



A social norms approach to reducing child mutilation and child sacrifice in Uganda

**HUMANEAFRICA**

HumaneAfrica  
Westoe  
Gloucester Road  
Bath  
England

2015

[www.humaneafrika.org](http://www.humaneafrika.org)  
[www.facebook/humaneafrika](https://www.facebook.com/humaneafrika)  
[info@humaneafrika.org](mailto:info@humaneafrika.org)

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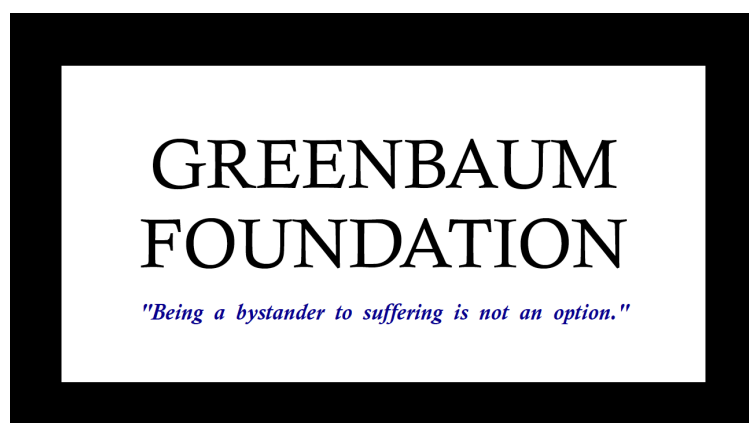
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## Acknowledgements



This two year project to reduce child sacrifice and the mutilation of children in 75 communities in Uganda has been funded by the Greenbaum Foundation and the Austrian Development Cooperation. HumaneAfrica is sincerely grateful for this financial support which has saved the lives and protected the rights of children in 75 communities in Uganda.



*with funding from*

**Austrian**

 **Development Cooperation**

## Executive Summary

Child sacrifice and the mutilation of children is the harmful practice of removing a child's body parts, blood or tissue while the child is alive. These body parts, blood or tissue are either worn, buried, concealed or consumed in the belief they will benefit an individual, family or community. Traditionally, children's body parts are particularly sought after for this practice, impacting children in every district in Uganda<sup>1</sup> and often resulting in the death of the child

HumaneAfrica, in partnership with 75 communities<sup>2</sup>, has brought about sustainable change by eliminating the demand for child sacrifice and mutilation in 75 communities throughout Uganda. Over the course of this project 61,840 community members from each of the 75 communities, pledged to abandon this practice. Despite regular reports of child mutilation throughout Uganda over the past two years, none of these reports came from the 75 communities where HumaneAfrica has completed this process. Additionally, key players in the community, such as the local chairperson or traditional leader have confirmed complete elimination of this practice in 59 communities<sup>3</sup>.

Each of the 75 communities chosen for this project had been affected by this harmful practice prior to HumaneAfrica's involvement<sup>4</sup>. The project's goal of reducing the number of child mutilations by at least 50% has been significantly exceeded. Communities have continued to keep the message of abandonment visible after the initial six month period when HumaneAfrica handed the project over to each community and each community has continued to address this issue without financial support from this project.

These results can be attributed to the social norms approach adopted by HumaneAfrica which began with each community attending a workshop where the issue of child sacrifice and the mutilation of children was openly discussed. The workshop encouraged the community to examine who drives the demand for this practice and what message the community could give to their own community members to eliminate this demand. The workshop concluded with the creation of a small working group made up of key players in the community who met regularly to design and implement three community responses.

Each community response was designed and implemented by the community, for the community, encouraging all community members to publicly and collectively abandon this harmful practice. HumaneAfrica had no influence or decision making role in this process.

While a number of stakeholders have previously attempted to reduce the practice of child sacrifice and the mutilation of children, this project is the first to employ a social norms approach. This approach enabled the community to freely decide for themselves how they should encourage their own community to collectively abandon this practice by both designing and delivering the message of abandonment to their own community members, enabling the community to continue to keep this message visible once the project concluded.

