Early Childhood Education and Peacebuilding in Postconflict Northern and Eastern Uganda

Achievements, Challenges, and Lessons Learned
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# Table of Contents

List of Figures .......................... ii
Acronyms ................................. iii
Document Overview ...................... v
Executive Summary ....................... vi

1. Programming Context in Northern and Eastern Uganda .......................... 1
   1.1 PBEA Background .................. 1
   1.2 History of Conflict in Northern and Eastern Uganda and Its Legacies ....... 4
   1.3 Conflict Drivers and Their Impacts on Education and Children .......... 7
   1.4 The Positives and Negatives of Rapid Social and Cultural Change ....... 8

2. PBEA Programming Response and Theory of Change ............................. 11
   2.1 Development of the ECD Component of the PBEA programme ................. 11
   2.2 ECD and Its Contribution to Recovery, Community Resilience and Social Cohesion .......................................................... 19

3. Lessons Learned and Recommendations ............................................. 33
   3.1 PBEA and its Contribution to Peacebuilding .................................. 33
   3.2 Recommendations ......................................................................... 36

Bibliography .............................. 38

Annex A. Key Implementation Structure for ECD in Uganda ..................... 41
Annex B. Theory of Change ................................................................. 42
# List of Figures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>UNICEF PBEA Implementing Countries</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Map of Uganda</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>St. Joseph’s ECD in Kitgum has a recycled sorter, with shapes made from discarded flip-flops</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>A play “neighbourhood” can be designed with fences, home plots, furniture and bedding from recycled bottle caps, cloth, rocks and twigs (Kakress B ECD Centre, Amudat)</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Caregivers in Karamoja do not receive salaries (taken at Tapac 2 ECD centre, Moroto)</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Pictures for discussing life skills and risk scenarios (Tapac 2)</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Children at WACFO Pabo receive morning porridge</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Tippy-tap hand washing system brought home to Acholi village (photo courtesy WACFO)</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Lessons in counting, hygiene and safety are brought home (Loket Ekiya, Moroto)</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Young girls watch intently as ECD pupils dance at Lolet Ekiya, Moroto</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# Acronyms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BRAC</td>
<td>UNICEF ECD implementing partner in Karamoja (formerly the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee)</td>
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<td>BTL</td>
<td>Breakthrough to Literacy</td>
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<td>BRMS</td>
<td>Basic Requirements and Minimum Standards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CA</td>
<td>Conflict Analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CBR</td>
<td>Centre for Basic Research</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CCT</td>
<td>Centre Coordinating Tutor</td>
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<tr>
<td>CCU</td>
<td>Catholic Church of Uganda</td>
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<tr>
<td>CDA</td>
<td>Community Development Assistant</td>
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<tr>
<td>CFS</td>
<td>Child-Friendly Schools</td>
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<tr>
<td>CMC</td>
<td>ECD Centre Management Committee</td>
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<tr>
<td>CO</td>
<td>Country Office</td>
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<tr>
<td>CPRC</td>
<td>Chronic Poverty Research Centre</td>
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<tr>
<td>CPTC</td>
<td>Core Primary Teacher College</td>
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<tr>
<td>DEO</td>
<td>District Education Officer</td>
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<tr>
<td>DIS</td>
<td>District Inspector of Schools</td>
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<tr>
<td>DRT</td>
<td>Development, Research and Training</td>
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<tr>
<td>E4PB</td>
<td>Education for Peacebuilding</td>
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<tr>
<td>ECD</td>
<td>Early Childhood Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EEPCT</td>
<td>Education in Emergencies and Post-Crisis Transition</td>
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<tr>
<td>EFA</td>
<td>Education for All</td>
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<tr>
<td>ELDS</td>
<td>Early Learning Development Standards</td>
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<tr>
<td>ESARO</td>
<td>Eastern and Southern Africa Regional Office</td>
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<tr>
<td>FBO</td>
<td>Faith Based Organization</td>
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<tr>
<td>FGD</td>
<td>Focus Group Discussions</td>
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<tr>
<td>FGM</td>
<td>Female Genital Mutilation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GoN</td>
<td>Government of the Netherlands</td>
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<td>GoU</td>
<td>Government of Uganda</td>
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<tr>
<td>HRW</td>
<td>Human Rights Watch</td>
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<tr>
<td>IDPs</td>
<td>Internally Displaced Persons</td>
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<tr>
<td>IPSS</td>
<td>Institute of Peace &amp; Strategic Studies, Gulu University</td>
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<tr>
<td>KIDDP</td>
<td>Karamoja Integrated Disarmament and Development Programme</td>
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<tr>
<td>LC, LOC1</td>
<td>Local Council</td>
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<tr>
<td>LRA</td>
<td>Lord’s Resistance Army</td>
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<td>MDG</td>
<td>Millennium Development Goals</td>
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<td>MoES</td>
<td>Ministry of Education and Sports</td>
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<tr>
<td>NCDC</td>
<td>National Curriculum Development Centre</td>
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<tr>
<td>NGO</td>
<td>Non-Governmental Organization</td>
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<tr>
<td>OPM</td>
<td>Office of the Prime Minister</td>
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<td>PB</td>
<td>Peacebuilding</td>
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<td>PBF</td>
<td>Peacebuilding Fund</td>
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<tr>
<td>Abbreviation</td>
<td>Full Form</td>
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<td>PBEA</td>
<td>Peacebuilding Education and Advocacy</td>
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<tr>
<td>PTSD</td>
<td>Post Traumatic Stress Disorder</td>
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<tr>
<td>RO</td>
<td>Regional Office</td>
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<tr>
<td>SGBV</td>
<td>Sexual and Gender-based Violence</td>
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<tr>
<td>ToC</td>
<td>Theory of Change</td>
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<td>ToT</td>
<td>Training of Trainers</td>
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<tr>
<td>UNDP</td>
<td>United Nations Development Programme</td>
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<td>UNFPA</td>
<td>United Nations Population Fund</td>
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<td>UNICEF</td>
<td>United Nations Children’s Fund</td>
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<tr>
<td>UPDF</td>
<td>Uganda People’s Defence Forces</td>
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<tr>
<td>USAID</td>
<td>United States Agency for International Development</td>
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<tr>
<td>VAC</td>
<td>Violence Against Children</td>
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<tr>
<td>VSO</td>
<td>Voluntary Services Overseas (U.K.)</td>
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<td>WFP</td>
<td>World Food Programme</td>
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Document Overview

This case study examines the role being played by Early Childhood Development (ECD), or pre-primary education, in building peaceful and resilient communities in the post-conflict contexts of Northern and North-eastern Uganda. With UNICEF support, ECD has been a key element of Government of Uganda (GoU) education policy since 2007, recognized in the Education Act of 2008, and its implementation and development has rapidly spread throughout the country.

This document is intended to be used by UNICEF staff, implementing partner organizations and other interested practitioners in the education and peacebuilding field. It is hoped that ongoing discussions on the value of Early Childhood Development (ECD) as a tool for community peacebuilding and reconciliation will be enriched by the field observations provided herein.

In post-conflict situations, there is a strong desire among survivors and returnees alike to turn the page, to create a new future free from conflict and violence. In this context of renewal, young children become a natural focus of attention and hopes. As the preschool education programmes have become ubiquitous in Northern and Eastern Uganda, there is a need to document the perceptions of stakeholders, and evaluate the direct and indirect ways in which ECD is supporting the transition to peace and sustainable development. It is also necessary to see if ECD might inadvertently contribute to conflict in some way, and how ECD can be improved and made more effective as a vehicle for peace and development. Insofar as possible, the study gives a voice to the individual actors involved.

In Uganda, the ECD program is a key component of the Uganda Country Office (CO) Peacebuilding Education Advocacy (PBEA) programme. As other PBEA interventions in Uganda did not lend themselves to case study research at the time of this fieldwork due to programmatic or scheduling reasons, two case studies have been produced on ECD, each with distinct thematic and regional focus:

- One case study on ECD in post-conflict North and Northeast Uganda (the present study). Here, the challenge for peacebuilding is to find ways for communities in the North (limited to Gulu and Kitgum districts in the Acholi sub-region) to solve low-level disputes over land with neighbours and in the Northeast (focusing on areas around Moroto and Amudat in Karamoja) to address low-level conflict within poor communities undergoing drought. Peoples in both areas are beginning to see education as having promise for the young upcoming generation as economies reconstruct after the war (North) or transition from sole reliance on cattle-raising to a more diverse but still undefined basket of livelihoods options (Northeast); significant impacts from the programme can also be found in terms of promoting equity of access in a context where ECD has until recently been primarily an urban phenomenon.

- One case study on ECD in ongoing conflict (village and district) contexts and emergency (refugee camp) contexts in South-Western Uganda (separate document).
Over the last ten years, Northern Uganda has been slowly emerging from decades of conflict. In the Acholi sub-region, the end of a long and brutal civil war with the Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA) has allowed individuals to restart their lives and return to their villages after being in captivity or spending years in camps protected by the army. The aftermath has seen conflicts over land and difficulties for many to regain their former livelihoods. In the economically depressed Karamoja sub-region, decades of increasingly violent raiding among pastoralist communities on both sides of the Kenya-Uganda border prompted the Ugandan Army intervene and carry out a strong, often heavy-handed, disarmament programme. Although conflict has steeply declined as a result of disarmament, a consequence for some communities that formerly depended on cattle and guns to protect them, but now have neither guns nor cattle, is the need to diversify their livelihoods or shift entirely to agriculture, leaving them vulnerable to droughts, such as the one that struck Karamoja in 2014.

This case study examines the role of Early Childhood Education (ECD) in these two post-conflict contexts, particularly its potential for advancing peacebuilding. Although pre-primary education of some kind has long been available for privileged children in a few large town areas like Gulu, the concerted effort by the government to improve service delivery and make ECD available throughout the country, even in the most remote settlements, has been done over the past 10 years. ECD learning framework and policy documents were released in 2005 and 2007, along with early learning and development standards (ELDS) in 2012, all with UNICEF assistance. Coordinated actions by the Government of Uganda (GoU), UNICEF and partner organizations have created the necessary conditions for developing ECD.

- The Government of Uganda has embraced ECD and adopted national guidelines for ECD that incorporate peacebuilding and life skills;
- UNICEF has supported training of ECD caregivers in life skills and peacebuilding (for some areas the latter training is still underway);
- The growth of ECD centres has been so extensive that many marginalized children in medium- and high-risk areas now have access to basic instruction, have an opportunity to develop behaviourally and intellectually, and can now contribute to positive peacebuilding outcomes.

As a key activity supported by the Peacebuilding Education and Advocacy (PBEA) Programme in Uganda, ECD has been recognized by UNICEF as likely to contribute to sustaining peace and building resilient and cohesive communities following periods of conflict, though exactly how the causality works is still unclear. Evidence from cognitive science suggests ECD, in fostering safe, nurturing, and stimulating environments, prepares children emotionally and intellectually for social life, taking advantage of crucial phases of brain development. Similarly, many adults in Northern Uganda see ECD as a way of starting afresh, a way to ingrain peaceful behavioural patterns and healthy social relations in a new generation, one that was born in the camps during the civil war with the LRA or after the pacification of Karamoja and did not experience the horrors of conflict or violent raiding. This case study seeks evidence on the ground for these and other developmental pathways—particularly those that lead through social structures and culture—to see what actually is being accomplished in terms of peacebuilding. The accomplishments made by ECD, and the challenges facing centres in Northern Uganda are discussed, and recommendations are offered for improving the peacebuilding potential of the centres.

Methodology

The study is based on literature review, consultations in Kampala and field research in the Acholi sub-region (Gulu, Pabo and Kitgum) and Karamoja sub-region (Moroto, Tapac, Amudat). In August 2014, eleven ECD centres were visited, five government education authorities and three implementing
partners were interviewed, and thirteen FGDs were carried out with caregivers, parents, community members and education students. In total some 156 individuals provided information to this case study through interviews or FGDs.

The study reveals that ECD has rapidly expanded to all parts of the region, and large percentages of the population are sending their children to the centres, particularly in the Acholi sub-region. The value of ECD as preparation for primary school is increasingly recognized. Parents, caregivers and primary school teachers confirm that pupils coming from ECD do better in primary school than those who come directly from home, having already obtained key emotional, educational and social skills. Parents send their children to ECD also to obtain four hours each morning to themselves so that parents can prepare meals, work in the fields or at another livelihoods task, or run errands, with the peace of mind from knowing their children are playing and learning in a safe environment (and in Acoholland, usually receiving a meal of porridge). Improved livelihoods resulting among communities reduce stress and contribute to peace indirectly, but more direct positive behavioural changes are seen in children who attend ECD and obtain social skills, many of which are brought home where they have peacebuilding implications in the family and by extension in the community. Another benefit of ECD is that it tends to remove barriers to information exchange in families and communities. ECD children speak up more than other children, and are more often listened to, as they now have skills that are admired by parents who take an increasing interest in their progress. Information on families and their problems or safety issues are often picked up by caregivers from the children, enabling conflict resolution if not life-saving interventions. Simply the bringing together of parents to discuss issues related to the children at regular ECD committee and parent meetings can help heal fractured communities and produce peacebuilding outcomes through interpersonal connections that might otherwise have been missed.

Although ECD is increasingly valued in Northern Uganda and as a result has developed widely, important challenges still remain.

- Funding for ECD mechanisms and caregivers is provided by parents in the Acholi sub-region, allowing centres to function more or less and, for most, also provide morning porridge for children.
- In Karamoja, however, where a drought has devastated farming and pastoral communities in 2014, communities are unable to support the salary of caregivers in ECD centres.
- Centres require NGOs or faith-based organisation to provide materials for construction or to subsidize rentals.
- Very often, lack of funds for construction materials or to rent existing buildings for classroom means ECD is dispensed to children under trees.
- None of the centres visited in Karamoja could pay for porridge for the children, and the volunteer caregivers often had very large classes to supervise.
- In all centres of Northern Uganda, parents and communities are calling on the government to step in to pay caregivers and subsidize centre construction, as these costs are considered too high for communities emerging from conflict or undergoing drought.
- Peacebuilding training has been provided to some caregivers, parents and community members, but not all.

Key Findings

The report documents various ways in which PBEA programming impacts either directly or indirectly on children, households and communities.

- ECD programme is contributing to addressing issues of equity that are widely believed to lie at the root of much contemporary intergroup conflict by rapidly extending pre-primary education and life skills training to all children, including those children in rural and marginalized areas.
- ECD, by providing safe places for children several hours a day, is helping struggling families to survive the current period of drought by freeing up time for productive livelihood activities that increase household welfare.
- ECD is promoting constructive social behaviour among children, including interpersonal and life skills that enhance constructive interaction among peers.
- ECD is promoting constructive social behaviour among parents and communities more broadly by enhancing the profiles and roles of children inside the household, removing barriers to information exchange, and encouraging open lines of communication between different sub-communities in a given locality.

