

# COME OUT AND LIVE AMONG US

*How Zande communities can  
influence combatants to surrender  
from the LRA.*

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#### ***Discover the Journey (DTJ)***

DTJ creates research-based localized media to protect children and prevent violence in conflict settings around the world.

DTJ has worked in the Democratic Republic of Congo since 2007, where it has assisted children in armed conflict and communities affected by war through publishing original research, creating localized collaborative film, providing direct services, including psycho-social assistance, and working with local partners to facilitate long-term reintegration of formerly abducted children. DTJ has focused exclusively on the war perpetrated by the Lord's Resistance Army since 2010.

#### ***Author***

*Lindsay Branham* is a filmmaker, photographer, and the Program Director for DTJ. Lindsay has spent a significant amount of the last three years living and working in LRA-affected central Africa. She has conducted research on the LRA's impact, as well as developed and implemented interventions in LRA-affected central Africa that utilize localized narrative film to reduce psychological distress and encourage peaceful reception of those who surrender from the LRA. Her past partners include Harvard Humanitarian Initiative and Queens University, Belfast. The research from this report laid the groundwork for the community-based defection intervention and mobile cinema program currently underway in central Africa through local partners.

#### ***Editing and Research***

*Margaux Fitoussi* is an independent researcher who previously worked in north-eastern Democratic Republic of Congo, Central African Republic, and South Sudan for the past two years on community protection programs. She graduated from the University of California, Berkeley and is fluent in French.

**Acknowledgements**

We would like to thank all of the men, women and children who openly and bravely shared their experiences with us during the course of this project across three countries. We were asked repeatedly to not let what they shared stay stagnant on paper. The goal of this report is to spur creative and effective action aimed at increasing peaceful defections from the LRA in order to bring a permanent end to this enduring crisis. We are committed to following through. This report is dedicated to them.



*"If the LRA defects and we are aggressive towards them, this could get back to the LRA in the bush. It's better to encourage the LRA to surrender, which could, in turn, encourage others in the bush to surrender too."*

— Hunter, Mboki, Central African Republic

## Executive Summary

Joseph Kony's Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) renders communities in the tri-country affected area of southeastern (SE) Central African Republic (CAR), northeastern (NE) Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and southern South Sudan (RoSS) in a permanent state of emergency. Food insecurity, economic collapse, and restricted access to health and education services are exacerbated by concurrent psychosocial needs and compounded by the grave lack of services.

One of the key strategies to ending this conflict is the utilization of defection strategies. Ongoing efforts by the international community to influence combatants to peacefully surrender, or defect, via these strategies, have been successful. In 2013, 79% of the 58 documented LRA escapees cited current defection efforts as influential in their decision to leave the LRA<sup>1</sup>. This research seeks to build off of the momentum of successful defection strategies by highlighting how local Zande, the population group most affected by the LRA today and who currently live in the midst of the LRA's area of operations, can also play a critical role in defection — and how they are willing to take on that role and be partners in these efforts — but are too often ignored, marginalized, or not fully utilized as partners by international defection actors, in particular MONUSCO.

Past research<sup>2</sup> has demonstrated that community-level contact with local populations is a key factor for LRA combatants and abductees in determining whether to surrender. Previous contact between civilians and potential LRA defectors has resulted in two outcomes: it deters defection when civilians are hostile to defectors, or facilitates it. Most recently, long-time LRA combatant Opono Opondo successfully defected on August 21, 2013 due in part to a Zande community member's encouragement near Faradje, DRC. The following report argues that defection initiatives need to consider local Zande communities as resources and partners in defection efforts and that ultimately these efforts could be more successful if the local community is actively engaged. Local populations have the capability to actually encourage LRA combatants and abductees to defect.

This report examines the decision-making and risks faced by would-be LRA defectors, the perceptions of local community members toward the LRA, and outlines recommendations for the active participation of Zande communities in defection efforts. Additionally, the myriad long-term effects of the LRA's predatory violence on Ugandan communities have been well documented. This report seeks to examine the impact of the LRA's indiscriminate violence on Zande communities living in the current LRA-affected region.

The interviews conducted for this report expose the reality that opportunities to defect do exist, which raises the question, "Why are members of the LRA not taking advantage of them?" This research unpacks the LRA's perceived lack of will to defect, examines how local populations can influence abductees and combatants' resolve to leave, and outlines ways local protection forces and the Mbororo in particular can participate in these efforts.

<sup>1</sup> According to the LRA Crisis Tracker Data, 2013

<sup>2</sup> "Loosening Kony's Grip: Effective Defection Strategies for Today's LRA" July 2013

International, national, and local non-governmental organizations (NGO) and security actors operating in LRA-affected communities must prioritize establishing truly safe places for the LRA to defect to, while working to ensure these same communities are safe from the LRA threat.

Community members across the surveyed region expressed a willingness and even desire for their communities to serve as defection points. These populations articulated sophisticated ideas of peace and forgiveness towards the LRA, despite the violence they have suffered at their hands. This understanding of the link between defection and peace engenders a favorable climate to engage in unique, community-based defection initiatives. In addition, this report shows that sensitization efforts are still needed to reinforce existing positive sentiments, prevent any reprisal violence, and prepare communities for future defection.

As defection messages are currently disseminated throughout the LRA-affected area via local FM radio, fliers and helicopter speakers, ensuring communities are prepared and ready to receive defectors is paramount. Additionally, the LRA has a history of making direct contact with local communities — capitalizing and building on this expressed desire to leave the LRA through establishing clear defection protocols in communities and equipping them to seize that opportunity to draw the combatant out of the bush is absolutely essential<sup>3</sup>. Too many defection opportunities have been unrealized due to a breakdown in communication after the LRA makes initial contact. Every opportunity missed extends this conflict.

Calls for peace resonate across the LRA-affected region. The international community needs to continue pursuing dynamic and creative approaches to resolving this enduring crisis. Providing effective humanitarian assistance while developing and implementing both top-down and bottom-up defection strategies is critical to bringing an end to Africa's longest running war.

<sup>3</sup> Between January 2012 and June 2013, the LRA made direct contact with local communities 24 times in DRC alone. 9 of these messages from the LRA expressed a desire to leave the armed group, sometimes asking civilians for assistance to do so. "Mid-Year Security Brief, LRA Crisis Tracker," June 2013.