human blood on their clothes. They asked all young men in the village to assemble outside. We all gathered and formed a formation and immediately we were given guns to keep guard. They asked us to take off our clothes and shoes and tie on red cloths around our waist and heads. I was sixteen years and I had no idea on how to shoot gun neither to smoke nor drink liquor.
In less than an hour we heard a huge gun fired and someone was killed. We were told to go and take the dead body and have it thrown away but what I saw was that it was my sister husband who has been killed. My trouble grew bigger and dipper from hunger to witnessing my relative being killed. I got very angry and said in my inner voice that I was going to kill one of the guys in ravage of the death of my brother in law. From that moment, my life took a negative position and I began to smoke marijuana, inhale cocaine and gun powder, drink plenty of alcohol and begin very drugs arctic and alcoholic at the age of 16. These things made me brave and aggressive but one thing I did not do was to kill someone.

In February 1991, some young women were arrested and we were told to rape these women and I refused on the ground that they were my sisters. Because of that, I was threatened by my commander that I would be killed if I don’t comply by the order. Then my friends were order to tie me and they gave me a duck tiebay. My two hands and feet tie behind me and my face up in the air. I spent two days in the rope. Upon release, I was paralyzed for two months.

In October 1992, a renew fighting broke up between my rebel group, the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) and the United Liberation Movement for Democracy (ULIMO). ULIMO was predominantly Muslim militia. We were sent to the battle front to push back the enemies from getting to Gbarnga. Gbarnga was the headquarters of NPFL and we were cut off in an armed bush for three days. On the third day, we managed to escape but wouldn’t go back to our commander because of fear of being killed. We were five in number and we remain in the bush for nine months barely surviving on fruits. We had a fear that when our commanders see us they will kill us and when the enemies see us they will kill us. One day I told my friends that we should try and go back to the village and maybe we would see people that we know. Fortunately for us, we met some of our aunts and sisters who were also in hiding in the forest. They first saw us like animals that were changing into human beings and we put them under gun point and told them not to move. Finally we realized that they were our aunts and sisters. After a month later we all were captured by another rebel group who accused us as enemies. A guy pointed at me and said you are a soldier and I said no to him. They beat us and scrip our sisters and aunts and raped them before our very presence. One of my cousins felt the worst ever in his life and he committed suicide by hanging himself. This is one of the tragedies that I will never forget in my life. My sisters beg for mercy and they were allowed to cross the border to Guinea and we were re-recruited and forced to go along with them.

At the beginning of 1994, I finally escape to Guinea to rejoin my family. In Guinea I became a student at the Refugee school but would not comprehend with the huge memory of killing and drugging. Many days it was like seeing ghost crying in my sleep and I was like going mad. One day I said to myself, no more turning back, enough is enough. I eventually recover by reading the Bible and praying to my God for deliverance. Days of schooling in Refugees Camp were like living in hell because there was no food and soap to bath many days. But through it all I may it and completed high school in 1995. Upon my graduation from high school, I enrolled at the Refugee Vocational School and earned a certificate in Basic Typing and Small Business Management. At this moment I felt that the war was over because we heard on the radio that all the warlords have formed a government of national unity in Monrovia and there was no more war. So I rejoined my parents and we decided to go back home from exile the beginning of 1997. Upon our arrival in Liberia, to our surprise, we were arrested by group of armed ULIMO men and they considered us as enemies. This was a massacre! More than 200 persons were
killed in my village by these men. The killing was done on a daily routine, every morning; they
selected ten to twenty persons to be slaughter in the middle of the town. This I knew that if we
don’t escape, we would be selected one morning to be killed. So we decided to leave the village
to move to Gbarnga, the headquarters of former rebel leader Charles Taylor. On our way that
afternoon, we were again arrested and my Dad was beaten and shot in his chest by one of the
soldiers. This is another memory that I will never forget in my life. After the death of my
father, we continue our journey to Gbarnga and I finally migrated to Monrovia in late 1997 with
the vision to go to University. I enrolled at the University of Liberia in 1999 and graduated in
2007 with a Bachelor of Arts Degree (BA) in Sociology.

When I first came to Monrovia, I felt I wasn’t a normal person anymore and I thought of going
back to the battle front to revenge on those who kill my Dad and raped my sisters and cause my
cousin to kill himself. Up to present I am troubled some days when I think of these stories.

In it all I am grateful to God first and to the Lutheran Church in Liberia whose prayer and
guidance kept me strong. They are the stance of my transformation. I started being transformed
in 1997 when I first attended the Lutheran Trauma Healing workshop and I decided never to go
back to fighting. This is how I came to the field to serve as a role model and become an
instrument of change for the many thousands youth and children whose lives were shattered by
the civil war just like me. I started up as a volunteer encouraging young people who were living
in the ghettos and the streets with my story of survivor. As a result of my story, many young
people dropped their guns and refused to go back to war.

This campaign also risked my life during Liberia second civil war that started in 1999 – 2003.
Many days I was threaten by friends who knew me. I wasn’t worry because I knew I was doing
the right thing. God gave me the strength to continue my campaign of non-violence until the
United Nations disarmed all child soldiers and combatants in Liberia.