**Recommendations**

**Financing ECD**
- Government should ensure equity through the funding of ECD;
- Public funding should be provided on a needs basis;
- Prioritize feeding of children in Karamoja ECDs through WFP;

**Addressing Violence and SGBV**
- Address VAC and SGBV in age-appropriate fashion through improved training for caregivers;
- Encourage inter-ethnic engagement through ECD through formalized community engagement strategies;
- Support traditional conflict resolution structures by involving community leaders in ECD management and community participation approaches;
- Ensure primary school teachers are aware of needs/capacities of ECD graduates by strengthening transition processes from ECD to primary school;

**Strengthening Quality**
- Ensure all ECD centres have a full set of ECD documents and a UNICEF ECD kit;
- Review the ELDS social and emotional development sections of learning curriculum and materials to ensure effective competencies are gained by children;
- Provide peacebuilding training and refreshers for staff, CMC and communities together with easy-to-use ‘pocket resource materials’;
- Strengthen support and training of teachers through development of caregiver training materials for ECD level;

**Improving Conflict Sensitive Monitoring**
- Ensure monitoring activities cover isolated upland and remote areas;
- Systematically deploy conflict sensitive monitoring indicators track violence against children or around schools as part of routine government and community level monitoring and oversight of ECD centres.
- Build capacity for conflict analysis and actionable response of local officials, communities, and police if needed;
- Strengthen communication mechanisms at community through ECD community engagement mechanisms.

**UNICEF Policy**
- UNICEF policies for ECD to more strongly reflect the opportunities for community level peacebuilding via ECD in order to seize upon immediate peacebuilding opportunities that address tangible conflict drivers.
1. Programming Context in Northern and Eastern Uganda

1.1 PBEA Background

The Peacebuilding Education and Advocacy (PBEA) programme is a four-year $150 million initiative established in 2012. Funded by the Government of the Netherlands (GoN), the programme aims to strengthen resilience, social cohesion and human security in conflict-affected contexts by improving policies and practices for education and peacebuilding.1

PBEA represents a continuation of the work of UNICEF and the GoN to implement education programming in conflict contexts. Specifically, PBEA followed the $201 million Education in Emergencies and Post-Crisis Transition (EEPCT) programme, carried out from 2006 to 2011 in 44 countries.2 However, the specific focus of PBEA on peacebuilding makes the programme unique; while past UNICEF interventions included elements indirectly supportive of peacebuilding, PBEA is the first to directly and explicitly aim to ‘work on’ factors giving rise to conflict.

PBEA emerged during a period of increased focus by UNICEF on strategic outcomes related to peacebuilding generally, and resilience and social cohesion in particular.

In Uganda, ECD is seen to be primarily addressinthe PBEA programme Country Level Outcome 4 (Increased number of schools and ECD centres in target post-conflict districts) providing conflict sensitive education that adheres to BRMS (Basic Requirements and Minimum Standards) and ELDS (Early Learning Development Standards). In fact, this case study argues that ECD in Uganda contributes to several country level outcomes.4 Quality education interventions targeting early learners, their parents and caregivers foster a holistic sense of development of the child and forge a sense of community ownership related to shared values of promoting education. By identifying and addressing the education needs of the learners and duty-bearers, the community based model of ECD empowers parents and communities to demand education services and claim the education rights of their children.

UNICEF PBEA support involves training and support supervision, and supporting MoES with training materials, a training framework and Early Learning Development Standards to guide those working in community based ECD centres. ECD centres are by principle and practice, responsive to the community identified needs and inclusive to all children of ECD age. All training (structured and supported by a residential international ECD specialist) emphasizes the relevance of peacebuilding approaches through early learning. By building community resilience and promoting social cohesion through education at community level, UNICEF is supporting Ugandan children,

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2 The goal of EEPCT was to support countries experiencing emergencies and post-crisis transitions in the process of sustainable progress towards provision of basic education for all.

3 Kenya is also included via support to the Dadaab refugee camp to address cross border conflict risks associated with Somali refugees.

4 See Section 2.1 and Annex B for more on country outcomes and theory of change (ToC).
their families and communities, to continue the transition from violent conflict to a just and sustainable peace.

**Methodology**

The case study methodology adhered at all times to UNICEF’s guidelines on research ethics.5

**Literature Review and background materials.** This case study was informed at the outset by a literature review and review of PBEA programme documents in Uganda, followed by consultations with ESARO staff and discussions with UNICEF PBEA staff and stakeholders in Kampala. This included four interviews with key UNICEF PBEA staff members in Uganda, group discussions with a wider CO team and with a senior official for the Ministry of Youth, several informal discussions, as well as by a desk review of programme documents.

**Structured and Semi-Structured Interviews.** As the first case studies exploring the results of PBEA in Uganda, it was essential to obtain field-level information on ECD programmes, structures and management. Interviews were conducted with seven of UNICEF’s ECD partners or focal persons in each area visited (Acholiland, Karamoja, Bundibugyo, Ntorko, Kasese and Rwamwanja – total of 42 persons) provided tireless support for this effort while transferring an invaluable and constant flow of information on the local programmes.6 Five interviews were also held with government officials in charge of ECD supervision and caregiver training in Gulu and Kitgum (Acholiland).7

**Site Observations and Focus Group Discussions.** Two to four-hour visits were made to four preschools (“care centres” in ECD parlance) in Acholiland and seven in Southern Karamoja. At each centre, at least one focus-group discussion (FGD)8 was arranged with caregivers, centre management committee (CMC) members and parents to discuss issues surrounding ECD and peacebuilding in their community (a total of four FGDs averaging 15 participants each). Additional FGDs were held with one group of students (some 12 persons) at the Gulu Core Teacher Training college (CTC), with beneficiaries of an ECD centre’s livelihoods outreach program near Pabo, and the BRAC facilitators team in Amudat (Karamoja) to discuss various aspects of ECD in the post-conflict context.9 UNICEF’s partners and trainers were particularly helpful in providing background on ECD in Uganda, and detailed information on how the programme and training of caregivers, parents, and community members evolved. In the many care centres visited, UNICEF partners, administrators, caregivers, parents and children provided a variety of perspectives on the value of the programme and challenges still to be overcome.

Overall, some 156 person’s provided information for this case study.

**Secondary data sources.** All available programme documents that outlined progress and challenges with ECD activities were provided for this study. These included monitoring and implementation reports of partners and PBEA Annual Reports and monitoring data. The documents were reviewed to gain a better understanding of the process for implementing ECD activities in relation to relevant programme Theories of Change. Significant amounts of data were subsequently provided to this study by UNICEF’s Regional Office and the Uganda PBEA team, especially in relation to providing a better understanding of the numbers of beneficiaries being touched by the PBEA programme.

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6 May recognition for key assistance rendered in the field go out here to Ms. Helen Stallard (VSO) for Acholiland and to Ms. Esther Ariko (BRAC) and to Father Pedo (Church of Uganda) for Karamoja. This study would not have been possible without their help.

7 Due to the visit by the President of Uganda to Karamoja occurring at the same time as the case study field visit, it was not possible to interview government officials familiar with the ECD programme in Karamoja. Five government officials were also interviewed in South-west Uganda.

8 FGDs were organized on the spot without moderator or fixed set of questions in order to adapt to the audience composition and provide for a lively and natural discussion relevant to the particular setting.

9 The second case study focuses on South-western Uganda to consider specific contexts of ECD in districts experiencing ongoing conflict and in the refugee settlement of Rwamwanja.
Theory of Change. The overall PBEA programme is based on an overarching theory of change (ToC)\textsuperscript{10} that, on a number of issues, is clearly relevant for the Uganda ECD programme. The ToC for Outcome 4, for example, posits that: if conflict sensitive education that promotes peace is delivered equitably as a peace dividend in parts of Uganda which are recovering from conflict, then grievances and perceptions of neglect which have historically fuelled conflict in that region will be reduced. Demonstrating definite causal linkages for the complex behavioural modifications advanced in this ToC would be an ambitious task for a study of this type. Nevertheless, more modest goals of this study are within reach: to examine realistically the extent to which ECD obtains some expected higher level results such as:

- Enhanced social cohesion\textsuperscript{11} through positive interactions between institutions and communities (caregivers, children, and parents);
- Enhanced community resilience\textsuperscript{12} through networks of support that develop around the ECD Centres to ensure and support service delivery in challenging circumstances.

As will be demonstrated in the case study, conflict drivers the communities are grappling with—alcoholism, gender-based violence (GBV), land issues, and others—can be directly or indirectly addressed via the conflict sensitive education and caregiving dispensed to ECD pupils. Some results have become apparent in a surprisingly short period of time, though profound transformations will be longer term. The question this case study will consider is to what extent ECD has contributed to enhancing social cohesion, positive interaction between institutions and communities, community resilience and improved service delivery, and if grievances and perceptions of neglect have been reduced among programme beneficiaries.

The study will also consider the adjustments needed to make the general theory of change more relevant to the post-conflict situation in Northern and North-eastern Uganda. It will explore how education advances conflict resolution, peacebuilding and community resilience in post-conflict contexts, how it might do so even more effectively, and the challenges facing programme efforts in the specific areas covered. In Annex B to this case study, all five points of the Uganda Country Office ToC are presented and commented in light of the case study results.

Limitations

The following limitations should be taken into consideration when reviewing this report:

- This study was specifically focused on identifying peacebuilding outcomes of ECD, and as such it cannot be used as a broad policy evaluation of pre-primary education in Uganda\textsuperscript{13}, though where the findings have policy implications these will be spelled out;
- In Northern Uganda, research was limited to the districts of Gulu and Kitgum, in the Acholi-majority areas;
- In North-eastern Uganda, research was limited to Moroto and Amudat districts, among members of three ethnic groups: Karamojong, Tepeth and Pokot;

\textsuperscript{10} Though there is no single definition, theory of change has been defined as “the description of the sequence of events that is expected to lead to a particular desired outcome” (Davies 2012, cited in Vogel 2012:3-4). Patricia Rogers (cited in Vogel 2012:4) puts it this way: “Every programme is packed with beliefs, assumptions and hypotheses about how change happens—about the way humans work, or organisations, or political systems, or eco-systems. Theory of change is about articulating these many underlying assumptions about how change will happen in a programme.”

\textsuperscript{11} Social cohesion has been defined in various ways. A recent report by the OECD (2011:53) “calls a society ‘cohesive’ if it works towards the well-being of all its members, fights exclusion and marginalisation, creates a sense of belonging, promotes trust, and offers its members the opportunity of upward social mobility.” The report cites the similar definition of the Club de Madrid (2009) “Socially cohesive or ‘shared’ societies are stable, safe and just, and are based on the promotion and protection of all human rights, as well as on non-discrimination, tolerance, respect for diversity, equality of opportunity, solidarity, security and participation of all people, including disadvantaged and vulnerable groups and persons.”

\textsuperscript{12} Resilience denotes “an ability to recover from or adjust easily to misfortune or change” (Webster’s Seventh New Collegiate Dictionary). Programmes such as PBEA are aimed at improving social resilience, which has been aptly defined by Keck and Sikkaprilak (2013) as comprised of three dimensions: 1. Coping capacities – the ability of social actors to cope with and overcome all kinds of adversities; 2. Adaptive capacities – their ability to learn from past experiences and adjust themselves to future challenges in their everyday lives; 3. Transformative capacities – their ability to craft sets of institutions that foster individual welfare and sustainable societal robustness towards future crises.”

UNICEF’s implementing partners without exception provided full assistance for logistics, for arranging visits to schools and for presenting the histories of the programmes, the communities and the challenges in each area visited. In Northern Uganda, government officials were interviewed in both Gulu and Kitgum districts, though not in Moroto and Amudat districts, where the visits coincided with term break and a Presidential visit. ECD centres that were on break were very kind to reopen and receive children especially for our visits. It was not possible to attend caregiver trainings;

- As discussed in section 2.1.1 below, ECD programming has received support from recent cognitive research showing beneficial effects of early caregiving and stimulation on brain development, which is then related to future peacebuilding outcomes. This report cannot address these results of cognitive research or the posited causal chain through to peacebuilding outcomes. The research presented here does however show peacebuilding outcomes more directly, through social interaction between children and parents in households and at community level between community members as a result of ECD.

1.2 History of Conflict in Northern and Eastern Uganda and Its Legacies

The Acholi sub-region

Bordered by South Sudan, the Acholi sub-region of Northern Uganda is recovering from a brutal 20 year civil war with the Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA). At the height of the insurgency nearly 95% of the inhabitants of the Acholi population in three northern districts were displaced by LRA attacks and the government’s counter-insurgency measures, and 1.7 million lived in more than 200 internally displaced persons (IDP) camps. The most significant cause of conflict today according to those interviewed for this study, land ownership issues, stem from this extended period in the camps, when people could not occupy their land continuously. Before the civil war, land was usually owned communally so there was no need for surveying and demarcating. The problem of overlapping claims emerged when people returned to their land. The conflicts are within the same community—between neighbours—not with outsiders, according to most. A few land conflicts are the result of settlers coming from the outside, or of people who have moved from parcel to parcel over time who, years later, show up at one of these locations and point to traces of their settlement as proof of ownership. Even the boundaries of the land on which schools were built have led to some disputes.

The brutality of the civil war left deep scars in its young population. UNICEF estimated in 2006 that the LRA had abducted over 25,000 children since the conflict began, some trained as child combatants. By 2006, the LRA had been pushed out of Uganda, but remnants still remain in the forests and isolated areas of Congo, Central African Republic and South Sudan. The lot of the abducted children is still a concern, and the reintegration of escapees and child soldiers has posed major challenges for social services and communities alike. While some returnees have managed to reintegrate, others are without work, stigmatized and shunned. Among other legacies of the conflict, disputes over access to natural resources, youth exclusion, and grievances around poor service delivery are also undermining efforts to achieve sustainable peace in the region.

The specific impacts of conflict on education and children have been well documented for Northern Uganda. As one study found, *“the conflict not only disrupted school attendance, [it] led to a disintegration of the traditional family structure. Whether because of death, substance abuse issues, or for economic reasons, male absence has changed the make-up of many nuclear families. Simultaneously, parents point to the poor behaviour of their children and attribute it to the patterns*
“learned during camp life” (Knutzen and Smith 2012:45). Under-investment in education is reflected in lower school education indicators across the board, including nutritional intake. “This stunting underscores not only the relationship between education and peacebuilding, but also the need for strategic investments to increase the resilience of northerners to conflict in the future. It also points to the role education can play in firming up a peace dividend over the coming years. As the Acholi sub-region continues to recover from conflict, increasing access to conflict sensitive education should be a top priority” (ibid.).