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<sup>1</sup> U-report Uganda

<sup>2</sup> A collection of people in a geographical area, also known as a Parish. Average population size of 2000-5000 people (Uganda Bureau of Statistics)

<sup>3</sup> HumaneAfrica has not received any reports of child mutilations in the remaining 16 communities, however no reliable verification has been received from key community members

<sup>4</sup> A baseline of recent cases of child sacrifice was established during the initial community workshop

## Rationale

The harmful practice of mutilating children, removing body parts, blood and tissue is known in Uganda as child sacrifice. This practice has been well documented over the past years with published research from Makerere University, Uganda Human Rights Commission, KidsRights and HumaneAfrica. This research documents how this practice impacts numerous communities throughout Uganda. Cases of child sacrifice and the mutilation of children are also frequently mentioned in the media, especially local language newspapers and radio stations.

UNICEF's U-report<sup>5</sup> found that more than 10,000 of its members representing every district in Uganda knew of a child who had been sacrificed in their own community and 10 cases were reported to U-report during the month in which the question was disseminated<sup>6</sup>.

A number of stakeholders have been working to reduce the number of cases of child sacrifice and the mutilation of children over recent years, however prior to the start of this project there had been a steady increase in the number of cases of child mutilation. Stakeholders working on this issue focussed their efforts entirely on the supply of children's body parts, rather than examining ways to eliminate the demand for this harmful practice within communities.

HumaneAfrica's approach is based on research which shows that throughout Uganda, this harmful practice of mutilating children is demand driven and this demand is generated by community members seeking personal gain or improvements in their life situation.

### ***What is child sacrifice?***

The Working Group against Child Sacrifice and the Mutilation of Children, made up of Government, UN agencies and Civil Society organizations in Uganda has agreed that child sacrifice is the harmful practice of removing a child's body parts, blood or tissue while the child is alive. These body parts, blood or tissue are either worn, buried, concealed or consumed in the belief they will benefit an individual, family or community and that this practice often results in the death of the child.

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<sup>5</sup> A free SMS-based system that allows young Ugandans to speak out on what is happening in communities across the country,

<sup>6</sup> <http://ureport.ug/pollresults/>

## Reducing child mutilation and child sacrifice in Uganda



In February 2013 HumaneAfrica embarked on a two year project to reduce child sacrifice and the mutilation of children in the 75 communities in the seven districts mentioned below:

Kamwenge District  
Butambala District  
Mbarara District  
Mukono District

Mpigi District  
Ngogwe District  
Wakiso District

Using the social norms approach detailed below, HumaneAfrica targeted communities where child sacrifice and the mutilation of children was evident and each community chosen for this project had experienced recent cases where children had been mutilated.

HumaneAfrica's goal for this project was to work alongside each community to collectively and publicly abandon this harmful practice of child sacrifice and the mutilation of children.

## Social norms approach



### *What is a social norm?*

The theory of self-enforcing social conventions has provided insight into why harmful practices exist. The theory uses game theoretic models to explain behavior in the presence of social conventions and social norms. It highlights that when a social norm is in place, decision making is an interdependent process in which a choice made by one family is affected by and affects the choices made by other families; it is a result of reciprocal expectations (UNICEF, 2010).

The decision to stop a harmful practice, such as child mutilation, must come from within a community and the most successful approach is to empower communities to decide for themselves to abandon the practice. Through the social norms approach, and more specifically through respectful education, dialogue and workshops, community members are encouraged to re-evaluate their current beliefs and attitudes in order to bring about positive change.

HumaneAfrica, in partnership with local communities, supports a social norms approach to eliminate this harmful practice against children. HumaneAfrica's interventions are designed to be community based. The design of the community based intervention is a combination of educational and awareness raising elements. The educational aspect focuses on the nature and causes of child mutilation. The awareness raising aspect focuses on the rights of children. The interventions are designed to be community driven and bring about sustainable change.

## Methodology



Changing social norms is key to reducing the number of child mutilations in Uganda. Research shows that throughout Uganda, the demand for traditional medicine and ceremonies containing body parts, a practice known locally as child sacrifice, comes from the community. The abandonment of this harmful practice is achieved through local communities initially attending workshops and establishing an open and honest environment where the issue of child sacrifice and the mutilation of children can be discussed.

