



Annual Report 2011

Our Mission

GRG's mission is to facilitate the reconciliation and reintegration of former child soldiers and other ex-combatants with their communities in northern Uganda.

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Greetings from our Founders

Try to imagine that you were a child soldier, being forced at gunpoint to kill your best friend or cousin. We met so many such victims while working in northern Uganda. The pain and stigma were so powerful, we had to do something.



We wanted to do something more than a offer a handout. Our projects are designed to help people heal progressively as a community. We start working with the child soldiers when they escape from the rebels and come home. They work together every day with their neighbors on group therapy projects that also generate income. The trauma turns into hope, as a child soldier becomes chairman of an organic farm or starts a new carpentry shop...

Five years after we started, 2011 was a landmark year for us, graduating the 425 people that we had worked with since 2006. Their lives had been transformed from isolation and trauma to positive, social lives.

Going forward, we are reaching out to the neediest communities – where no organizations have ever worked and where conditions are desperate. This expansion will take tremendous work, and we need your help to continue.

–Sasha and Kasper



Francis, a former child soldier, has transformed into a community leader. Abducted as a youth by the LRA, Francis tried to escape but was caught. The rebels killed his brother by crushing his head with a log, as a warning to Francis if he tried to escape again.

Francis finally escaped a year later and has turned his life around. He was elected Chairman of the GRG group in his home community, Teetugu.

Now 29 and an inspirational leader, he made the group into a highly successful project, as it spun off 17 new businesses for its members and bought its own ox for farming with project profits.

Francis is so talented that he is a regular trainer in microfinance skills. He states, "The leadership skills I have learned from GRG and the ability to work for my community has helped me so much."



2011: Proudly Graduating our First Groups

- **SUCCESSFUL GRADUATES:** We graduated 425 people from our original 17 groups after 5 years, with new skills in leadership, income from new businesses, and more peaceful communities.
- **REACHING OUT TO THE POOREST OF THE POOR:** We started 21 new groups in the most vulnerable areas of northern Uganda.
- **ORGANIC FARMING:** We trained our groups and helped them set up organic farming projects.
- **EMPOWERING PARENTS - 612 CHILDREN BACK IN SCHOOL:** Instead of giving scholarships, we empowered participants to pay school fees from the money they earned from GRG projects. 89% of our participants' children went back to school in 2011.
- **IMPACT - 192 NEW SMALL BUSINESSES:** We helped participants establish groceries, carpentry shops, tailoring enterprises, and other businesses.





Overview

- **2006-2011: 17 GROUPS OF 425 PEOPLE** total. Groups graduated in 2011 after reaching social, economic, and community goals.
- **CURRENTLY: 21 PROJECTS WITH 530 PEOPLE** total.
- **ELEVEN TYPES OF PROJECTS**, each designed by the community: Conflict Resolution Training, Leadership Development, Community Microfinance, Organic Farming, Brick-Making Competitions, Skills Training, Animal Husbandry, Trauma Counseling, Small Business Development (Handicrafts, Beekeeping), Cultural Drumming & Dancing, and Adult Literacy

- **STARTED PROJECTS IN UGANDA IN 2006**, working with 425 people.
- **GOAL:** to help reconcile and rehabilitate former child soldiers and their communities through peace-building and development projects.
- **PROJECTS ARE DONE THROUGH GROUPS.** Each group has 15 to 30 members: half former child soldiers and half community members.

- **WHAT'S UNIQUE:**
 - Projects are designed by communities themselves
 - We work continuously with a community for 5 years, not a 1-off workshop
 - Participation is inclusive to avoid stigma: youth, men, women, ex-combatants, community members, disabled persons
- **TOTAL ANNUAL BUDGET:** approximately \$49,000





History of our Organization

GRASSROOTS RECONCILIATION GROUP (GRG) began in 2005 to help reconcile and rehabilitate former child soldiers of Joseph Kony's Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) and their communities in northern Uganda, a well-documented need on the ground.

The program was put together using a bottom-up approach, beginning as part of the USAID-funded Northern Uganda Peace Initiative. Community groups custom designed hands-on projects in rural areas. With ex-combatants working side-by-side with their communities through group projects, former child soldiers and war victims began reconciling their differences and generating income.

USAID pulled out as planned in 2006, but our co-founders Sasha and Kasper believed in the community groups. They personally invested in the projects and spun off GRG as an independent 501(c)3 non-profit organization in the U.S. and an NGO in Uganda in 2007.



Janet (now 16)

"When I was nine, the rebels forced me to carry food pots that were very hot, so they burned the hair off my head."

Janet was eight when the rebels came to her hut in the night. Her hut was burned, and then she was forced to become a sex slave to a commander. After four horrifying years, she escaped by running across dead bodies during a battle.

She now wants to help her family, because her father was also abducted. "Now I go to school, but my mom is having trouble with paying my school fees. So I joined the GRG, so the income could help me go to school. I want to be a nurse later in life."