The Karamoja sub-region
Karamoja is part of related group of arid regions encompassing North-eastern Uganda, South-eastern South Sudan, South-western Ethiopia, and North-eastern Kenya populated primarily by Nilotic agro-pastoral herders from seven principal ethnic groups (known as the Karamojong Cluster): Karamojong, Dodoso, Nyakwai, Toposa, Nyangatom, Teso, Turkana and Jie.17 Cross-border livestock raiding among these groups has long been a fixture of the area. Traditionally, raiding was condoned by elders and carried out for three main reasons: 1) by boys as part of coming of age and a way to obtain cattle to start a herd, 2) by groups seeking to replenish their herds following epizootics or drought against less affected groups, or 3) unplanned conflicts over resources (mainly pastureland and water), often small incidents that spiral into major skirmishes. Traditional raiding followed strict though unwritten rules, which limited deaths and injuries, and for the most part spared women and children. In recent decades, however, the ready availability of modern automatic weapons from past and ongoing wars in Somalia, Sudan and elsewhere, the erosion of the authority of elders, and the arrival of opportunistic, entrepreneurial forms of raiding have combined to undermine the traditional rules, leading to widespread attacks on civilians and destruction of property.

The Karamoja sub-region of Uganda has a history of severe food crises, and in 2014 there is widespread food insecurity due to drought. Food prices are high as local agricultural productivity is low, and households have few livelihood and income-producing options. A famine in 1980 caused 21% of the population to die in 12 months, most from starvation, and sawinfant mortality rates soar to around 600 per 1,000, and child mortality rates to 305 per 1,000. More recently, 2008 and 2009 were drought years; in the areas visited in Southern Karamoja, 2014 is said to be a disaster in comparison to the earlier droughts. The World Food Programme (WFP) has long been operating throughout Karamoja. This interplay of climate, drought, epidemics and poor access to infrastructure, food and livelihoods continues to be the source of poverty and insecurity.

With this interplay causing increased pressure to raid, and the frequent cross-border skirmishes becoming increasingly deadly, the Uganda People’s Defence Forces (UPDF) instituted the controversial Karamoja Integrated Disarmament and Development Programme (KIDDP), an effort to disarm Karamoja communities of an estimated 40,000 modern weapons they were believed to hold. The army carried out cordon and search operations of villages and household clusters (manyattas) in search of weapons in 2001-2002 and from 2004 onward. Since 2011, the UPDF claims they have scaled down operations as most weapons have been confiscated. Sources in Karamoja generally agreed that the military presence has become more discreet, while at the same time security has improved. Father Roland of the mission in Tapac (Moroto district) gave his assessment:

Raid's are no longer large-scale. Now it’s just gangs of a few people who can sneak and go for raids in Turkana [across the Kenyan border six kilometres from Tapac]. But no longer on a large scale like before, because the government has really improved security in this area. Since the tough disarmament in 2008—it was the toughest—but now we can enjoy the fruits of it. Oh, the government was sharply criticized over it, but now we find it was a good thing. It was tough, but it needed that, otherwise it couldn’t work. You couldn’t give prayers and rosaries for the guns.

The largely positive assessment of the disarmament campaign received in the areas studied must be nuanced by evidence that the campaign has had negative consequences in other areas. Some communities have been left vulnerable to raids following disarmament, while sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) has worsened partly due to the rapid socio-economic changes in the region but also the loss of masculine identities through the disarmament processes, or depression and substance abuse in Acholi due to trauma and loss of livelihood roles. Although ‘objective’ security has improved perceptions of security...
1.3 Conflict Drivers and Their Impacts on Education and Children

A large number of conflict drivers have been found operative throughout Uganda, including North and North-eastern Uganda. These include regional instability, poverty and regional development disparities, resource competition, poor governance and democratic deficits, human rights abuses and erosion of civil liberties, restricted space for civil society, lack of truth, reconciliation and transitional justice, tensions between cultural institutions and government, inequitable social service provision, ‘bulging’ youth population, high youth unemployment, high levels of violence against children and SGBV, food insecurity, among others) have increased.

In Acholi sub-region, at the time of the present research, the refugee influx, marital and family disputes and land disputes were seen as the most critical conflict drivers. For many, generational change and the war have combined to weaken traditional values and resistance to corruption, as Samuel Baker of Saint Joseph’s ECD in Kitgum explained:

> Let us say that war dissolves culture. The problem is people begin with the local level, then when that doesn’t work out the way they had hoped they try the Local Council (despite their being much more expensive). Before, people would just accept the ruling of the traditional leader.

As for Karamoja sub-region, in the midst of the 2014 drought, food insecurity topped the list, and insecurity is not far behind. In Karamoja, security has only very recently been assured due to the provision of checkpoints and police or army positions in and around the villages. The UN had until July 2014 (one month prior to this research) required armed escort on all roads except the Soroti-Moroto road, which has been free of this requirement for the last year.

Although traditional large-scale raiding has been reduced due to the UPDF Disarmament policy, Ugandan ethnic groups still are known to carry out raids in Kenya. Small-scale cattle rustling still persists in all areas visited. This likely indicates a continuation of the phenomenon of “traiding,” a latter-day evolution of the general commercialization of cattle in the Karamojong cluster region since the 1970s, a process that has contributed to ecological crisis and economic impoverishment. While distrust of authorities and their motives has
always been high in Karamoja, there are some recent indications of improvements in that level of trust. Still, most adults remember the difficult years of the disarmament campaign, when distrust of government motives and ability to protect communities was highest. So long as Karamoja’s communities live in a constant state of food insecurity, poverty, and inadequate provision of services and opportunities, this mistrust of government will not be broken and the risk of a return to open conflict will remain.

In both North and North-east Uganda, there is a need to adopt a multi-dimensional human security perspective that looks beyond the immediate goal of removing weapons from circulation to providing freedom from want and freedom from threats, whether they be economic, environmental, personal or social. In updating the above conflict drivers at the crucial level of education service delivery, recent study finds that most conflict drivers from the 2012 baseline study subsist, but some have evolved, and include strong grievances around:

- Inequity and exclusion from education
- Poor quality (e.g. teacher performance) and relevance (e.g. thematic curriculum) of education
- Inadequate infrastructure and resources
- Alleged (mis)management of education resources
- School-community disputes over land
- Violence (including SGBV) against children in schools and communities
- Adolescent/youth exclusion
- Reported discriminatory practices based on gender/ethnicity/religion/diverse abilities in schools affecting staff and learners

In North and North-east Uganda, there is also evidence that education at the Primary and Secondary levels can actually increase conflict when it is not provided equitably and with due regard to the network of interactions education has with the wider society (IPSS-UNICEF 2014). Unhealthy competition among learners can breed conflict, as can the growing differentiation between an educated sibling or spouse and their uneducated counterpart. Frustration can result from the high expectations of employment that education inspires only to remain unsatisfied, as is generally the case in North Uganda settings. Factors such as these can ultimately prevent learners from leading productive and sustainable lives, and if left alone dampen community support for education and weaken community cohesion and resilience.

ECD, though focusing on learners in the 3 to 8 age group, is not immune from these conflict drivers. Evidence shows that early learners can be adversely affected directly and indirectly from each. At an age when nurturance and support are essential for healthy physical and emotional development, manifestations of violence, exclusion or discrimination of any kind, by word or deed, can have lasting consequences (Bynner s.d.). To mitigate these risks, UNICEF has been engaging with the GoU (MoES 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2012; NCDC 2005) to formulate for ECD a conflict sensitive learning framework with peacebuilding education as a cross-cutting element, basic requirements and minimal standards (BRMS) and appropriate caregiver training.

1.4 The Positives and Negatives of Rapid Social and Cultural Change

Most adults in the North and Northeast express concern at what they see as the erosion of traditions. Respect for local leaders decreased in Acholiland due to the inability of traditional heads to protect communities from violence during the civil war or to solve the many land disputes that came with renewed peace. Yet, the traditional clan courts are still seen by many as effective in conflict resolution. One problem identified by the Principal of the Kitgum CPTC, Mr. Simon Charles Okwi, is that schools are no longer teaching and informing pupils about these institutions. Primary and

25 See Kennedy Muktu Agade (2010).
27 IPSS-UNICEF (2014) Conflict Analysis of the Education Sector: Draft Report (Gulu: Institute of Peace and Strategic Studies, Gulu University & Kampala: UNICEF Uganda CO). This December 2014 document, still in draft form, was kindly supplied by UNICEF CO.
secondary civics classes would appear best adapted for presenting pupils with knowledge of traditional social, political and legal systems, though ECD caregivers should be encouraged to introduce the many dimensions of social life to their young pupils whenever possible.

In Karamoja, there are mixed views on the rapid changes. Some elders claim that youths no longer heed their advice, and their ability to moderate raiding and violent conflict has eroded as a result. Others say that the general context in the village has been evolving in a way that is reducing raiding and is conducive to supporting sustainable peace. A villager in Tapac (Moroto) sees positives changes in that people still have faith in traditional leaders for conflict resolution, yet they are getting away from traditions of violent retribution formerly considered the usual way of settling cases of theft. Rapid social and cultural change thus presents both opportunities and risks for education and for children. Education must seize the opportunities to support positive changes—in a sense, legitimizing the new behavioural patterns as ‘renewed tradition’.

The war and conflict led to higher fertility rates, according to people in both areas. In Acholiland, the secure, assisted and sedentary life of the camps encouraged couples to have children, sometimes to replace those lost during the war. Since the war, there is a perceived rise in polygamy, dowry and child marriage. Men who take multiple wives claim this is to help the women in response to the high male mortality rate during the war. The demand for wives in turn drives up the price of dowries, puts downward pressure on the marriageable age and encourages school early school leaving among girls.

Large families mean parents cannot sufficiently invest in each individual child, setting them up for being unqualified when they enter an already crowded job market. Customary care relationships break down as extended families are led to substitute return on investment criteria for the customary priority given to family cohesion. A picture of the vicious cycle that ensues was given by Sister Muda of St. Joseph’s school in Kitgum:

There are a lot of early marriages here: 13, 14. By P7 many girls are already married. We get a lot of P7 girls dropping out due to marriage and pregnancy. People have lots of children, because of the polygamy. Some have ten, fourteen, even twenty. Juliette has twenty. A man died a few months ago, he was only 40, but he had thirty-something children. You would be surprised; you think somebody who has gone to school would do otherwise. I would sometimes ask these men who are taking all these women: ‘What about the other men [if you take all the eligible brides]?’ They tell me ‘No, they killed a lot of men, so they left a lot of women. We have to help these women.’ […] [For the dowry] some are tempted to steal to get the sums necessary. It’s very high. Another thing is that when you take long to pay the dowry—you have children already with the woman, ya—you take too long, [the wife’s family] will take back the wife [and children]. And that one contributes also to polygamy. Because that man will look for another woman. By the time that woman is coming back, there is another woman in the house. I’ve seen some families like that. And then when we ask them, they say ‘It happened, and we can’t reverse it.’

Besides the psychological cost to the children and parents, high rates of fertility, polygamy and dowry can have other long term costs to society and put strain on household, environmental and societal resources and services. Uganda’s efforts to seize the demographic dividend and accelerate socio-economic transformations could also be set back by high rates of population growth. Recent statements by the President of Uganda suggest that the government is now changing its position and will support family planning to address these risks.

28 The term ‘early school leaving’ is used here rather than ‘drop out’. ‘Drop out’ carries with it negative connotations toward children for not continuing with formal education and thus tends to lay blame at children for ‘dropping out’ of school, rather than considering the numerous factors that place pressure on children to leave school early.

29 See UNFPA 2014 on Uganda’s first family planning conference held in Kampala 28-30 July 2014.
Younger generations will determine future trends in population growth and fertility,\(^{30}\) and ECD participates in informing and empowering them to take the decisions and paths that lead to sustainable development and resilient societies. In a nutshell, as outlined below in more detail, ECD introduces children (and by extension households and communities) to the value of education, to positive forms of social interaction, and to critical thinking, all of which contribute to which will hopefully provide a foundation for the higher order competencies to be acquired in primary and secondary education. As a logical extension of the ToC for the ECD intervention, the accounts in the following sections will demonstrate how children informed by a knowledge base and set of skills at an early age are able to initiate and participate in positive everyday social interactions that further compounds (through diffusion to their households and wider community) the stock of social behaviour skills in the community. By training children to be actors of change and by developing networks of interaction around the centres, ECD is contributing to community resilience and social cohesion.

2. PBEA Programming Response and Theory of Change

2.1 Development of the ECD Component of the PBEA programme

The Uganda country office (UCO) theory of change (ToC) makes a number of assumptions in the design of the PBEA programme activities, many of which have relevance in terms of the support for ECD. The full text of each ToC is in Annex B.

The first outcome of the programme is expected to be the integration of peacebuilding and education and better understanding of the relationship between conflict drivers and education. For this to happen, education policies, plans and strategies must be conflict sensitive in order to promote cultures of non-violence and change social norms that condone violence. Establishing equity in terms of education provision is also seen as a way of reducing tensions between regions and districts. The underlying assumption is that, through interventions such as ECD, intergenerational cycles of violence can be broken at various levels, household, community and region. Recent UNICEF engagement with the government (see Section 2.1.2) demonstrates this concern that the authorities have at their disposal relevant conflict sensitive information and pedagogies to make ECD part of the solution to communal conflicts and everyday violence.

Uganda is emerging from years of conflict where violence against children (VAC) was particularly widespread, and many communities in the North and Northeast have still not entirely recovered. The UCO Outcome 2 thus focuses specifically on inequity manifested through unequal access to services, VAC in school, and inability to access school due to lack of opportunity in order to transform relationships and effect social change. This report will examine how ECD centres provide access to all, though often with very limited means, and ways of bringing communities together. The avenues offered by ECD to children to inform of VAC and learn about how to prevent it are also explored (see Sections 2.2.4 and 2.2.8).

The UCO posits that to increase capacities of parents, children, youth and community members to deal with conflict and promote peace, schools can serve as platforms to bridge community divisions, serve as incubators for positive interaction and dialogue, unite communities, and provide social cohesion around common goals (ToC for Outcome 3). This case study shows how this process is working on the ground to foster social cohesion in terms of providing primary education preparation for all children without exclusion (Section 2.2.1, below), keeping children safe and healthy (2.2.2, 2.2.3, 2.2.4), helping household economies (2.2.5), bringing communities together (Section 2.2.6), and increasing communication across society (2.2.7, 2.2.8).

Increasing the number of schools and ECD centres in target post-conflict districts providing conflict sensitive education that adheres to BRMS and ELDS is the UCO Outcome 4. Though UNICEF has been working for many years to help GoU develop ECD, the conflict and peacebuilding focus is relatively new for UNICEF. This outcome occurs more at the level of administrators, government and teachers to discuss grievances and find productive outlets for issues raised in the community. See Section 2.1.2 for more on UNICEF support for BRMS and ELDS. Training with integrated PB has far surpassed targets (the 2013 target of 200 caregivers trained was surpassed 13-fold).

Finally, UCO Outcome 5 is the generation of knowledge for evidence-based implementation of Uganda PBEA programme, of which the present case study hopes to contribute as part of an active learning methodology sensitive to gaps in knowledge and change in order to effectively feed back into practice for more effective interventions. Notably, this report will focus on identifying linkages between education and peacebuilding.