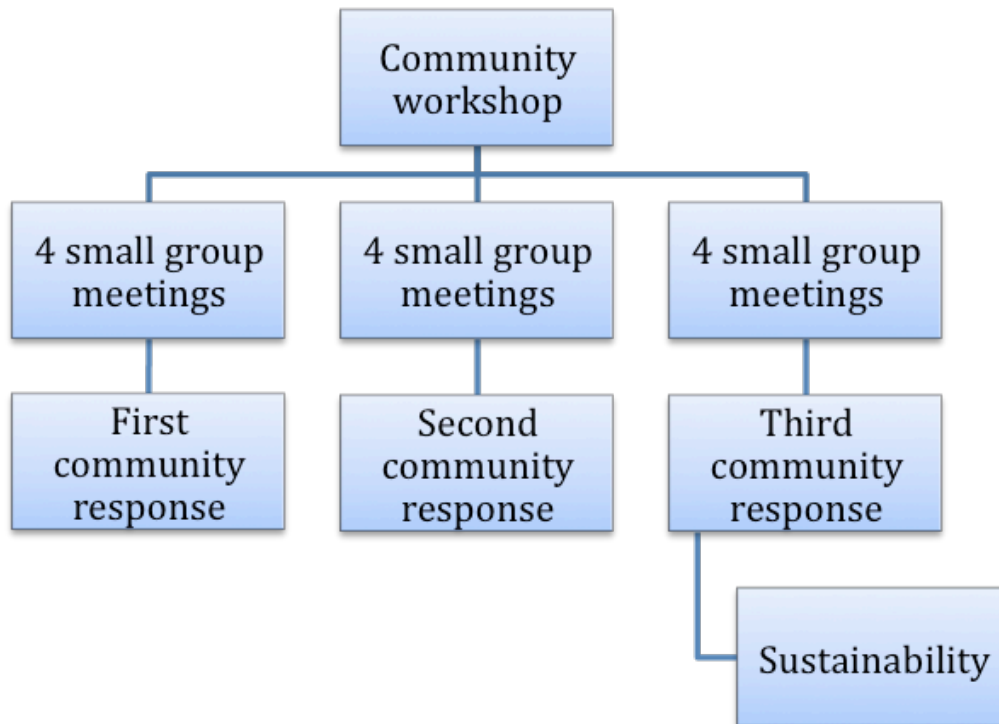
HumaneAfrica's approach is based around the community acknowledging that child sacrifice exists and has an adverse effect on their community. Through workshops, consisting of facilitated group discussions, the community establishes that their own children are at risk of violence. At the same time, it is the community members themselves who drive the demand for children's body parts by visiting so-called witchdoctors in the knowledge that children will be mutilated.

One of the most important aspects of this approach is that the acknowledgment that this harmful practice is community driven, comes from the community and not from the facilitator or another outsider. Using a comprehensive set of questions which generate discussion in small groups, this conclusion is achieved.

Once the community makes the link between their visit to a so-called witchdoctor and a mutilation of a child which has taken place in their community, social norms can change and the community has the possibility of joining together to collectively abandon this harmful practice. Each community involved in this project has fully taken part in this process and has decided to collectively abandon this practice and has acknowledged the link mentioned above. HumaneAfrica's role is to give communities the opportunity to discover this link for themselves and support the community in designing and implementing activities to collectively abandon this harmful practice.

HumaneAfrica has a presence in a community for six months working with each community to eliminate the harmful practice of child mutilation and child sacrifice. After this six month period the project is handed back to community to continue keeping the message of abandonment visible, described in more detail in the chapter entitled “Sustainability”.

The graph below shows the activities which take place in each community over the six month period.



## The workshop



*Community members participating in a workshop*

The workshop was the starting point for the social norms process aimed at eliminating the demand for this harmful practice and it was essential that key players such as religious and traditional leaders, the local chairperson and the local government official attended the workshops. Meetings and dialogue took place before each workshop to ensure these community leaders and key community members were present.

These workshops were designed to bring a gender balanced cross section of the community together to discuss the impact of child sacrifice and the mutilation of children on their community, through facilitated group discussions. All workshops were undertaken in communities where HumaneAfrica was aware that child sacrifice and the mutilation of children had impacted the community.

