

Egidio's Story



My name is Okeny Egidio. When I was abducted from my small village in Nam-okora Sub County, I was 12 years old, and still in primary school.

The Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) laid ambushes along the school road and some surrounded our school. They abducted 18 of us on our way to school. Some had already attacked the school. We watched our teachers being slaughtered, and some pupils were forced to finish the job. Each was forced to take part in cutting the body of the slain adults, boiling their remains and eating them.

My commander chose me after 3 months to specialize in burning granaries and hunting domestic animals for food. Here I got a position to lead a team called "Cam Kwok Ki" (meaning "eat your sweat"). These duties required some of us to beat local civilians while looking for food.

During the course of these activities, the second-in-command lost his gun in the bush during the skirmish. Here I thought of evaporating into dust, because the only penalty is death. We then planned to escape together with some 10 fellows. We never moved beyond 6 kilometers, and we were captured and taken back to the original team. We were beaten. He who lost the weapon was beaten on his back with an iron bicycle chain and was assured he was to be killed for his mistake.

The chief commander gave us another punishment: to harvest wild honey at daytime without fire. The bees were so wild and harsh that it scattered even the LRA camping site, leaving us a chance to escape. Because we were assured that the army was following us, we used the chance. When the UPDF clashed with the rebels, several of them were killed and a few were rescued. I ran, ran and ran. I was alone for days in the bush, weak and completely exhausted.

Finally, I found a village and the first woman I saw ran away from me in fear. Eventually a village priest came and helped me to a Ugandan army barracks. They interviewed me, gave me food and took me to an IDP [*internally displaced persons*] camp. A local organization contacted my family so that I could return home.

My family welcomed me home and organized a small ceremony with some cultural practices but I felt insecure. I was plagued by night mares that they are killing me, and at time that I was also busy burning houses.

I was later sent back to school in western Uganda when I completed my O-level [*grade 10 exams*], where I could still hear and read from papers that Kony has still abducted, killed, and burnt. My concern was about the long-term effect of the violence on the young people in northern Uganda.

In 2001 when I completed my A-level [*high school completion exams*], my sister who took care of me was killed by a land mine along the Kitgum-Gulu road. I tried to join the army under officer's cadets, but I failed because of my height and age.

I got down to my home district Kitgum and initiated a youth group which I have registered now as a Community-Based Organization known as Northern Uganda Child Returnee Association (NUCRA). Our first program was on trauma counseling, and brick-laying for income generation. Later we developed other programs, which aim at supporting war affected youth in the armed conflict.