31 See Uganda PBEA Operational Matrix, approved version early 2014 for alignment of coding.
2.1.1 Justifying ECD in terms of cognitive and social development

ECD programmes in Uganda have aimed to develop children’s capacities, promote healthy physical growth, and instil good moral habits. From the start, emphasis in ECD centres was on moral development, imagination, self-reliance, thinking power, appreciation of cultural backgrounds, customs, language, and communication skills in the mother tongue.

One of the six goals (appreciation of cultural backgrounds) promoted peacebuilding in an aspirational sense: “To help the child towards appreciating his/her national cultural background and customs and developing a feeling of love and care for other people and the Uganda and a sense of unity leading to national harmony.”

ECD has been envisioned by Ugandan authorities as primarily a way of developing skills in young children, preparing them for productive and peaceful social life and nation building.

UNICEF’s ECD programming is informed by recent psychological and cognitive development research. Along with research on emotional development, emerging research in psychology is indeed providing strong support for ECD, in a number of ways, including the following:

- The development of the brain is affected by the interaction of genes and environment;
- New frontiers of scientific inquiry are exploring how parenting and caregiving may change the expression of genes in the brain, potentially affecting future generations;
- Children may not achieve their development potential if subjected to adversities at a young age—lack of adequate nutrition, poor health and stimulating, nurturing, responsive and safe environments;
- Significantly for UNICEF, investing in early interventions timed to take advantage of crucial phases of brain development can improve the lives of the most disadvantaged and vulnerable children and their societies, helping to break cycles of poverty, violence and despair;
- Safety, play and stimulation are pre-requisites for early brain development, and early neglect and deprivation are hard to remedy later in life.

These findings from neuroscience, cognitive science and psychology are valuable in bolstering support for ECD as well as child health and safety in general. Though unlikely to be demonstrated over the timeframe of a two to three year programme, the proposition that cognitive brain development and the healthy intellectual and social development of children are determined by interplay between genetic and environmental factors is non-controversial, and supports ECD, as do the implications that failure to provide safety, play and stimulation to young children will have costs for society as they grow older.

This study identifies another layer of evidence, more immediate and directly linked to identified conflict drivers in Uganda, to support a holistic approach to education for peacebuilding (E4PB) programming that takes both individual and societal change into account. As key peacebuilding pathways lead through social structures and culture, political economies, cultural practices and power relations play a part in determining if children can achieve their full development potential.

The ECD programme assumes that the training provided to children and parents will feed back into wider social structures and processes. The research in this report thus attempts to show ways in which ECD is already beginning to impact upon political economies, cultural practices and power relations in the household and community.

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36 See, for example, the Roots of Empathy Research Symposium in Toronto, Canada (15-16 May 2012) http://www.ncb.org.uk/ media/904024/roe_conference_summary.pdf.
Early Childhood Education and Peacebuilding in Postconflict Northern and Eastern Uganda

2.1.2 Government and UNICEF Country Office Support for ECD – Strengthening Systems and Policies

According to the ToCs for Outputs 1 and 2, conflict drivers can be effectively addressed through ECD (see Annex B for the full text of the UCO ToCs). But to achieve this potential, government ministries need to have policies, programmes and pedagogical materials that can support the development of resilient children, households and communities through knowledge, behaviour change and making concrete the economic and social benefits of education. Although pre-primary nursery schools have been supported by churches and private organizations in Uganda for many years, government interest in their development and certification has been more recent. Government involvement was aimed at harmonizing the curriculum and general approaches used by faith-based, community-based and private preschools. According to the Principal of the Kitgum CPTC, Simon Charles Okwi, the government involvement has also increased due to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the Education for All (EFA) goals:

Before that, they were just handling the children without the framework; giving children subjects from P1, P2, English and mathematics that were not appropriate.

UNICEF recognized the need, and began supporting MoES to produce the key documents to enable communities, local NGOs and community-based organizations (CBOs) to open, develop and organise ECD centres in accordance with the framework and become certified. With the support of UNICEF and the World Bank, the government published the Learning Framework for Early Childhood Development (3-6 Years of Age) in 2005 and the Early Childhood Development (ECD) Policy in October 2007.

UNICEF also helped develop the Early Learning and Development Standards for 3 and 5 Year Olds (ELDS) released in November 2012, in which peacebuilding is clearly addressed. Although the emphasis is primarily on cognitive development and acquiring learning and motor skills, there is a separate section for each age group on social and emotional development. It is here where the notions of conflict sensitivity (human rights, inclusion, non-discrimination, etc.) can be introduced by caregivers. The 3 and 5 year old child is evaluated on the ability to form and sustain social relationships with others, to understand, manage and control emotions in personal and social contexts, appreciate his/her own culture and that of others, and achieve positive moral development to interact positively with peers and adults.

Clearly these skills are fundamental for building behavioural foundations for peace in young children. However, the introductions to the social and emotional development sections for each age are identical, perhaps missing an opportunity to set out differentiated goals and principles as targets for each age group. Nevertheless, the standards, indicators, and preparatory learning activities for each age share both similarities and differences, and do show higher expectations for the 5 year olds in terms of having attained more sophisticated knowledge and skills for social interaction.

A number of the learning activities can be seen as preparing the terrain at a very young age for the specific capacities that support inclusive and peaceful societies. Helping the child describe different kinds of emotions, causes of such feelings and how they affect others, or encouraging the child to talk about how they are affected by other people’s emotions (ELDS 5 year old preparatory learning activities 4.2.1.1 and 3), among related ECD activities, could prepare children for dilemma framing or other skills that will be required for peacebuilding later in life.


39 Early Learning and Development Standards for 3 and 5 Year Olds, pp. 19-22, 39-43.

40 John Paul Lederach (1997) Building Peace: Sustainable Reconciliation in Divided Societies (Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace Press), p. 119. Lederach describes dilemma framing as “the capacity to articulate the central dilemmas facing the people on all sides of a conflict, both in terms of immediate impasse and long-term divergent views of the future. Dilemmas are a useful and nonantagonistic mechanism for reframing the specific concerns and issues facing people in a given context in a way that creates an integrated and holistic understanding.”
Peacebuilding, Education and Advocacy

Framework, ELDS and other training materials produced for ECD are highly valued by caregivers in the areas visited. The “ownership” is certainly demonstrated by the tendency of caregivers to take them with them when they change postings, as UNICEF ECD Adviser Ms Helen Stallard notes:

“The [written] materials were just the Learning Framework (UNICEF published more as many did not have them), we made sure each caregiver would have one, though sometimes they shared between 6 teachers. UNICEF published quite a few copies, and distributed them, but found later that many centres did not have any. Through the CCTs [Centre Coordinating Tutors] we made sure each school had one. It seemed that when teachers were moved around, they tended to take their copies with them. There’s this tendency to feel that if they’re given a copy it is then theirs. UNICEF and I tried to impress upon them that these copies needed to stay in the schools. If they [head teachers] are moving out of the pilot areas, there should be no reason for them to use it for the curriculum for other areas as it’s not in the approved curriculum. This is school property and must stay in the schools.

Though posing supply and distribution bottlenecks, this indicates a high degree of adherence to the programme materials by caregivers, which is very positive for the development of ECD throughout Uganda.41

2.1.3 Role of Implementing Partners, Local Education Services and Schools

ECD has developed rapidly in the far-flung regions of the country in the last few years due in no small part to the dedication of key government and NGO partners who have worked tirelessly to develop appropriate training programs for caregivers. Training of caregivers accelerated following UNICEF support for the deployment of ECD Advisers in 2010, and to date around 2,400 ECD caregivers have been trained.

Peacebuilding is one of the key threads running through the three modules of the Face-to-Face College-based Residential Training for FBO Caregivers and ToTs Training Manual that details the training dispensed in three week-long caregiver training workshops.

- In the first module, the first morning trainees are informed of children’s rights and responsibilities, including physical, emotional, cultural/social and spiritual rights. On the third morning, 90 minutes is spent introducing the concept of peacebuilding and conflict, using role play, group work and brainstorming to build peacebuilding skills. The lessons insist on the need for peacebuilding to be fully integrated into the learning framework.

- In the second module, on the third afternoon trainees play a ball game to illustrate peacebuilding through play. Following the game, they are asked what peace building skills are developed during the game (such as cooperation, sharing, team work and gross/fine motor development). Record keeping and formal reporting to parents is a key to building trust in the community; consequently, it takes up 135 minutes of training on the morning of the final day. Positive discipline, non-violent consequences for poor behaviour, and techniques for reinforcing good behaviour are covered that afternoon.

- In the third module, two and a half hours are spent on peacebuilding, with brainstorming on how to build self confidence in children and how caregivers can use kindness, praise, encouragement and non-confrontation to help children gain confidence, and on how to analyse disciplinary situations and to apply positive discipline strategies. The fourth day,

41 Consequently, the Learning Framework and other documents (model course plans, pedagogical aids, etc.) should be reproduced in sufficiently large print runs to ensure all caregivers and schools are supplied. If possible, caregivers could receive their own copies during training.
which begins with the lesson that learning can take place anywhere – not just in the classroom – the entire afternoon is devoted to peacebuilding, and making materials and devising activities and games to promote peace and build children’s self-confidence. These are designed to develop children’s sharing skills, turn taking, acceptance of not winning a game, not cheating and accepting imposed rules. Trainees brainstorm for ideas and design a game that promotes the above.

Of course, many more elements of the training provided caregivers touches on subjects relevant to peacebuilding. Repeat exercises show how to instil self-confidence and develop the ability to communicate and interact respectfully with others. Few elements, in fact, are devoid of relevance to peacebuilding, since ECD is focuses on building a set of practical and emotional skills individuals need to interact constructively with society. Caregivers are recruited and trained from the local communities (in Karamoja often from the same villages) in which the centres are located. They are encouraged to link the training they receive with local knowledge and institutions, including traditional dispute resolution mechanisms, to “go beyond training” so that the peacebuilding impacts are maximized. The same can be accomplished by parents and CMC members who receive training. In the event volunteer caregivers leave a community in search of paid employment, trained parents and CMC members can maintain local peacebuilding skills.

Expanded training specifically on peacebuilding put together by UNICEF has begun to be delivered by its implementing partners to adults in high conflict-risk communities (see examples from Karamoja below).

### 2.1.4 Challenges for community based ECD

**Funding.** The greatest challenge to ECD is no doubt the funding of the centres. Although some ECD centres have been built by Faith Based Organizations (FBOs), NGOs or private for-profit firms (the latter in larger towns), and some caregiver salaries are subsidized in part, the great majority are community based institutions. Land and materials for building these ECD centres are provided by the community. Funds for maintenance, materials and equipment, and for caregiver salaries, must come entirely from the fees paid by parents who send their children to the centre. Caregiver salaries are often barely enough to survive on, when they are paid at all. None of the centres visited in Karamoja (both in Moroto and Amudat) were able to extract fees from parents or pay their caregivers. At most, caregivers would receive gifts of soap from the implementing partner. In the Acholi sub-region, fees range from a low of 10,000 UGX (Ugandan Shillings) to 200,000 UGX or more for private nurseries in the main towns. The average rate for community-based centres appears to be around 50,000 UGX.42 ECD centres reflect the economic conditions of their local context and make heavy demands on personnel, as UNICEF ECD Adviser Ms Stallard illustrated:

“In one area of Kitgum district, the teachers were in a super building built by an Italian NGO, and when they pulled out they handed over to the community who was supposed to maintain it, but they didn’t. It’s a very poor area and the rainfall had been minimal. So they were really struggling for food, never mind for paying school fees. When I visited there, these teachers were doing a wonderful job. And they hadn’t been paid for 10 months, because the parents couldn’t pay the school fees. They didn’t even have any money left to buy flour to give the children porridge I found on that particular visit. But these two teachers, they had so far to travel and the roads were shocking, but they were doing everything we had asked, taken all the ideas on board, even though they hadn’t been paid. They were still doing it. They struggled on for a year, and then they couldn’t continue with it any more. They passed; we’ve just collected their marks, so those teachers will get the certificate. But their school itself has collapsed. They just can’t keep working there for nothing. When you figure that they’ve continued without pay for a year, good for them!”

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42 1 USD was worth 2600 UGX during the time of this study.
Fortunately, this situation reported for one area of Kitgum is unusual for that district; in almost all areas, ECD is community supported. In Karamoja, however, the communities visited were almost entirely dependent on outside support for ECD. At best, land can be provided and perhaps some wood and manpower donated for the construction, but many centres meet under trees open to the elements. Where structures exist for classes, often BRAC, one of UNICEF’s implementing partners, is paying rent for it, or a FBO has facilitated the construction. Ironically, the fact that no families are paying fees means that no child can be left out. In the centres visited in Karamoja, efforts were underway to get as many children as possible coming to school, despite the burden added children imposes on the unpaid caregivers in the very large classes. In Acholiland, families normally paid fees, but when they were unable to meet one or more monthly payments, their children were still accepted. Barring a centre’s collapse due to lack of caregivers, and perhaps a very few isolated or pastoralist communities, ECD has demonstrated in a very short time that it is truly inclusive (even of the most vulnerable and underprivileged) and has attained wide, almost total, coverage of Uganda.

Caregivers in quite a few cases (about half of the centres visited) do not have formal schooling, or have only had primary education. This limits their ability to transmit material in English, though for ECD, most is in local languages anyway. They are trained in functional literacy, the ABCs and numeracy in local language and English. Their motivation is high, and when it comes to ECD caregiving tends to make up for the lack of formal education.

Despite the high level of commitment demonstrated by caregivers in both areas, striking differences in quality of service are unavoidable. This is primarily due to the fact that whereas in Acholiland, FBO-hosted and community based ECD centres receive parental contributions and can pay salaries to their caregivers, Karamoja FBO- or NGO-supported centres are financially constrained. Typical for the region, none of the seven centres visited in southern Karamoja were paying salaries to caregivers. Predictably, trained Karamoja caregivers willing to teach on a voluntary basis are few and far between, resulting in one willing caregiver having to handle a large heterogeneous group of children often under a tree with few support materials. Compare this to any of the four Acholiland centres visited. Supported by FBOs, each were composed of two or three classes in separate quality built classrooms, each with at least one caregiver. Typical of the region, all were providing mid-morning porridge for the children. Understandably, the challenges to Karamoja caregivers voluntarily teaching numerous unfed and under-supervised children in the open are of a different order from those facing the average caregiver in Acholiland. Nevertheless, the accounts below will show why local communities continue to make sacrifices to ensure ECD centres continue functioning and how they and the programme staff seek to make the best of what limited resources are there.