At the start of each workshop, information from the media, such as a radio excerpt or a newspaper article, which informs about child sacrifice in the area was presented. The workshop attendees were subsequently split into smaller groups to discuss the report. Using a piece of media to inform about this practice is significant as it ensured the community introduced their own terms and their own understanding of this issue, rather than if the subject was introduced by the facilitator where it might be deemed that HumaneAfrica was there to pass judgement or lecture on this issue

The small groups were asked to discuss and answer questions related to violence against children in their own community and instances where children had been mutilated. The small groups also discussed what these children's body parts were used for.

The responses were used to create a baseline for the impact child sacrifice and the mutilation of children had on each community.

An exercise where supply and demand was discussed was then presented to the group. Two scenarios were shared with the small groups. One involved an attack on a group of school children where body parts were removed, the other involved a community member in a neighboring community who used children's body parts in an attempt to increase wealth for her business. Both stories were true.

The purpose of this exercise was to give an opportunity for the participants to link the two stories and open a discussion in small groups focussing on the supply (the mutilation of the children) and the demand (the community member wishing to increase her business wealth).

Once the participants acknowledged the issue of supply and demand, they also recognized that although their own children were at risk of violent attacks due to this practice, it was their community that drove the demand for children's body parts.

Due to the nature of the questions and small group discussions, those attending the workshop came to this conclusion as a group rather than being instructed to have a certain opinion. The community worked together to conclude that the demand for this practice comes from within each community and possibly for the first time the focus shifted from blaming others such as the authorities for lack of action or so-called witchdoctors for instigating the mutilations, to focussing on their own community which generated the demand.

The workshop attendees then discussed in small groups what message could be given by the community to their own community members to deter them from any involvement in child sacrifice and the mutilation of children. The small groups were asked *"What message would you give to your own community to encourage them to abandon this practice?"*

The suggestions from each of the small groups were then presented to the larger group and written on flip charts and displayed on the walls or trees. These suggestions were then referred to as the "community response" to the harmful practice.

The tipping point for a community to begin the process of collectively abandoning this practice came during the last moments of the workshop when the facilitator asked each person present to stand up and respond to the question "Is it ever right or justifiable to take a child's life?" The facilitator usually received confirmation from a number of those attending that it is not. The facilitator then asked the question to each person individually. After the facilitator received a response, each individual was asked in turn to be seated. This was a powerful moment for all communities as it was the first instance where the key players in the community, including traditional practitioners and healers openly acknowledged that killing a child for personal gain was not acceptable. This commitment at the earliest stage of the process set the tone for the next six months where the community came together to design and implement ways to demonstrate and recommit to their pledge to abandon this harmful practice.

## The small working group



Following each workshop, a small working group was established usually made up of six participants (3 female, 3 male) who both attended the workshop and were key players in the community. The small working group met four times over a two-month period to design and implement one of the community responses suggested during the workshop. These community responses were chosen and designed by the small group, with HumaneAfrica acting solely as facilitator for these meetings. Subsequently, the small working group presented a proposal to HumaneAfrica including a narrative of how the proposed activity would involve the entire community to eliminate the demand for this practice as well as a budget.

After the small working group had met four times and the proposal for the community response had been accepted by HumaneAfrica, the community response took place. Following the first community response, the small working group then met another four times, followed the same process of designing and implementing another community response suggested during the workshop.

This process continued up until the third and final community response which, as noted below contained a sustainable element to ensure the small working group continued to keep the message of abandonment visible after the project had concluded.

## The community response



After designing the community response, the small working group took the lead in implementing the response, which had the sole purpose of bringing the community together to collectively abandon the harmful practice of child sacrifice and the mutilation of children.

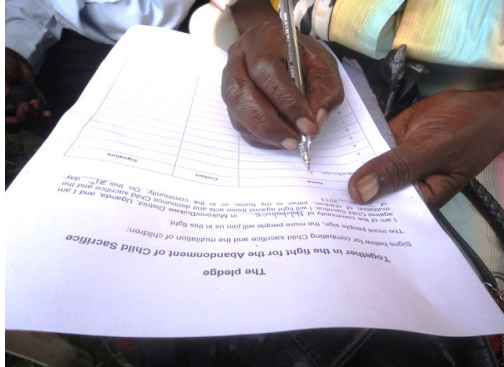
Community responses took many different forms. The message however was always to bring the community together for the purpose of making a declaration of abandonment. These responses included, radio programs, marches, theatre and drama plays, community declarations of abandonment, sporting events, door-to-door visits, suggestion boxes, training for key community members such as traditional healers and religious leaders to integrate this message into their established gatherings and community debates to open discussions on the issue.