Goals and Objectives

Under our main goal of reconciliation and rehabilitation, we have 5 specific aims:

- **EMPOWER COMMUNITIES** and former child soldiers to become self-reliant by providing support to need-based, community-driven livelihood projects
- **PROMOTE INDEPENDENCE** and innovation through capacity building programs
- **FACILITATE THE REINTEGRATION** of former child soldiers into communities by offering opportunities for participation in joint projects and by providing psycho-social support and key skills
- **CREATE A DIALOGUE** for members to exchange ideas and revitalize the rich cultural values destroyed by war
- **BUILD AN ATMOSPHERE OF RESPECT AND TOLERANCE** in the wider community, to reduce conflicts





We ensure that our work is grassroots, as our participants design their own projects.

Training & Cultural Activities

20 years of war led to lowered group cohesion and the need for skill development. GRG supported projects designed by the groups to strengthen skills and community relations:

- **CONFLICT RESOLUTION TRAINING** – We conducted training in conflict resolution and reconciliation for all groups.
- **LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT** – We trained all groups in leadership and group management. They established leadership structures and constitutions themselves and empowered

over 100 ex-child soldiers to leadership positions.

- **TRAUMA COUNSELING** – GRG trained 15 local leaders to be trauma counselors in one community, who then counseled over 200 people locally. This project ended in 2011 but we plan to reinvigorate trauma counseling.
- **ADULT LITERACY** – GRG facilitated training, engaging group members to meet and train each other regularly on basic reading and writing.
- **CULTURAL DRUMMING & DANCING** – Several groups have overcome divisions to the extent that they now love to socialize and perform cultural dances and drumming sessions together. GRG supported several such projects.

Livelihood Projects That Foster Reconciliation

Through the process of shared planning and collaboration on economic livelihood projects, groups overcome mistrust, foster reconciliation, and facilitate development:

- **ORGANIC AGRICULTURE** – Groups received training and then started organic farming projects. Eight groups in Olwal designed a project to share a water pump to guarantee

What We Do – Our Projects





year-round food security. Groups also started long-term pineapple and banana projects.

- **BRICK MAKING COMPETITION** – Brick making is highly profitable locally, and GRG provided tools to 13 groups in 2011. The enthusiasm for these projects was so great that GRG facilitated a competition between the groups. The Koc Goma group won by making 20,000 bricks, worth \$750. They won polo shirts as a prize.

- **ANIMAL HUSBANDRY** – Raising animals is one of the best ways both to generate income and improve group problem-solving skills in northern Uganda. Groups constructed housing, and GRG delivered pigs and goats and provided training. This long-term initiative will provide continued collaboration well beyond GRG's departure.

- **HANDICRAFTS** – GRG conducted training in weaving, basketry, mats and purses made out of locally sourced reeds and palm trees.
- **BEEKEEPING** – Several groups received training and hollowed logs to begin projects bringing fresh honey to the community and to market.

Community Microfinance

Microfinance has played a major role in building peace in our communities. As groups have told us, "If you trust others with your money, you can trust them with anything."

All groups have developed microfinance projects, spun off of GRG's initial livelihood projects. GRG provides training and savings boxes. This village savings and loan system enables groups with no access to banks to save money and take out loans to start businesses or provide for social needs like paying school fees. Participants earn interest on their savings based on the repaid loans of others.





2011 Accomplishments

In 2011, our participants made great strides in overcoming war trauma, reconciliation issues, and poverty through work in our expanding projects.

- **WE GRADUATED OUR ORIGINAL 17 GROUPS:** As groups met their goals and could stand on their own, we graduated each group with

a ceremony in 2011. GRG committed to visit groups each quarter in

2012 to provide advice, but the groups operate independently financially now.

- **WE WENT ORGANIC:** Through a working partnership with the organic farming non profit NOGAMU, GRG introduced organic farming methods to all of our groups, increasing market access and protecting the environment.
- **WE IMPROVED OUR MONITORING & EVALUATION:** We conducted a evaluation of all original groups, collecting numerical and narrative data on our participants.
- **NEW BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT:** 192 new individual businesses were started by beneficiaries as a result of GRG's skills training and livelihood support. These included farms, piggeries, small restaurants, and tailoring shops.
- **IMPROVED TRUST:** Ex-combatants and community members strongly agreed (4.76/5) that working with GRG had improved relationships with the community, showing a great sense of reconciliation and reintegration. 99% of group members felt 'very free' to visit each other's homes.
- **CONFLICT RESOLUTION:** GRG members reported using new methods to resolve conflicts, including gathering as a family, seeking the advice of elders, or requesting the assistance of a local counselor.
- **INCREASED SAVINGS:** 87% of members were able to save money, on average saving 28,793 Ugandan shillings per month (USD\$12.52).

2011 Accomplishments





- **SKILLS DEVELOPMENT:** Members agreed (4.44/5) that their skills in agriculture had improved due to their engagement with GRG, with most receiving training in vegetable farming, animal husbandry, entrepreneurship, and savings.
- **SCHOOL ATTENDANCE:** 612 children were sent to school using income from GRG projects, or 2.62 children per group member. This represents 89% of all school-aged children of GRG members. When we started the projects, most members asked us to give money to send their children to school. Now, they send their children to school on their own, using income generated from their GRG-related projects and businesses.
- **LEADERSHIP:** 48% of former child soldiers were elected into leadership roles by their respective groups. The positions – including chairmen, secretaries, treasurers, mobilizers, and advisers – show that these individuals are trusted in their communities and demonstrates their significant social growth.
- **PARTICIPATION:** In contrast to their social isolation when they started, 98% of members reported that they were able to fully participate in group work. Their willingness to participate and the willingness of the community to engage them in social activities shows great progress.