At nearly every community based centre visited in Acholi or Karamoja, teachers or parents enquire whether the government will get around to providing funds for caregiver salaries or meals, as is done for primary schools. In both areas, the communities believe they are providing assistance to the full extent of their current means. When asked if they would be willing to chip in to provide salaries for the caregivers, Karamoja community members respond in the affirmative, that they would definitely like to provide a token of appreciation for the work of the caregivers, were it not for the current drought and resulting crop failures that make even ensuring a minimum level of subsistence for their own households a constant struggle. In Acholi, parents manage to pay for caregivers and meals for children, despite the strain on their budget. To do more would be beyond their means, as UNICEF ECD Adviser Ms Stallard explains:

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43 UNICEF ECD Adviser Ms Stallard noted the case of children in one part of Kitgum who would pay their own ECD fees by making bricks to sell.

44 Some of Uganda’s oldest nursery schools outside the capital were set up by FBOs in the North (Sunday Monitor 2014).
Up in the north, they’re nearly all given something in the nursery schools. It was a problem this year when we had to extend a week of school to get the moderations done, the school principals told us there was no money left to feed the children, as the funds had been apportioned for the planned school calendar. It’s not just a question of reaching the parents and the teachers and saying can you cover another week. There are other implications.

My colleague, who is working on the BRMS, and especially up in the Karamoja region, they were saying that as long as there was a feeding program, the attendance was good. Once the feeding program stopped, attendance dropped dramatically. In the north, some children also bring a little box with cassava or something extra in addition to the porridge.

In the southern Karamoja region centres visited, no such feeding programs existed (subsidized or community-based). Karamoja is facing its worst drought in years. In many areas we visited, locals tell us that all the main crops have failed this year, only those in better situated areas near sources of water doing well. On the sub-region level there is a severe shortfall, which the WFP is trying to address, and concern for the health of pre-school age children. It is suspected, and a few parents confirm, that many children have only one meal a day. One centre that meets under a tree in the vicinity of a primary school would find that its children would disappear at lunch time to try to join the feeding queue at the nearby school.

Despite the great need, communities in Northern Uganda may have to wait a long time for government support to be forthcoming.

According to Okwi:

I see [State support] as forthcoming, but not right away. The amount of money paid for primary school is quite insufficient (450 shillings/pupil); if we extended that down to the ECD centres, the money would really be spread thin. So I don’t see an early extension of government subsidy to ECD.

For communities emerging from conflict, displacement and dependence on outside agencies for survival for so long, and finding it so difficult to cope, it is little wonder that members still expect hand-outs. ECD programming staff and trainers have found the best strategy is to encourage self-reliance, inventiveness and recycling.

As a VSO, I [UNICEF ECD Adviser Ms Stallard] arrived and was quickly told ‘Our challenges are this, this and this.’ It’s all new buildings, playground materials, and so on, all of which would cost money). I was always quick to reply, ‘Nope, I’m a VSO volunteer! I’m helping UNICEF deliver this program, so we are providing training.’ For materials, recycling is the key. Materials are made from jerry cans, stones, discarded boxes, bottles, bottle caps, banana tree bark, the list goes on.


46 Community members may be excused for hoping for something when they see the UNICEF sticker on an approaching car. But it is unfortunate that some salaried education inspectors expect to be paid extra for any work which, as professionals, they should be doing as part of their normal workload.
Inventiveness and the use of local, discarded, unused and donated items, allows communities with little or no outside funding to create learning and play materials for vibrant ECD centres capable of developing the learning potential and stimulating the curiosity of pre-schoolers. Examples of this inventiveness are found everywhere.

A difficult challenge for many communities to overcome is finding the place to house the group, protecting it from the elements and providing a place to safely store learning and play materials. Cement, posts and iron sheets for roofing are expensive for many communities, though all are willing to provide voluntary labour to erect the structures. The challenges are greatest in Karamoja, where many communities have no means to build structures, and end up holding ECD classes under a tree.

**Teachers.** Another challenge for Karamoja ECD development is the lack of qualified teachers. Because few caregivers can be found willing to teach without compensation, one caregiver can find he or she has to teach all three ECD levels together, often with more than 40, or 100 to teach at once. It takes energetic and inventive teachers to do this, such as the teacher at Loket Ekiya Cou ECD who is alone to teach a group that has 156 children registered. Although at any given time some of these children are away herding cattle, the number is probably still underestimated.

Throughout Uganda, ECD touches the community more than the number of registered children would suggest. Newly-attending children are not always registered right away, and pastoralist children often go uncounted. Older children who accompany their younger siblings sometimes stay in the classroom or linger at the centre, especially if they have never received schooling or their school is out. They will usually participate in the ECD activities. The pressure on teachers in charge of managing such large numbers of children is immense. On the other hand, the impact of ECD on the wider community is proportionally greater. Parents or other

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47 The caregiver at Loket Ekiya Cou ECD stated that he was only able to accept this voluntary position because his wife had paid employment, and he had no other options at the moment. Other volunteer caregivers said they accepted the position out of pity for the local children and with the expectation that eventually they would begin receiving a real salary. Caregivers consider the incentives provided by BRAC negligible (one bar of soap per caregiver per month in Amudat).
Early Childhood Education and Peacebuilding in Postconflict Northern and Eastern Uganda

2.2 ECD and Its Contribution to Recovery, Community Resilience and Social Cohesion

2.2.1 In preparing children for primary school ECD changes perceptions of education

Throughout Uganda, ECD is increasingly recognized as an essential preparatory step in a child’s primary education. This is particularly so in the North and Northeast, where families have high hopes for their young children, all the more so because they recognize them as belonging to the first generation free of the trauma of having experienced the LRA or Disarmament periods. By easing the transition from home to school, ECD contributes to social cohesion by building trust in educational institutions in areas where such trust is low.

Acholi sub-region

ECD centres in the Acholi sub-region are recognized by all communities as essential for preparing their children for the environment they will find in primary school. At St. Janani’s ECD centre in Kitgum, for example, children who were timid a year ago are now speaking up in class, making presentations lasting several minutes, and showing confidence in themselves. All those interviewed (including primary school teachers) agree that children with ECD experience do better in primary school than children without. Though the communities are far from well-off, this recognition of the value of ECD means they are willing to contribute what they can to the cost of running the centres. Centres are generally very well furnished in teaching community members, including out-of-school youth, sometimes congregate around a centre to watch classes or outdoor activities. The messages transmitted by the caregivers thus reach far into the community. The BRAC model incorporates community volunteers to support group learning, and some were seen assisting caregivers or interacting with parents and CMC members in the Amudat and Tapac centres visited. This exemplifies the web of interactions that the ToC predicted would grow around the centres, a web which provides necessary monitoring and oversight at the community level. This would seem to be a very significant contribution to ECD particularly in the more remote mountainous regions where government monitoring and evaluation of ECD centres is rarely carried out due to distance and lack of funding.

Figure 4. A play “neighbourhood” can be designed with fences, home plots, furniture and bedding from recycled bottle caps, cloth, rocks and twigs (Kakress B ECD Centre, Amudat)
Peacebuilding, Education and Advocacy

This lends support to initiatives to mainstream teaching of local languages in written form, as in the Breakthrough to Literacy (BTL) project. While much of the standard argumentation suggests that mother-tongue instruction is the most effective method for ensuring effective learning for early grade children, emerging evidence from Uganda suggests that mother-tongue instruction is in fact having mixed results for several reasons including poor teacher capacity to teach effectively, very high rates of early school leaving observed at transition grades when children begin to learn in English, and risks around undermining social cohesion due to the hardening of identity lines based on linguistic divisions tied to ethnic groupings at local levels – see Uganda Conflict Analysis Update, forthcoming.

Primary school completion rates in Uganda are very low, at around 33%. Median survival in primary school is less than five years. Evidence exists, however, that vernacular teaching for lower classes can help limit school attrition. Since 2007, the Ugandan curriculum prescribes local language instruction from P1 to P3, with P4 being a transition year, and by P5 children are increasingly being taught in English. By far the greatest attrition occurs between P1 and P2 (Tamusuza 2011:127), an argument for making sure that ECD adequately prepares children with the mother tongue oral and written basics they will need from the start, or (in the case of minorities) a foundation in another local language. The standard orthodoxy also suggests that parents will need to be reassured that progress in mastering the local language provides a firm basis for learning English effectively. The Ministry admits more awareness of the benefits of local language instruction in early years is needed, now that government policy has evolved in the right direction. As for English, ECD pupils receive early exposure to the basics, and their better overall preparation for primary school equips them well for the transition to English in P4.

Another reason for insisting on local language acquisition is to put brakes on the loss of local culture. A local radio program in Acholi had a local traditional leader promoting the same messages and referring to ECD. Teachers, who are influenced by the demands of parents, insist that children are assimilating spoken and written English. Among themselves, however, children always continue to use local languages.

48 Recent improvements in the UNICEF Kits have been appreciated by the VCO colleagues involved in training and monitoring, as they were the ones who provided reviews of the kit’s composition and made suggestions for modifying the contents to better correspond to usage and needs in the field.

49 Tamusuza (2011:126) writes that in Uganda “the probability of reaching P7 in 2009 was about 34% of the children who started P1 in 2003. It of note that the UNICEF-2010 published survival rate is 32% for 2008. In other words, the probability of finishing the full cycle of seven years of primary education in Uganda is approximately one-third of what it should be. To put this completion rate in context: in 2008, the corresponding percentage surviving to the last grade was 83% in Tanzania and 72% in Kenya (UNESCO, 2011) while the average for Sub-Saharan African countries in 2011 was 66.9%.”

50 Tamusuza (2011:143) cites a World Bank/UNICEF (2009) report on Mali, where “the repetition rate is 20% in French language primary schools, compared to 5% in schools that mix instruction in French and local languages until Grade 4.”

51 While much of the standard argumentation suggests that mother-tongue instruction is the most effective method for ensuring effective learning for early grade children, emerging evidence from Uganda suggests that mother-tongue instruction is in fact having mixed results for several reasons including poor teacher capacity to teach effectively, very high rates of early school leaving observed at transition grades when children begin to learn in English, and risks around undermining social cohesion due to the hardening of identity lines based on linguistic divisions tied to ethnic groupings at local levels - see Uganda Conflict Analysis Update, forthcoming.

52 This lends support to initiatives to mainstream teaching of local languages in written form, as in the Breakthrough to Literacy (BTL) pilot the government and UNICEF led in May 2001. Uganda’s Ministry of Education and Sports and its partners, UNICEF, the Institute of Teacher Education, Kyambogo, and the National Curriculum Development Centre, began a pilot project to teach local languages, using the BTL methodology. Originally developed to teach functional literacy skills to learners in their first language, BTL brings the language used in the home into the classroom. The approach helps children recognize words they are accustomed to hearing and speaking when they see them translated into a written code; it then helps them read and write the language themselves. Its effectiveness was rigorously demonstrated in Letsabo, K. (2002) Technical evaluation of breakthrough to literacy in Uganda. http://www.unicef.org/evaldatabase/files/2002_Uganda_Literacy_rec_358398.pdf (retrieved 8 December 2014).
Early Childhood Education and Peacebuilding in Postconflict Northern and Eastern Uganda

Karamoja sub-region
The situation in Karamoja is different from the Acholi sub-region. Low enrolment and high drop-out (or early school leaving) rates have long characterised the schools in the region for several reasons, among them lack of available cash to procure scholastic materials and pay non-tuition fees, lack of curriculum relevant to the needs of pastoralist communities, inability to school all children in a household due to needs of cattle raising, insecurity, lack of classrooms, lack of qualified teachers, and lingering identification of education with colonial oppression.53 The research carried out in August 2014 paints a more hopeful picture, with the improvement in the security situation, and a sense that most people no longer identify education with the colonial past, but see it as a necessary tool for coping with a fast-changing present and preparing for the future. With security and perceptions improving, many challenges remain however in this sub-region subject to frequent drought, food deficit, and endemic poverty. Some families interviewed had lost their herd, which paradoxically have made them more receptive to the call to education, reasoning that perhaps education can be an alternative to cattle-raising for their children.

(We like ECD because) it is something that teaches children, and the children are becoming wise. It’s helping to “farm knowledge.” It helps children to understand concepts and be ready for P1. (Parent of child in Tapac 2 ECD Centre, Moroto)

ECD is now recognized by most communities as the first step in education. Centres exist in even the most isolated areas, providing challenges for implementing partner and education ministry monitors. Attendance rates are high. In primary schools, the food deficit and livelihoods determine attendance rates to a great extent. The meals provided to primary pupils represent a strong drawing card outside of harvest periods, when children are needed for labour and food is plentiful. Logically, if ECD centres could provide meals, as in the Acholi sub-region centres,

ECD attendance rates would see further increase and likely approach 100%. This would have a significant impact on easing nutritional stress among 3-8s and even younger children who are often brought to the centres by their siblings in charge of watching over them.

Better school preparedness through ECD leading to more effective learning and retention in primary school should have knock-on effects to lower early school leaving rates as parents recognize the value of education and maintain their children in school. Peacebuilding efforts have the most impact when children remain in school, gain skills and competencies, and learn to interact with others in positive ways. ECD places a strong accent on communication skills, whether it be through beginning local and English language learning, sharing and taking turns, and gaining understanding and tolerance of others. These are the building blocks of social cohesion, as defined by the OECD (2011) and the Club de Madrid (2009), such as fostering communication to fight exclusion and marginalisation and promote trust, or preparing properly for education to enable social mobility and economic resilience in a changing world.

2.2.2 The ECD centre as “safe place”
ECD contributes to community resilience by improving preparedness and risk avoidance. Not only are care centres a place to keep children safe, in many communities they are also the primary source of information on health and sanitation, risk avoidance54 and safe behaviours.

54 In Uganda, ECD pupils discuss in age-appropriate fashion how to avoid risks posed by wild animals, environmental dangers, abduction, HIV-AIDS, and other dangers.
**Acholi sub-region**

Acholi sub-region families have a clear idea of what “schools as safe places” mean to them. During the civil war, schools often served as safe havens where children and families would spend their nights. As peace has returned and UNICEF and its partners are expanding and upgrading ECDs around the sub-region, a notion closer to UNICEF’s broader “Child Friendly Schools” (CFS) concept is becoming accepted. Parents are becoming cognizant of the need for better structures, latrines, and safe play areas which contribute to CFS.

Families frequently cite safety among the most important reasons for sending a child to ECD centres. Due to the necessity for parents to work in the fields, children are frequently left home alone to fend for themselves, or in the case of a sibling or elderly family member who might be unable to provide constant surveillance. The massive child abductions of the LRA period are still fresh in many minds, and most parents have a natural reflex to make sure their children are not far from view. Replacing the LRA threat in terms of child abduction are the persistent rumours in Uganda that children are disappearing to be used in witchcraft or sacrifice. Evidence of actual abductions is difficult to pinpoint, thus caution should be exercised before accepting at face value the “confessions” of would-be witchdoctors or the many sensationalist newspaper articles the rumours have spawned. Whatever their veracity, the media attention has served to raise vigilance among parents, and ECD centres perhaps have benefitted from this general rise in vigilance and concern for child safety. Caregivers at several centres visited in Acholiland and noted that they take precautions to prevent children from being picked up by unauthorized persons. Lists are drawn up and updated regularly by communities to reflect changes which could conceivably pose a threat to children, such as a recent divorce. Communities in Acholiland have been torn apart by recent history, but initiatives such as this demonstrate very clearly the manner in which they are coming together around schools as safe places shows how they are overcoming their histories of conflict and division.