Many small groups dedicated time and energy into mobilizing their community to attend the response. Many partnered with local schools where the school children marched and sang spreading the news of the time and place for the community response. It was not unusual to have more than 1,200 community members attend such gathering when this form of mobilization was used.

During these community responses, key players in the community committed to abandoning this practice and signed declarations of abandonment which were then circulated to the entire community. Traditional and spiritual leaders also used their position to encourage the community to consider their actions and join together to make their community free from this harmful practice.

Many community responses combined marches, speeches, dramas and sporting events and these gathering took most of the day.

The third and final community response included the symbolic handing over of the project to the community. For this final community response, the small group included a sustainable aspect to ensure the message continued to be visible after the project had ceased, making the entire process sustainable.



## Sustainability

HumaneAfrica focussed throughout this project on sustainability to ensure that each community continued to keep the message of abandonment visible by integrating their commitment into existing social gatherings without the need for ongoing financial support.



*A market place in Buikwe where a small group regularly promote the message of abandonment*

The third and final community response therefore included the handing over of the project to the community where a sustainable element had been developed by each community's small working group.

HumaneAfrica was active in a community for six months and once a community had the capacity to continue to keep the message of abandonment visible, formally handed the project back to the community. All 75 communities, with the support of the small working group developed ways to continue to keep the message of

abandonment visible without the need for financial support from this project, by integrating their activities into existing social gatherings such as faith based meetings involving both Christian and Muslim groups and community council gatherings where local leaders had been trained to promote this message of abandonment. Below are examples of sustainable activities undertaken by communities after HumaneAfrica handed the project back to the community.

- School, community and faith based anti child sacrifice clubs and committees to promote the message of abandonment within their respective communities. The committees and groups meet regularly to design and implement activities to continue to promote collective community abandonment within existing community gatherings
- Commitment from traditional and religious leaders to recommit to abandonment at regular local council meetings and faith based meetings
- Income generating activities controlled by the community to generate a small income to fund the implementation of further activities to abandon this harmful practice. These include a small coffee plantation owned and operated by the community, a maize field and a small shop
- Groups made up of school teachers to campaign for abandonment amongst parents of their pupils
- Setting aside one day each year for a community event to both remember children who have been mutilated and also to revisit their commitment to abandoning this harmful practice
- Mission groups with the specific responsibility of sharing the community's message of abandonment with neighboring communities
- Signposts stating their community to be free from child sacrifice and committing to continuing the fight against this harmful practice
- Key players in the community such as local leaders, youth leaders, teachers and religious leaders to carry on the campaign among their respective members



*A community volunteer helping with the community's income generating venture to grow and sell coffee*

A community in Busabaga, with support from the local chairperson, dedicated an area of land for growing coffee, the proceeds of which are being used for members of the small working group to travel to neighboring communities to spread the message of abandonment. The responsibility for the growing of coffee is shared equally within the community. This small income generating initiative was set up in 2013 and the proceeds have been used to spread the message of abandonment within 24 schools, eight local councils and a number of Churches and Mosques.

A small working group in Kasubi partners with a local church and one Sunday a month integrates an activity to remind the community of their commitment to abandon the harmful practice of child sacrifice. These activities are prepared in partnership with the small working group and the local minister. The message has been delivered by school children, local ministers and the traditional leaders of the community.



*A church in Kasubi integrates a message of abandonment each month into their Sunday service*



*A school girl in Kirangira makes a poster asking her community to continue the fight against child sacrifice*

A group of 15 school children in Kirangira created an anti child sacrifice club which meets every month to plan activities such as plays and marches. They visit neighboring schools to share the message of abandonment with other school children and are also active at community gatherings

A group of community members in Seeta set up an anti child sacrifice club and each month the members go to their local market to talk to community members about continuing their commitment to abandon child sacrifice. The club's members include the local chairperson and traditional leaders and receives no financial support from HumaneAfrica.