One night while in my beg I got a vision that I should direct my career to helping young people
who youthful lives have been corrupted and who have been used as instruments of war against
their will to recover from nightmare and trauma and be transformed more positively.

The corn of my counseling to young people and hopeless children is that if I can overcome all
the horrors I went through, you can also overcome your own trauma if you remain focused and
willing to be transformed and that you are not alone.
Civil Society Exchange Program (CSEP) 2014
WORK PLAN

BACKGROUND SUMMARY

War-affected youth carry significant psychological burdens, compounded by social exclusion arising from their loss of family members and previous affiliations with conflict-participant groups. In surviving their experiences they become resilient and capable individuals, but their burdens and exclusion could very likely cause these capabilities to be turned to non-constructive ends. Assisting their reintegration into normal social and economic life, in a manner that is ultimately self-sustaining, would show them and their young peers that a) their lives are important and have value b) their life experiences can be made positively meaningful and c) their participation matters to others.

GOAL

The goal of this fellowship is to establish connection and foster communication and exchange between Camp for peace and the Trauma Healing Program in Liberia and Friends of Orphans in Uganda. This partnership will be in the form of content and ideas sharing across the two countries and will focus on the rehabilitation and reintegration of former child soldiers and ex-combatants in the two countries.

NOTE: This work plan is a collaborative effort of both organizations. It includes specific activities that the fellowship will cover which include meetings, seminars, speaking tour, etc. Remember, the work plan is a living document and may change over time as we progress throughout the fellowship. Please check on the next page for a draft work plan outlining major activities, projected outcomes, workplace logistics, plan of supervision, etc.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Activities</th>
<th>Projected outcomes</th>
<th>Participants expectations</th>
<th>Host expectations</th>
<th>Supervised</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>March 7 - 9, 2014</td>
<td>Travel to Uganda</td>
<td>Arrive Kampala</td>
<td>Arrive Kampala</td>
<td>Arrive Kampala</td>
<td>Abel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 10, 2014</td>
<td>Meeting with host organization to discuss proposed work plans and activities</td>
<td>To gain understanding of activities and work plans</td>
<td>To share with participants, the mission and goals of my fellowship</td>
<td>To share with host my mission and goals of the fellowship</td>
<td>Abel &amp; Ricky</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 11, 2014</td>
<td>Meeting with FRO Executive Director and key staff to develop a monitoring plan on activities</td>
<td>Monitoring plan developed</td>
<td>Gain insight on monitoring plan</td>
<td>To develop monitoring plan</td>
<td>Abel &amp; Ricky</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 12, 2014</td>
<td>Acquaintance Meeting with community leaders</td>
<td>Information gathered about conflict in both countries and post conflict development</td>
<td>To share experiences about the Liberian civil war and post conflict recovery and to learn from the Ugandans perspectives</td>
<td>To share lessons learnt from the Liberian civil war and its post conflict recovery and to also learn from the Ugandans perspectives.</td>
<td>Ricky and Abel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 13, 2014</td>
<td>Acquaintance Meeting with civil society organizations.</td>
<td>Information gathered about conflict in both countries and post conflict development</td>
<td>To hear my story and learn from it. I also anticipate hearing their stories and learning from them.</td>
<td>To hear my story and learn from it. I also anticipate hearing their stories and learning from them.</td>
<td>Ricky and Abel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 14 - 16, 2014</td>
<td>Field visit to war affected communities to interact with beneficiaries of FRO. These beneficiaries include former child soldiers, abductees, orphans, single child mothers, vulnerable women heading families, etc.</td>
<td>Information gathered about individual experiences of the war and how they are coping with the post conflict rehabilitation challenges.</td>
<td>To share experiences of the war in Liberia and how children, women, men and other people were involved, and how they are now coping with their post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)</td>
<td>To learn strategies about conflict resolution and rehabilitation of former child soldiers and other war affected people in Liberia.</td>
<td>Ricky and Abel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 17 – 19, 2014</td>
<td>Attend individual counseling and group sessions</td>
<td>New knowledge and skills about counseling acquired</td>
<td>To share my expertise about counseling and learn from their way of counseling</td>
<td>To share my worth of experiences with FRO counselors and to also learn from their experiences</td>
<td>Ricky and Abel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 20-21, 2014</td>
<td>Visit rehabilitation and reintegrated youth center</td>
<td>Youth inspired to use tools and access to make positive cultural shifts that are holistic, fulfilling and sustainable.</td>
<td>Share counseling skills, motivational, peer mediation and development skills.</td>
<td>To contribute to their resource base in peer mediation and self-esteem</td>
<td>Ricky and Abel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 22, 2014</td>
<td>Evaluation of program</td>
<td>Impact of the fellowship measured and recommendation made</td>
<td>Sharing of my experiences during the fellowship with them.</td>
<td>Resource based strengthened</td>
<td>Rick and Abel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 23-24</td>
<td>Travel back to Liberia</td>
<td>Fellowship completed</td>
<td>Fellowship completed</td>
<td>Fellowship completed</td>
<td>Abel</td>
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**NOTE:** Post fellowship activities will continue in both Liberia and Uganda for the Month of April and May, 2014, and final report of the fellowship will be made available at the end of May. Also, be assured that a snapshots from the activities will be send immediately after the two weeks of fellowship in Uganda.