Child security is also a primary reason for parents to support ECD. Although pastoralism is the dominant form of livelihood, and it creates challenges for setting up ECD centres that can serve migrant groups year round, increasingly sedentarization has been occurring in the areas visited for this case study. Lingering security concerns, primarily to prevent cross-border attacks by Kenya-based groups that have not disarmed, still influence practices for sedentarizing groups, despite the disarmament campaign. Among the Pokot, in order to reduce the risk of raids, communities seek to keep their settlements discreet. A representative of the UNICEF partner organization for Karamoja, Esther Ariko, explained how in one settlement, where BRAC’s repeated monitoring visits to its ECD centre were leaving clear tire marks, the settlement leaders decided to pick up and move. A consultant who had participated in vaccination campaigns in the Tapac area of Moroto district explained that when Tapac parents in isolated homesteads need to run an errand, the children will be put under a tree away from the settlement so they are safe in case of attack. A parent in Tapac 2 appreciated this feature of ECD:

"It is a very good program because sometimes when you go to the trading centre or run an errand you could come back and find the children have been playing with fire because there is no one to control them, or that someone has fallen in the fire, or a child has been scalded with boiling water. But at least when you bring them here, you are sure they are safe; you just come pick them up.

The safety and security functions of ECD go much farther than simply providing a convenient drop-off child care service. Life skills are a key entry point used at centres to bring up complex issues of protection and risk avoidance. Series of pictures provide the support for repeated discussion on these issues, and these were seen on walls throughout North and North-eastern Uganda.

2.2.3 ECD promotes children’s health

ECD centres contribute to community resilience by expressing a communal engagement to improve health and nutrition. In Acholi sub-region, that engagement has been underlined by provision of meals in nearly all centres, while in Karamoja sub-region, the engagement is strong in spirit, though not yet in substance due to food shortfalls resulting from the 2014 drought.

Acholi sub-region

The most basic contribution to child health is without doubt the porridge children receive every morning in Acholi sub-region ECD centres. Parents are able to contribute the added cost to their monthly or term ECD fees, or contribute grain or sugar directly as part of those fees. Composition of porridge given children: either millet (brown) or maize (white) with tamarind or peanut paste added for taste and nourishment. Victor Braun Sister Muda said that the children needed a thick “heavy” meal at school because when they returned home they might have nothing else until evening.

Most communities have shown a high level of commitment to provide healthy and safe areas for the ECD centres, making bricks for buildings, thatched roofs, and latrines. By being involved in bringing the centre up to standard, villagers become familiar with those standards, and their young children begin to demand the same at home. The “Tippy-tap” pivoting jerry can hand-washing system present in nearly all ECD centres has been adopted by many villages. Latrines that were not common in villages have been built following the ECD model. Practices such as washing hands before meals and after the latrine are now followed more closely.

Karamoja sub-region

Although they do not benefit from morning porridge, children in ECD centres learn new hygienic practices and in turn teach their parents. In the Nadunget ECD centre near Moroto, like in other ECD centres in Karamoja, children sing songs about hygiene, and learn the names of animals and which ones are dangerous. Likewise at Lotirir sub-county ECD centre, where Adomay Maria (chairperson)
and her helper, Christina Lomo (assistant caregiver and member of the CMC) said they are proud to have prepared many for the primary school. In Adomay Maria’s words:

"The ECD graduates are far better. They are taught hygiene, they even know how to differentiate harmful from safe animals. They know they are supposed to wash their eyes and brush their teeth. Most of those other ones will contract conjunctivitis."

Rev. Simon Eyesu, Social Secretary of the Karamoja Diocese of the Anglican Church agrees that ECD is promoting hygiene:

"On bathing and the health aspect, a child can get up and say ‘I want to wash my hands and eyes in the morning.’ Even when eating, he’ll say ‘I’m not eating before washing my hands. They’re telling us there is a disease called hepatitis, that we should be washing our hands.’ So ECD is very helpful."

Much improvement could still be made in terms of child hygiene, safety and protection. Available funds are part of the equation, but fortunately for Karamoja some positive changes in areas such as hygiene depend as much on communication. The 156 registered pupils at Loket Ekiya (Moroto) centre, through the health and hygiene messages they receive and transmit to their parents in song and deed, represent a powerful force for changing health practices in the wider community.

2.2.4 ECD drives positive behavioural changes, addresses violence and negative behaviours in households

ECD contributes to social cohesion through children acting as agents of positive change in their communities. Through ECD, young children assume peacebuilding roles. From what has been seen in North and especially Northeast Uganda, attitude change could be profound in the case of VAC and SGBV. A recent study (UNICEF 2014d, Table 9) found that 58% of women, but “only” 44% of men believe a man is justified to beat his wife under certain circumstances. Numerous young children are beginning to challenge these practices and beliefs in households across Uganda right now, a product of ECD socialization of new behavioural norms through

57 Percentage of women and men 15–49 years old who consider a husband to be justified in hitting or beating his wife for at least one of the specified reasons, i.e., if his wife burns the food, argues with him, goes out without telling him, neglects the children or refuses sexual relations.

Figure 6. Pictures for discussing life skills and risk scenarios (Tapac 2)
trained caregivers. Moreover, in an unusual turn of events, the children are being listened to. The result requires confirmation, but if this study’s small sample is any indication, SGBV is increasingly being seen as shameful.

**Acholi sub-region**

Positive behavioural changes frequently mentioned by parents as reported to caregivers and to centre administration include an improving attitude of children towards others, the acquisition of polite manners, the ability to stand in line and wait one’s turn, asking for something rather than grabbing it, and the capacity to overcome timidity to speak up in class. Adults appreciate the fact that children attending ECD, unlike others who do not, will greet them when they pass by in the community. Like for health and hygiene, many of these practices are not necessarily followed back home, so ECD pupils again become the agents for change by transferring them to parents and siblings.

**Karamoja sub-region**

In Karamoja, parents gave many examples of the sorts of behavioural changes that are being caused by children who are bringing lessons home. In Amudat, children are repeating at home ECD lessons on the dangers of chewing khat leaves (mirra) to try to get their parents to quit. Alcohol abuse is an even more common problem. Fortunately, due to ECD, small children can now speak openly to parents and even get listened to, as this frank account from the Tapac 2 ECD centre by a 30 year old father:

> At times you can go drink as a parent. You come back when you’re drunk and staggering, and disorganized, the child can just look at you and say “Eh! Father is that how you behave? Why do you go and drink and vomit, and you fall down like a baby.” So sometimes if you have good sense, you can analyse: ‘I think this kid has a point’; I should reduce on my drinking habits, and try to minimize and control myself.
A second Tapac 2 father explained with similar candour how his ECD child got him to stop hitting his wife:

“Sometimes, you find that maybe if you want, if you are intending to fight maybe your wife, and the child comes and embraces the mother or embraces you and tells you ‘Father, don’t beat Mother, why are you beating her?’ and starts crying. Even you, who wanted to fight, you can just throw down the stick and just say ‘Ah!’”

The mother of yet another child from the same ECD centre joined in:

“Sometimes if you quarrel [with] some woman or you are abusing someone, your child will say, ‘Mother, at school the teacher says we should not be abusing other people.’ So you also feel it and [feel ashamed].

Behavioural change occurs as children build capacities for primary school. One mother from Tapac 2 centre shows how the skills of counting and sharing are acquired together:

“These children who are attending ECD, most of them have learned how to share. Many of these children come from homes where they are alone and everything is compact. Sometimes when they bring something, even if it is small, they have to divide it and each takes a piece and all are happy. They are also helping those of them who have not gone to school to count. You find if he has some mangoes or fruits, so he can count, ‘Oh these are five, so I have to give Father one, I give so-and-so one.’ […] Sharing and counting go together.”
2.2.5 ECD supports household economies

ECD contributes to community resilience by freeing up household members for productive work while children are safe and looked after at the care centres. The service provided by care centres is all the more precious in upland or isolated settlements, where markets, water sources, and agricultural plots may be quite distant from the homestead. The support in terms of their livelihoods is one of the key advantages of ECD cited by parents. Improved household economies mean improvements for children, through better nutrition and added financial means. The latter could be used to meet educational expenses to keep children in school and improve their life chances into the future. As ECD raises expectations for children and their parents in terms of education, it is necessary that livelihoods “keep up” so that children’s contribution to the household does not unduly interrupt their education.

Household livelihoods everywhere, and particularly in rural Uganda, are also a product of household lifecycles. The development and health of the child is essential for the long-term economy of the household, for a strong child will one day be required to support the parents in old age. Only two percent of the elderly are receiving an old-age pension, so children are perceived as a form of pension for the vast majority who have no other protection when they are unable to fend for themselves (Sebudde 2014, World Bank 2014). Other factors contribute to Uganda’s having one of the highest fertility rates (average number of children per woman) in the world at 5.91 (United Nations 2013:77), including lack of access to contraception, strong cultural norms in favour of large families, and low levels of education among girls, but the need for long term management of the household lifecycle is certainly a central factor.

A logical adaptive response of parents seeking security for their old age becomes, however, a poverty trap when reproduced by most households in a community lacking a land frontier that can be exploited by the growing population. Households find their land and resources dwindle as families grow and divide, becoming insufficient for supporting new family offshoots. If children, including girls, can stay in school, stay healthy and safe, and succeed as productive members of the household, both parents and children

Figure 9. Lessons in counting, hygiene and safety are brought home (Loket Ekiya, Moroto)
will aspire to have fewer children, and be in positions to invest more in each, thus avoiding this cycle of poverty. As has been shown in studies of “the value of children” (notably in Asia), family size is intimately linked to economic opportunity (Cain 1977, Smith 2011, White 1976) and access to education is a game-changer, particularly for girls (Caldwell 1982, Goujon 2003). Cultural norms evolve rapidly to validate new family size choices, resulting in change ramifying throughout society. Supporting the livelihoods strategies of young parents, PBEA sponsored ECD can set in motion the more general processes leading to social cohesion and community resilience.

Acholi sub-region

For many Acholi parents, ECD has become an essential routine part of their livelihood strategy: bring the children to the centre, then off to the fields for four hours of intensive productive work. Without ECD, children were left at home alone or idle in the fields while the parents worked and tried to keep an eye on them at the same time; the alternative was to forego economic activities in the morning, a difficult proposition for households. In this sub-region, the child’s morning meal will be assured at the same time—important because it frees up additional time that would have been spent cooking for productive activities, and also nutritionally for the child who will generally have to wait for the evening meal.

Karamoja sub-region

In Karamoja, the support ECD gives to household economies depends on the parents’ activity. Agriculturalists, such as the Tepeth in Tapac count on ECD to keep their children safe while they are in the fields, which could be far from the home. The 2014 drought caused lowland crop failures obliging Tepeth to reopen abandoned upland vegetable plots in the hope of gaining at least some harvest. This requires additional travel time and absence from the lowland households, which ECD conveniently facilitates. Household diets and economy receive a critical infusion during a drought year. Households with cattle will spend part of the year near the centre and send their children at least for these several months but during periods of migration for water and fodder for their herds some children will be brought along, interrupting their time in ECD. Naturally, the households that are sedentary or in the process of settling down due to lack of cattle will be those finding the most continuous livelihoods support from ECD, but for each group the support is critical.

2.2.6 ECD promotes intercommunity and interethnic engagement

ECD promotes resilience to conflict and social cohesion by strengthening intra/inter communal relationships.

Acholi sub-region

Although as neighbourhood educational institutions, ECD centres reflect the social, ethnic and religious characteristics of the community. In communities divided by conflict, an ECD centre can represent a neutral space, where children of different origins learn to interact peacefully, and where their welfare becomes the common goal shared by parents who are led to interact across and bridge that divide. In Acholi and Karamoja, most ECD centres are fairly homogeneous in terms of ethnicity, but ethnic minorities are welcomed, and encouraged like all local residents to send their children. In no case were problems between two children of different ethnic groups highlighted in Acholi or Karamoja, though cleavages can exist between community members divided on other issues.

In Acholi intracommunity engagement is fostered by the regular meetings of caregivers with parents and periodic meetings with the centre management committee (CMC). Samuel Okwi, principal of Kitgum CPTC said the meetings add to regular clan meetings held to discuss village challenges together with the Local Council (LC):

“I think [the centre parents meetings] can help [to promote peacebuilding] because these schools invite the parents to come discuss how the caregivers should be paid, the welfare of the kids, how to buy materials for the centre, so that provides an opportunity for the parents from different families to come and share in the discussions, so in a way it creates some kind of relationship between the
different families. And most of the people come, the mothers normally, they try to make a bit of peace when they come for family meetings.

It is noteworthy that although the meetings are not designed for peacebuilding per se but for discussing the welfare of children in a community ECD structure, participants and local observers recognize a peacebuilding function in the meetings. If peacebuilding is envisaged as a process, we can say that ECD contributes through building some of the necessary foundations which, depending on the centre and the local history of community relations, could include the patient work of laying down patterns of trust, transparency, harmony, sharing and forgiveness. One of the most difficult issues to resolve in Acholiland is the return to the community through “come back home” radio programmes and other initiatives of former LRA fighters and individuals abducted as children and forced to carry out atrocities on fellow family and community members. The ability of Acholi communities to accept them back is widely seen as a model for post-conflict forgiveness in the region. Yet, the integration process is difficult and painful for returnees and victims on both sides. A number of community members and ECD administrators expressed pessimism in the ability of adults to overcome the deep legacy of violence alone, echoing the feeling that the elder generation “is lost” and “mentally shattered” from the experience and that the “only hope” is in “the new generation that did not witness the violence.” ECD is seen as the way to build peace afresh in this young generation. In the words of one adult, “the young ones will teach us how to be peaceful.”

Karamoja sub-region

Like Acholiland, Karamoja has legacies of conflict that ECD can address through the entry point provided by a young generation that has relatively little knowledge of violence. The interethnic conflicts evoked in conversations in Karamoja centres were essentially cross-border issues, between Tepeth or Pokot and Turkana, who are based in Kenya and do not appear in the Uganda ECD context. Like in Acholiland it was thus not possible to assess the effectiveness of ECD for bringing different ethnic groups together or for addressing ethnic conflict in Karamoja. However, conflicts between ethnic groups over access to grazing land and water resources are common in Karamoja, thus this information should be available from other centres. From what could be gathered this time, ECD is still doing much to reduce conflict in general. Caregivers give daily information on alcohol abuse that causes conflict, according to the head of the CMC at Nadunget subcounty ECD Centre near Moroto, and sing songs about hygiene, the Ten Commandments, and peace.