## Key Results



*A message from the community, to the community to abandon a harmful practice*

Each of the 75 communities participating in this project has engaged in the process to eliminate child mutilation and sacrifice, using a social norms approach.

HumaneAfrica has conducted **75 workshops** attended by **2,730 community members** (1,367 female and 1,363 male). All 75 communities both acknowledged the impact of child sacrifice on their community and showed a desire to change this harmful norm of visiting so-called witchdoctors and asking for child sacrifice. Each workshop established that even though this issue adversely affects the community, it is the same community that is driving the demand for children's body parts, blood and tissue.

On completion of the workshops, each community formed a small working group with the aim of designing and implementing community responses suggested during the initial workshops.

**900 Small Group Meetings** attended by **5,643 participants** (2,745 women and 2,898 men) have taken place during the project period, leading to **75 community responses** designed to bring the community together to collectively abandon the harmful practice of child sacrifice and the mutilation of children.

These community responses have been attended by **66,384 community members** and **61,840 community members** have pledged to abandon the harmful practice of child mutilation and sacrifice.

All 75 communities have committed to keeping this message of collectively abandoning this harmful practice visible without the need for financial support from HumaneAfrica.

The most encouraging aspect of the project is that over the past 24 months there have not been any reports of child mutilations in any of the communities where this project has completed at least one community response. These initial reports from each community small working group have been verified by the local chairperson or traditional leader in 59 communities.

There have however been a number of reports of mutilations either directly before the first community response or in neighboring communities. Three of the victims HumaneAfrica has supported over the past two years were from neighboring communities to where this project was active.

These results are particularly noteworthy as 12 out of the 75 communities participating in this project also participated in recent research where on average one child was mutilated each week in one of the 25 communities involved in the research.



## Key challenges

The main challenge over the past 24 months has been maintaining regular contact with a number of the more rural communities. HumaneAfrica took the decision to implement this project in communities with the most need, where children had recently been mutilated, resulting in the need to cover a wide geographical area. Communication and access became a challenge in some of these outlying communities where electricity, internet and mobile phone coverage were unavailable for prolonged periods. In addition to this, road access during the wet season made public transport extremely challenging to these communities. In hindsight it would have been a great deal easier to have focused this project on 75 less rural communities where communication and access were not such a challenge. That said, these more rural communities which demonstrated the greatest challenges often demonstrated the greatest need for collectively abandoning this harmful practice. This lack of access and communication resulted in six communities not completing the process and although HumaneAfrica could easily find six other communities with recent mutilations and the process was successfully completed, however this was a drain on resources.

The issue of “facilitation” or a payment for services was an issue initially in most communities as previously NGO’s and non-profit organizations had paid for services in the form of “facilitation”. This expectation of payment for services was evident right through to the Government who often expected a small payment for attending meetings or conferences. However, HumaneAfrica set a precedent from the start of this project that no payments would be made and the small working group and community leaders would be involved solely for the benefit of the community, rather than for financial gain. This approach was not welcomed in a number of communities, however once the process evolved and these key players witnessed the commitment of the majority of community members, they began to conform with the community and accept this project was their own and they would not benefit financially from working towards the elimination of this harmful practice.

Receiving updates and reports on sustainable aspects of the project and also information on new cases of child mutilation has also been a challenge. 16 of the 75 communities which completed the process have not followed through with their commitment from key community members, such as traditional leaders or local chairperson to confirm independently that no cases of child mutilation have taken place in their community. HumaneAfrica has therefore not been able to verify if this lack of communication is due to the communication issues mentioned above, or if these key players expected some “facilitation” or payment for their ongoing commitment or if indeed a case of child mutilation has occurred in these communities.

## Victim Support

Six victims have been identified during this project where the intention has been to remove body parts, blood or tissue. HumaneAfrica has supported all victims with the necessary medical and psycho-social care:

Child 1<sup>7</sup> is a four-year-old boy who on 20<sup>th</sup> July 2013 was discovered bleeding from the groin area after an attempt was made to cut and possibly remove his penis. The boy was taken for treatment at the local health clinic where he was treated for swollen eyes and chest, bruises to the nose and cuts around his back and penis.