2011 Accomplishments



The Need

After 5 years of work, we conducted research in the most vulnerable areas of northern Uganda to see if the scars of war there had healed. We found incredible need:

- People drank water from trenches, because they had no fresh water wells.
- Violence between ex-combatants and communities was similar to levels of five years earlier in other areas of northern Uganda.
- In many communities, no NGO had ever operated and the government had not provided any services.
- Communities suffered from high rates of alcoholism because of war-related depression and lack of work.

Many of these communities are difficult to reach by car, and we have to stay nights in far-away places to work with them. But with our proven track record, we knew it would be worth trekking to these communities despite the costs.

The Need: New Groups in 2012



Our Work

- **WE INITIATED NEW PROJECTS WITH 21 GROUPS IN 12 VULNERABLE COMMUNITIES:** We worked closely with local leaders to identify which areas had been most greatly affected by war, had the highest numbers of LRA returnees, and had received the least NGO and government support.
- **NEW GROUPS ARE ALREADY UP AND RUNNING:** All 21 groups have now developed constitutions and have started projects in vegetable cultivation, microfinance, and long-term crops, and cultural initiatives such as dancing, and reconciliation ceremonies.

Plans for the new groups:

- **MICROFINANCE PROJECTS** are being started with all new groups to support reconciliation and community reinvestment.
- **AGRICULTURAL PROJECTS** have been selected by the groups. Vegetable seeds and training were provided in early 2012, and other farming projects will follow.
- **TRUSTING AND COHESIVE** groups are essential to GRG's work. GRG will assist groups in this crucial time of growth and development.
- **ENHANCING TRAUMA COUNSELING ASSISTANCE:** We plan to reinvigorate our trauma counseling work that was successful from 2006-11.
- **INCREASING SKILLS:** GRG will provide training as per groups' needs.
- **OTHER HOME-GROWN PROJECT IDEAS** from the groups themselves.
- **STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS:** In 2012, GRG is developing partnerships with other NGOs, including the Justice & Reconciliation Project on community reconciliation theater. Others will be developed on trauma counseling and business development and marketing.

Our Work: New Groups in 2012

ANNA SQUIER, PROGRAM MANAGER – Anna headed our office in 2011. She holds an MA in Human Security and Peacebuilding from Royal Roads University. She has worked with youth in post-conflict scenarios, as the Program Coordinator for Restorative Justice in Canada and most recently in Rwanda on conflict resolution curriculum development.

FRANCIS OPIO, PROGRAM OFFICER – Francis holds a BA in Development Studies from Kyambogo University, Uganda. Before joining GRG in January 2011, Francis worked with the NGOs ACTED and Friends of Orphans, as well as with the local government. Francis has been directly involved with working with former child soldiers and former combatants in his postings and brings strong field experience to GRG's program team.

STELLA MIRYAM AKOLI, ACCOUNTANT – Before working with GRG, Stella worked with the phone company MTN in Gulu. Educated at the Uganda College of Commerce, Stella holds a diploma in Business Studies. Stella has also worked for Masindi District Local Government, in Western Uganda. She is fluent in five languages.

Trainers: GRG partnered with several trainers in 2011 to support the community projects. These trainers came from close partners to GRG, including the Agriculture Department at Gulu University and NOGAMU, as well as from GRG's own groups.

New management: In 2012, GRG hired Christopher Maclay as the new Project Coordinator to facilitate the growth of the organization. Christopher has a background in youth, conflict, and livelihoods and spent the last two years managing a \$120 million poverty reduction program for the UK government agency DFID in Bangladesh.




	Amount in \$	Description
INCOME		
Donations from Individuals	35,355	Sasha Lezhnev: \$25,555 Virginia Lezhnev: \$7,000 Anna-Maria Kaneff: \$1,000 Other donors: \$1,800 total
Grant from the U.S. Embassy in Uganda	3,336	
Other Funds	2,101	Sale of vehicle
Balance from 2010	9,167	
Total Income	49,959	

EXPENDITURES		
Administration	8,264	Office and administration (53%), Salaries (36%), Finance (11%)
Animal Husbandry	9,987	Direct Transfers (14%), Training (86%)
Agriculture	12,438	Direct Transfers (28%), Training (72%)
Other Livelihood Projects	5,927	Direct Transfers (1%), Training (99%)
Community Microfinance	5,452	Direct Transfers (4%), Training (96%)
Reconciliation and Leadership	4,500	Training and support (100%)
Operational Costs	3,272	Vehicle Repair (75%), Group Graduation (16%), Group Transport Costs (8%), Group AGM (1%)
Miscellaneous Non-Operational Costs	119	Misc (100%)
Total Expenditure	49,959	

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