There is no raiding, just stealing. Things are relatively quiet now; you can even walk to the other village. Before you could not even reach the neighbouring village, you would be stopped. [The ECD programme] has succeeded in making theft rare. This caregiver assumed that her ECD lessons were responsible for dramatically improving security in the community. It is of course likely that the disarmament and heightened presence of police and army have contributed to improving these conditions. Nevertheless, beyond this optimistic statement we can detect a powerful sign that communities are feeling a sense of ownership for the newfound peace, and are identifying it with the ECD centres they are responsible for managing. This identification appears to be occurring due to centres acting as integrative social mechanisms that provide communities from different backgrounds with opportunities to come together. Reductions in theft would be an expected outcome of more frequent interaction and common awareness of the value of social cohesion, in addition to the added monitoring through children’s accounts and caregiver-community links (see Section 2.2.8, below). In short, a community’s destiny need not depend entirely on national security sector deployments; ECD is providing a way for communities to forge much of it themselves.

2.2.7 ECD brings peacebuilding messages home and into the community

ECD promotes resilience to conflict and social cohesion by ensuring that peacebuilding messages are received by the households and communities supporting the centres. Evidence
increasingly shows that communities are becoming receptive to these peacebuilding messages and are acting on them. Despite the significant progress already made, an ECD specialist at the CPTC in Gulu suggested that the government expand peacebuilding training for parents as a way of consolidating the gains.

Acholi sub-region

Peacebuilding components were present in all the trainings provided to caregivers and communities in the Acholi sub-region. One of the designers of ECD training modules and in charge of monitoring Acholiland centres in recent years, UNICEF ECD Adviser Ms Stallard confirmed our observations and the accounts of caregivers and administrators that the harsh treatment and violence against children common in the past had virtually disappeared, and high levels of care were consistently observed in the centres. No incidents of school violence were encountered. The extreme violence of the recent past, and the deep desire to overcome it, have enabled communities to make the connection with the “everyday violence” that traditionally was accepted in the home and in schools. New norms are emerging, reinforced by ECD and peacebuilding trainings. Perhaps the most concrete example of change is the exemplary reception of returnees, both victims and perpetrators of violence, accepted back into communities. The messages are clear from ECD: children are now to be recognized as the future of the household and the community. Parents are receptive to this message. A major part of their motivations for investing in their young children is the perception that by being spared the horrors and trauma of the civil war these youngsters are best placed to create a peaceful future for Acholiland. Besides the implicit and unspoken quality of the peacebuilding message carried by ECD, obvious peacebuilding messages are brought home in the form of songs and numerous behavioural modifications (new ways of resolving conflict through discussions, waiting one’s turn, politeness and risk avoidance are the examples most frequently offered).

Karamoja sub-region

Karamoja is where the peacebuilding impact of ECD is more readily articulated by the actors involved. The words of two parents and a priest in Moroto depict the changes brought on by ECD:

“A long time ago, we used to have so many conflicts, quarrels, misunderstandings, domestic violence. But after that [BRAC-implemented adult peacebuilding] training we have gotten more sensitization; we have also learned that we can settle problems by discussions. Mostly what is causing quarrels nowadays is all swirling around food and poverty; but we are trying to work hand-in-hand to solve such issues.” (female parent, Tapac 2, Moroto)

“Before, there was violence in the homes. Not any more in our village. Now, concerning meals, it’s not good to scold the mother because there’s no food to be cooked; that’s just the way it is. [If the husband is squandering money on beer] he will be chided by the wife and child, and the child might say ‘Father, why are you drunk like this? At least you could have brought something for us?’ (second female parent, Tapac 2, Moroto)

ECDs are actually helping us to meet some needs in the community. Because these children, they carry messages back home. The messages that children bring are always very sharp when they reach the family, short but sharp...and challenging. It leaves the parents pondering ‘what’s happening’? (Rev. Simon Eyesu, Social Secretary, Karamoja Diocese Anglican Church, Moroto)

It is striking how, almost systematically, villagers in Karamojalink improvements in security, levels of violence in the household and community, and overall harmony among community members to the presence and activities of ECD. Certainly ECD cannot be the only catalyst for positive change towards a more peaceful and secure Karamoja. Perhaps it is the memory of the heavy-handed implementation of the Disarmament policy by the UPDF that leads those in Karamoja...
to seek a more unambiguous catalyst for peacebuilding in ECD (or UNICEF and its partner organizations). The strong support from the GoI for ECD will have an impact on these perceptions, lending more credit to the GoU over time and providing more recognized national ownership for ECD, particularly if the same subsidies enjoyed by primary schools can be extended down to the ECD centres.

2.2.8 ECD reduces barriers to information exchange

In both sub-regions, the profile of young children has been enhanced in recent years. This is partly due to an end to the fighting, which causes parents to change from a focus on their children’s survival to a focus on their children’s future development. The heightened interest in the welfare of children is also partly a result of the opening of ECD centres in most areas, even quite remote settlements. In highlighting the value of young children and of their education, ECD centres become a focal point for information exchange between groups of diverse background that contributes to social cohesion, and builds reliance and trust in educational institutions. The coming together of adults from different clans, subgroups and tribes to discuss the management of ECD centres and the progress of their children have already been mentioned. These regular parent-caregiver meetings, and parents meetings held at least once a year are one form of information exchange. What is not always appreciated is the extent to which children themselves help break down barriers to information flow and even mouthpieces for change. The mechanism is found in the caregiving sessions, in somewhat different, though effective, forms in the two sub-regions.

Acholi sub-region

In Acholiland, ECD encourages information transfer from centre to household and community and vice versa through one of the class routines to have a specific period for free expression every day. Caregivers in Acholi and Karamoja say that since the centres opened they are much more aware of what is occurring in the community. It is during this time that caregivers can learn of violence in the home or disputes in the community. Children can use this discussion to talk through any issues that might be worrying them, including economic hardship, lack of food, conflicts with neighbours, SGBV, VAC and other abuses that occur outside of the community’s vision. This creates opportunities to resolve issues before they become even more serious problems. One teacher said she used this free expression period as the ideal way to open up the morning class and get children participating. She encourages children to interact and respond to each child’s narrative and propose their own solutions before she provides general rules to apply in such cases.

With the heightened value of children in the eyes of parents comes new respect for children. This means that parents take an interest in what children have to say and what they are learning in the centre. Important lessons on risk avoidance, peacebuilding and other subjects discussed in class can be repeated in the home and community.

Karamoja sub-region

In Karamoja, a striking fact of many ECD centres is that they attract not only young children. Visiting centres that remain open while local primary schools are on break, it is possible to find primary school pupils participating in the class activities and playing along with their younger siblings, eager to experience this new institution they missed. This is one direct way that ECD notions are transmitted into the household and community, overcoming the traditional barriers to information flow in Karamoja communities due to seasonal migration and the traditional roles of girls and boys that cut them off from education and new information.

In Moroto, it was not uncommon to see many older, unschooled children and adults watching from the side-lines, particularly when classes were held outdoors. Caregivers confirm that onlookers are frequently present. Sensitive topics such as female genital mutilation (FGM) and SGBV are introduced by ECD through trainings with parents and community members, or simply when caregivers refer to the issues when onlookers are in evidence. Much information in songs, dance and teaching is transmitted to these bystanders. The “free expression” period of information exchanges between children and teacher exist, but they are more effective in the smaller centres of Tapac and Amudat and mostly concern VAC due to the young age.
of the children. Caregivers and local partners are nonetheless able to confirm that attitudes within the communities consistent with the decline in FGM in recent years (UNICEF [2014d: Table 9] has found the level is down to 1% of the Ugandan population due to the many programmes raising awareness of the issue, including ECD).

In the three open-air centres outside Moroto, the large number of pupils in single classes and lack of intimacy are not always as conducive to the free expression conversations, but caregivers find ways to get children to speak at appropriate times, and share lessons learned with the group—lessons that include issues such as trust, tolerance, understanding others, inclusion and respect of difference. The fact that many bystanders are present amplifies these lessons. Some who were interviewed were out of school youths who were attracted to the events and nostalgic for their days in class, or even regretful that their parents did not see fit to school them. Such individuals are particularly attentive to the lessons taught and messages transmitted.

Figure 10. Young girls watch intently as ECD pupils dance at Lolet Ekiya, Moroto
3. Lessons Learned and Recommendations

3.1 PBEA and its Contribution to peacebuilding

To show how ECD is addressing conflict drivers, it is necessary to identify microfoundations or causal links in the sequence from conflict driver through ECD to peaceful outcomes. Until now, much of the justification for ECD has been provided by cognitive development specialists, who point to studies showing that early caregiving can reduce stress levels or severity of PTSD and thus enable learning and acquiring social skills. These studies are intriguing, and suggesting interesting hypotheses that could be evaluated should conflict reductions be found as these children grow up, but they remain for now incomplete and unproven. By justifying ECD solely on the basis of the positive cognitive changes expected, and cognitive theories based on interaction and caregiving centred in the home, cognitive development specialists could steer research away from wider social structural and cultural factors that appear fundamental for peacebuilding and require urgent research.

The research at the community level presented in this study has shed some light on the new linkages being forged between parents and schools, between the community of parents and between pupils. These linkages appear more powerful, more immediate, and more relevant for peacebuilding than the cognitive and brain structure changes postulated for individual participants in ECD – and tend to be less ‘normative’ as they are directly linked to specific conflict drivers in the ‘here and now’. Specific conflict drivers being addressed by ECD interventions at community level include:

- **Household economic vulnerabilities**, addressed in the short term by provision of ECD safe spaces and periods when parents can be freed for productive work and children can be safely attended by qualified staff, and addressed over a long term household cycle when well-prepared children can through education assume positive roles in society and support their families;

- **VAC and SGBV**, addressed through better communication between children and teachers, between teachers and parents, and sometimes between caregivers and the wider community, including out of school youth who congregate around ECD centres, but above all by young children beginning to speak out when abuses occur in the household, and being listened to;

- **Marital/family disputes and land disputes**, the main conflict drivers in Acholi sub-region, are being addressed in part and indirectly by bringing people together to share the common goal of educating their children in ECD, which initiates discussions that can range to cover other issues in common, including such conflicts;

- **Food and physical insecurity**, in that order, are the main conflict drivers in Karamoja sub-region, and they are being addressed by the combination of impacts outlined in the text: notably, providing safe places for children to enable parents to devote attention to livelihoods pursuits and food production, and creating networks of solidarity and information exchange that reduces theft and other forms of insecurity, initiatives that can also have longer term impacts on building social cohesion;

- **Mistrust of government** is being addressed through government support for ECD, though the investment so far is not visible to ordinary parents, who are requesting subsidies for ECD.

Moreover, by leading parents to reconsider the value of their children as receptacles for new livelihoods skills and competencies through education, by forging new parent-teacher links and embedding parents in practical networks such as the regular parents meetings or the Centre Management Committees, ECD is building the foundation for peace in communities, not only in spirit, but on the ground and is addressing the violent legacies of conflict (i.e. what some have referred to as ‘the normalization of violence’).
Peacebuilding outcomes have been most likely to occur when the various ethnic groups present in proximity to an ECD centre can all send their children, thus creating the space for interethnic engagement, diversity and inclusion. Most ECD centres visited were indeed multi-ethnic. Challenges will exist in times of active conflict, but the very existence of the Centres provides integrative social structures that can potentially mend bridges and keep alive interethic dialogue.

Community-level factors support cognitive development processes and support changes in the ‘enabling environment.’ ECD supports resilience, conflict mitigation and information sharing by bringing parents (especially mothers) together regularly, and it involves older children when they drop off siblings or simply when they are attracted to a functioning ECD centre as spectators. One of the primary aims of the field studies was to determine the degree of interaction in these meetings of community members, and any evidence of problem solving or conflict resolution. Do parents interact on matters beyond their child’s education, and do they solve community problems or resolve current or potential conflicts through this interaction? A number of concrete examples were collected of how interaction, resilience and peacebuilding are fostered through ECD, though many more examples are out there waiting to be documented. The way to study this impact has little to do with the children, who are just learning to express themselves, and much more to do with UNICEF’s partners and the parents and adults in the community. Thus it was possible to gain information in visits to centres that were on term break, as it was possible to arrange for administrators, caregivers, parents, and CMC members to be present.

Taking into account specific local circumstances is essential for understanding the linkages between conflict and education as a social service. Some broad generalizations from this ongoing work are worth noting here. In every centre visited, the staff and parents were unanimous in their opinion that the ECD centres were important and valued—indeed, they had become essential services for the household and community in many respects. General shared perceptions have been noted in all regions visited regarding the value of ECD, whether the community is urban, rural, agriculture-based or pastoral-based.

First, ECD programme is contributing to addressing issues of equity that are widely believed to lie at the root of much contemporary intergroup conflict. ECD centres are valued by parents as essential for preparing their children for primary school. Even parents who might not have considered education as having value for their male and female children—due to belonging to a pastoral society based on cattle keeping, for example—are being introduced to education through ECD and are getting used to the idea of education for their children. In many ways (most strikingly in Karamoja), ECD appears to be driving a fundamental perceptual shift on the part of parents towards their children, enabling them to envisage new roles and potentialities for their children, coupled with new responsibilities for themselves as parents.

Not that many years ago, many parents viewed education as “not for them,” not providing relevant tools children need to obtain sustainable livelihoods and care for their families. This view is beginning to change. Though far from conclusive as the field studies were limited, many anecdotal bits of evidence gathered, if taken as a whole, do show high levels of impact from ECD on parents and the wider community. There is much evidence that parents are changing their view of education, seeing it increasingly as a valuable key for providing future economic independence to their children in a context of rapidly evolving socioeconomic structures; the question will be to what extent these heightened expectations can be fulfilled by provision of appropriate employment opportunities. Only time will tell if economic opportunities will open up in sufficient numbers to ensure that this new

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58 Interethnic tensions were not mentioned in the areas visited in August 2014. This is a key difference between the post-conflict North and North-east of Uganda and the South-west, treated in a separate case study. A few centres, in areas of ongoing conflict such as in the Western Uganda districts of Kasese and Bundibugyo (see second Uganda case study), have seen a rash of departures as families fearful for their security have relocated to areas where their group is in the majority, pulling their children out. In Kasese, agriculturalists are surrounded by pastoralists and feel unable to cross ethnic lines to bring their children to ECD centres they formerly used.

59 In Karamoja, the systemic nature of attitude change appears strikingly clear, and it is no doubt closely linked to transformations in livelihood activities, climate, access to valued resources, and reproductive strategies.
value given to education is a sustainable phenomenon, and one that will contribute to greater equity in society as a whole. For the time being, parents and communities are certainly eager to give education a chance, and are taking this first step towards building social cohesion and resilience.

By encouraging all parents to give education a chance, and assuming real employment opportunities will eventually be opened up for substantial numbers of these children from all backgrounds, EDC is addressing economic inequities over the long term.