*A child receiving counseling*

Child 2, a two year old girl suffered from cuts around her body and genitalia after an attack on 24<sup>th</sup> June 2013. After minor treatment she recovered well physically but suffered from trauma. She received counseling over a 3 month period at the District health centre.

Child 3 is a five year old boy whose entire genitalia was removed during an attack. On 11<sup>th</sup> September 2013 he received medical treatment to open his urinal outlet.

Child 4 is a 12-year old girl, who in November 2012 was attacked. She had stab wounds and cuts in several places. She was treated for her injuries and recovered well, but suffered mental trauma. She had a physical and mental examination and it was concluded that she suffered from post-traumatic stress disorder. She received psycho-social therapy twice a week for four months and was able to return to school.

Child 5, a seven year old boy was attacked on January 9<sup>th</sup> 2014 in a neighboring community to where HumaneAfrica was active. He suffered several injuries. He received treatment for the cuts and bruises as well as psycho-social therapy twice a week for five months and is now able to attend school.

Child 6, an 11-year old boy from a neighboring community to where HumaneAfrica has been active, was attacked early 2014. He was admitted to the local hospital with a deep cut on his arm and a minor injury on his head. He underwent a physical and mental examination and subsequently received psycho-social therapy twice a week for five months. He will continue with therapy until he is able to participate fully in social gatherings and school.

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<sup>7</sup> All children's names have been removed to protect their identity

## Working Group against child sacrifice and the mutilation of children

HumaneAfrica coordinates the high-level working group against child mutilation and the sacrifice of children in Uganda which works towards creating legislation to combat child sacrifice and the mutilation of children. The working group meets each quarter and consists of the Ministry of Gender Labour and Social Development, Justice Law and Order Sector (JLOS) institutions (Uganda Police Force and Uganda Human Rights Commission), UNICEF, OHCHR, Equal Opportunities Commission, the Uganda Association of Women Lawyers, Makerere University and NGO's. The meetings, which do not generate any cost to this project, have been hosted by UNICEF and OHCHR and chaired by UNICEF and the Assistant Commissioner for Gender Labour and Social Development. The group have reached a consensus on what constitutes child sacrifice and this has been included in the draft National Action Plan against child sacrifice which the group edited and updated. The Ministry of Gender Labour and Social Development submitted the draft to their Senior Management and the draft was accepted in principle with a request being made for the working group to cost the plan.



## Conclusion

This project has successfully eliminated the demand for child sacrifice and the mutilation of children in 75 communities throughout Uganda. There have been no reports of child mutilations in any of the communities where this project has been active.

From February 2013 to December 2014 HumaneAfrica conducted **75 workshops** attended by **2,730 community members** where the issue of child sacrifice and the mutilation of children was openly discussed, with community members sharing how child sacrifice had impacted their community. All 75 communities acknowledged that the community drives the demand for this practice and showed a willingness to engage in the social norms process and collectively abandon this harmful practice.

The 75 workshops led to **900 Small Working Group Meetings** where messages of abandonment were designed by key players in the community. The small working group meetings, led to **225 community responses** designed to bring the community together to collectively and visually abandon this harmful practice.

**66,384 community members** attended the **225 community responses** and **61,840 community members pledged to abandon the harmful practice of child sacrifice and the mutilation of children.**

HumaneAfrica had a presence in each community for six months, working closely with the small working groups, traditional and spiritual leaders. All 75 communities committed to keeping the message of abandonment visible after the initial six month period without the need for financial support from HumaneAfrica and activities continue in all communities.

While the elimination of child sacrifice and the mutilation of children in 75 communities in Uganda shows that the social norms approach is extremely effective in eliminating the demand for this harmful practice, relative to the scope of this problem throughout Uganda and the number of communities impacted by this practice, the result is relatively modest in protecting children from mutilations nationwide. It is evident however, from the response of these 75 communities that an opportunity exists to expand this approach to include more communities impacted by this harmful practice.

The social norms approach adopted by HumaneAfrica, in partnership with local communities, has resulted in community members taking ownership of this issue without the need to blame or accuse outside forces and the results are shown to be sustainable. On this basis HumaneAfrica sees the opportunity to eliminate the harmful practice of child mutilation entirely in the central region of Uganda by 2020.