Second, ECD is protecting children and helping struggling families to survive the current period of drought by freeing up time for productive livelihood activities that increase household welfare. Parents have in large numbers sent their children to ECD centres for the “day care” facilities they provide between the hours of 8 a.m. and 12 noon. The existence of this “safe place” for their children enables them to run errands and work in the fields and gardens or do other livelihoods-related tasks. Before, children were left at home, or placed away from the homestead under a tree. No wonder that they are now much more at ease having them at an ECD centre. Even a closed ECD centre in the afternoon or on weekends frequently attracts children in search of playmates, and remains a far safer place for isolated children to be than other areas of the community. Parents are increasingly dependent on this “free time” provided, and the additional income-earning made possible is an argument for centres to use in encouraging parents to contribute something in cash or in kind to make the centres sustainable, able to pay their caregivers and budget for maintenance of structures, purchase of teaching and play materials, and capable of providing a mid-morning porridge or meal for the children. In Karamoja, ECD is helping struggling families to survive the current period of drought, though they are not yet able to increase income enough to create surplus to auto-finance the centres.

By developing safe places for young children to learn and play, the ECD program provides a child protection service, one square meal (in the Acholi sub-region centres), while facilitating household economic livelihoods. In many societies, childhood insecurity, injury and sickness exact a high price on recovering households, and economic insecurity provides a breeding ground for conflict, crime and violence. The causal links might be complex and indirect, but there is little doubt that ECD is contributing to conflict reduction through this axis of support for child safety and household economic viability.

Third, ECD is promoting constructive social behaviour among children. Parents praise ECD centres because they teach their children good manners and life skills seen as resulting in positive behavioural changes. Some behavioural changes occur in the families as a result of being transferred from the child to the adults. These include polite manners of greeting other people, or improved hygienic practices, which parents adopt after watching children wash their hands or use a latrine. Parents interviewed express pride in having children who possess these interpersonal and life skills, and who acquire “knowledge” and competencies early on. Many of these skills—such as waiting one’s turn, discussing problems before they become conflicts, and learning to appreciate the perspectives of others—have direct peacebuilding implications, whether they be acquired directly by the children or transferred by them to their parents.

If one only considers the three general points above on face value, an argument could be made that ECD is a programme that should come under Education and/or WASH, and not Peacebuilding. Such an argument would ignore, however, the systemic nature of the complex intervention ECD represents for these communities, and the effects on peacebuilding for each point.

Fourth, ECD is promoting constructive social behaviour among parents and communities more broadly. Behavioural changes brought about by ECD have more straightforward connections to peacebuilding. Some parents note that children who have been to ECD do not hesitate to inform them when they are engaging in harmful or conflictual behaviour. One parent said if the adults were quarrelling in a potentially violent way, the child would intervene by crying and tugging on the father’s pants leg, informing him that such behaviour is unacceptable. Two other fathers said that if they return home drunk, without bringing any dinner, the child will speak up, saying that the teacher taught them about the dangers of alcohol, or asking why he had...
failed to bring home food for the rest of the family. The heightened value of children in the eyes of parents, a significant result of ECD suggested in the three points above, means that these messages transmitted from child to parent stand a greater chance of being heeded than might have been the case before such programs existed. A new level of respect for the opinions of children was one of the most salient observations coming out of the interviews in all areas visited.

ECD can lead to peacebuilding by removing barriers to information exchange. Children speak freely in class about problems in the household during the periods set aside for free expression. This discussion enables children to talk through disturbing incidents in their daily lives. Caregivers are frequently alerted by the children to serious incidents in the household or community that necessitate their intervention (including VAC, SGBV and FGM).

Increasing information exchange is at the core of what is perhaps the clearest peacebuilding outcome in all areas: the potential for ECD to bring communities together. This is happening through the regular meetings of all parents, usually occurring three times a year (between once a month and once a year) most of the ECD centres are attended by more than one ethnic group, the centre serves to keep the lines of communication open between communities, making those communities more resilient to stresses or shocks that might disrupt dialogue between peoples.

3.2 Recommendations

Through its contribution to early cognitive development and to social cohesion and community resilience, ECD has been shown to play a critical peacebuilding role, preparing children to act as agents of change in their households and communities to bring them together around common goals. Intervening at this most basic level of education would appear to provide the best chance of breaking long-running cycles of violence that have plagued both North and North-east Uganda by addressing specific conflict drivers such as conflicts over resources, insecurity, mistrust of government, VAC and SGBV, and others. To maximize the effectiveness of ECD in this regard, a number of recommendations are made to government and aid agencies involved in developing ECD programmes.

**Financing ECD**

- Now that a wide network of ECD centres are up and running largely through community support, encourage GoI to bring ECD on budget, so that constrained communities are assisted in meeting start-up and regular costs of construction and maintenance of buildings, caregiver salaries, and morning meals for children. The current situation—where high ECD fees are required of parents or temporary subsidies from FBOs or NGOs help a few care centres—is unsustainable. It has the potential to create inequities that exclude children from underprivileged families, creates added burdens for communities accepting to cover non-payment of fees, and at the very least strains the capacities of FBOs and NGOs to cope with demand. Insufficient financing also creates inequities arising from low quality of services, which undermines the potential benefits of ECD for children’s learning outcomes and general welfare in later years;

- Providing an allocation per school might be preferable to the government installing identical structures and equipment, since then local communities can better adapt the centres to their needs, local culture and traditions. Making the financial commitment would enhance government legitimacy in areas where mistrust of government is long-standing, and improve the motivation of unpaid or underpaid teachers. In the immediate term, public funding should be designed on a needs basis to prioritize crisis zones, and should not discourage local initiatives and local ownership;

- Similarly, as many children in ECD centres in areas currently undergoing drought (such as Karamoja) are only receiving one meal a day in the evening, engagement with WFP would be advised to ensure that at least in areas where WFP is already distributing food aid, ECD centres also receive grain in order to provide meals or porridge for these children. A permanent solution for the feeding question might only be possible through government subsidized meals as in primary schools;
Addressing Violence and SGBV

- Address VAC and SGBV in age-appropriate fashion in care giving, and raise awareness among adults of the importance of eradicating these ills in household and community. Provide specific training to caregivers in identifying and correctly engaging with children, families and communities having VAC and SGBV issues;
- Encourage inter-ethnic engagement through ECD by attracting learners from all communities, particularly minority, isolated, and vulnerable sectors of the population;
- Support traditional conflict resolution structures and continue to engage religious and secular leaders around common goals such as conflict resolution, peacebuilding and ECD. Enlist their aid in resolving remaining land disputes over school properties;
- See to it that primary school teachers are made aware of the special needs and special capacities of ECD graduates, so that the skill sets and peacebuilding behaviours acquired in ECD can be transferred, mainstreamed and further developed in primary schools.

Strengthening Quality

- Verify and ensure that all ECD centres have the full set of ECD documents (learning framework, BRMS and ELDS, model lesson plans) and the UNICEF kit as aids for teaching;
- Amend the ELDS social and emotional development sections for each age group to set out differentiated goals and principles as targets for each age;
- Provide adequate peacebuilding training and refreshers for all staff and CMC, and to the full extent possible, families and communities, including updated and locally relevant conflict analysis and scenario building. ECD caregivers should be encouraged to incorporate the many dimensions of traditional social life in role play and other activities whenever possible;
- Support and training of teachers should be strengthened, particularly in areas undergoing economic and social stress, including Karamoja.

Improving Conflict Sensitive Monitoring

- Ensure that monitoring activities cover the more isolated upland and remote areas, so that standards of service and access are upheld, and special needs of remote centres are specifically taken into account;
- Systematically deploy conflict sensitive monitoring indicators track violence against children or around schools as part of routine government and community level monitoring and oversight of ECD centres;
- Build capacity for conflict analysis and actionable response. The diversity of communities and societies is a double-edge sword: usually a source of strength, stability and resilience, diversity can become a source of discord in times of economic or political stress;
- Strengthen communication mechanisms. As complex adaptive systems, where multiple factors interact and causalities evolve, communities require institutions that facilitate free flow of information, scenario building and dialogue in order to prevent small perturbations from affecting overall stability and resilience, while permitting positive adaptive change. ECD can play a small part in building this capacity, through encouraging information exchange and discussing current events in the care centres, but local and national governments and universities should take the lead in building the more formal analytical (and actionable response) capacities required to sustain peace and development.

UNICEF Policy

- UNICEF policies for ECD to more strongly reflect the opportunities for community level peacebuilding via ECD in order to seize upon immediate peacebuilding opportunities that address tangible conflict drivers.
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Annex A.

Key Implementation Structure for ECD in Uganda

Key implementation structure for ECD in Uganda

- Ministry of Education and Sports
  - Other key stakeholders
    - BASIC & SEC
      - Primary & Pre-primary
    - DES
      - Basic Education Standards
    - Higher Education
    - NCDC
      - Pre-primary
    - TIET
      - Training & Education Institutions
    - Other MOES departments (EPPA, SNE)
    - Other Ministries
      - District Local Government
        - DES Focal point persons
        - District Education Officers (ECD focal person)
      - Non Govt, private & corporate partners
      - Basic Education Standards
        - Primary & Pre-primary
        - Basic Education Standards
        - Higher Education Standards
        - NCDC
      - School/Centre Management Committee
      - ECD teachers/ Caregivers, Parents, child care providers & workers
      - Tutors
Annex B.

Theory of Change

The Uganda Country Office (UCO) five point ToC is presented below. Indented under each point are comments based on the case study findings related to the ECD programme.

UCO ToC for Outcome 1 (Peacebuilding and education integrated. Increased understanding of the relationship between conflict drivers and education): “If education policies, plans and strategies are not conflict sensitive and instigate tension between groups then they can contribute to and fuel conflict. If policies, plans and strategies that promote cultures of non-violence, promotion of social cohesion and encourage the change of social norms that condone violence are being implemented in schools then they can support the breaking of cycles of violence and contribute to building positive social relations between children, youth and teachers in schools. If policies, plans and strategies ensure equitable distribution of resources in terms of teacher distribution, availability of infrastructure and access to education then tensions between regions and districts decrease leading to reduced levels in ongoing violence.”

ECD training protocols have integrated conflict sensitivity and promotion of cultures of non-violence. In both northeastern and southwestern Uganda caregivers and CMC members provide countless examples of how ECD has promoted non-violence, changing behavioural patterns in home and community, and brought communities together, ToC predicts that both norm changes and equitable access to education, resources and infrastructures will lead to reduced levels of conflict. The results of this study suggest that the latter has stronger causal efficaciousness; i.e., that norm changes alone will be insufficient in the absence of equitable access and distribution of resources.

UCO ToC for Outcome 2 (Increased institutional capacities of UNICEF, MoES and districts to supply conflict sensitive peace education and of responsible institutions to address VAC): “Though the global ToC focusses on unequal access, there in Uganda we are focussing specifically on VAC as one issue in school that fuels conflict: If MoES institutions provide education that supports social cohesion and peacebuilding and addresses issues that may have fuelled conflict, such as unequal access to services, VAC in school, inability to access school due to lack of opportunity, then education will contribute to positive transformation of relationships and social change. If children and youth are provided with mechanisms that can support them in channelling complaints related to violence to appropriate instances such as the police and the court, while providing a supporting and conducive environment for talking about VAC, then this will have a deterrent function and lead to a decrease of the societal acceptance of VAC and prevent future acts of VAC. This will then break the intergenerational cycle of violence that leads to trauma, anxiety, depression and emotional isolation that makes a society more prone to experience an eruption or continuation of existing conflicts.”

On the whole, this ToC is supported by observations in centres and accounts of caregivers and CMC members who see ECD as laying the foundation for non-violent interaction among children. This is done through simple steps documented in the case studies, such as learning to care for smaller children, take turns, and solve disputes through dialogue. In order to ensure lasting reductions in VAC, primary education structures and practices should take inspiration from ECD, and see that pupils who have not gone through ECD receive remedial attention.
UCO ToC for Outcome 3 (Increased capacities of parents, children, youth and community members to prevent, reduce and cope with conflict and promote peace): “If schools are used as platforms for bridging community divisions (ethnic/tribal, religious, or otherwise) and become incubators for positive interaction and cooperation through sports, community dialogue and arts then this has the ability to unite communities providing social cohesion around common interests, goals, and values to promote.”60

With regard to this ToC, PBEA has accomplished much already through the Music, Dance and Drama festivals (MDD) and through sports competitions in post-conflict districts, involving thousands of children. ECD has also contributed to bridging community divisions through encouraging interaction among community members of different clans, ethnic groups or tribes at regular meetings to manage the ECD centres. Thus, the early initiation of their children to education, and preparation for primary school, serves as a common focus for sectors of the community that otherwise would have little cause for interaction. The result is an increase in communication and social cohesion at the level of individual communities. These interactions are not meant to be one-off contacts forged on the occasion of specific events but rather designed to create lasting links beginning when their children are at a tender age, and for many will last throughout their children’s education, if not beyond.

UCO ToC for Outcome 4 (Increased # of schools and ECD centres in target post-conflict districts providing conflict sensitive education that adheres to BRMS and ELDS): “If conflict sensitive education that promotes peace is delivered equitably as a peace dividend in parts of Uganda which are recovering from conflict, then grievances and perceptions of neglect which have historically fuelled conflict in that region will be reduced. Building up education provision in conflict affected areas offers a means to build state legitimacy. Ensuring that schools are conflict sensitive provides an opportunity to empower teachers and administrators to discuss grievances and find productive outlets for issues raised in the community.”

ECD fosters quality education interventions targeting early learners, and also caregivers and parents, which promotes social cohesion in the community by focusing attention on the holistic development of the child and transmitting ownership of promoting education to the community. Training of caregivers in ELDS and ECD with integrated PB has far surpassed targets (2013 target of 200 caregivers trained was surpassed 13-fold).

UCO ToC for Outcome 5 (generation of knowledge for evidence-based implementation of Uganda PBEA programme) “maintains that because peacebuilding is somewhat new to UNICEF, it will be valuable to institutional learning as well as effective programme implementation to ensure that activities are evidence-based and sensitive to ongoing fluctuations in stability. If a programme has an active learning methodology that continuously aims to address gaps in knowledge and gather learning from other sources and that are translated and fed back into practice then interventions will be informed and more effective. Working with local institutions will ensure that research capacity is built and sustained beyond the life of the programme. Therefore a strong body of evidence will demonstrate the linkages between education and PB and will in turn help to support the reposition of UNICEF education programming to support resilience in fragile state contexts and thus mitigate the negative impacts of violent conflict.”

60 A second part of this ToC concerns youth.
It is in addressing country level outcome 5 that the results from the present and accompanying studies may be helpful for future programming adjustments. By examining the results in terms of peacebuilding of ECD programming in specific areas of post-conflict (in Acholiland and Karamoja), ongoing conflict (Kasese and Bundibugyo districts) and emergency (Rwamwanja Refugee Settlement, Kamwenge district), institutional learning can occur and feed into effective programme implementation to support resilience. Community-level monitoring of how education links into conflict and livelihoods issues is essential for finding ways to improve service delivery and mitigate inequities, with an increased need to pay attention to power dynamics as well in areas of ongoing conflict.