

UGANDA'S Forgotten CHILDREN

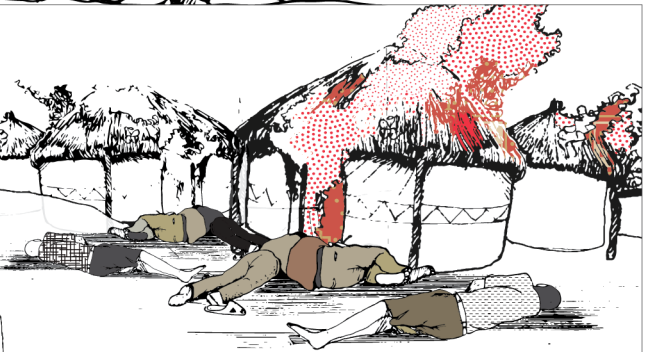
Between 2000 and 2004, more than 30,000 children were abducted by the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA).

These are Uganda's Forgotten children.

What happened when they came back, and what place do they now have in Ugandan society?

Northern Uganda has been affected by war and conflict for decades.

The LRA, led by Joseph Kony, emerged in 1987 and engaged in looting, violence and the forced recruitment of children into their service.



By 2003, around 1.5 million people (about 80% of the population) were living in hundreds of internal displacement camps (IDPC), often in appalling conditions.

Most children were abducted from displacement camps.



In their time with the LRA, many of the abducted children experienced, witnessed or took part in terrible violence and killing.

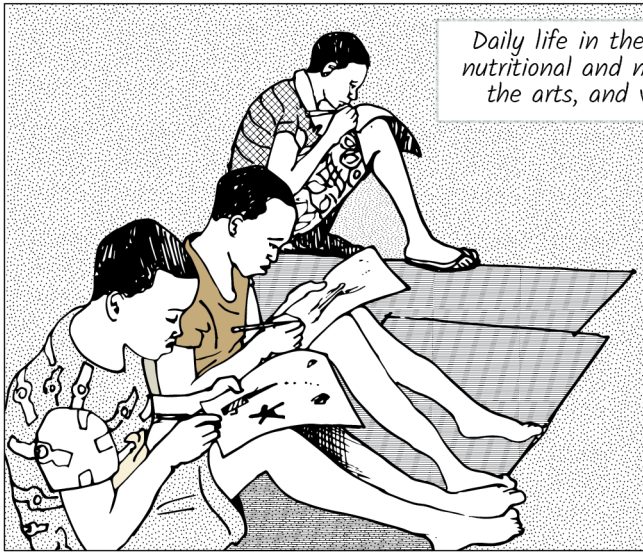
The reintegration of children who escaped the LRA was done through reception centres...



...managed by us and by other humanitarian organisations

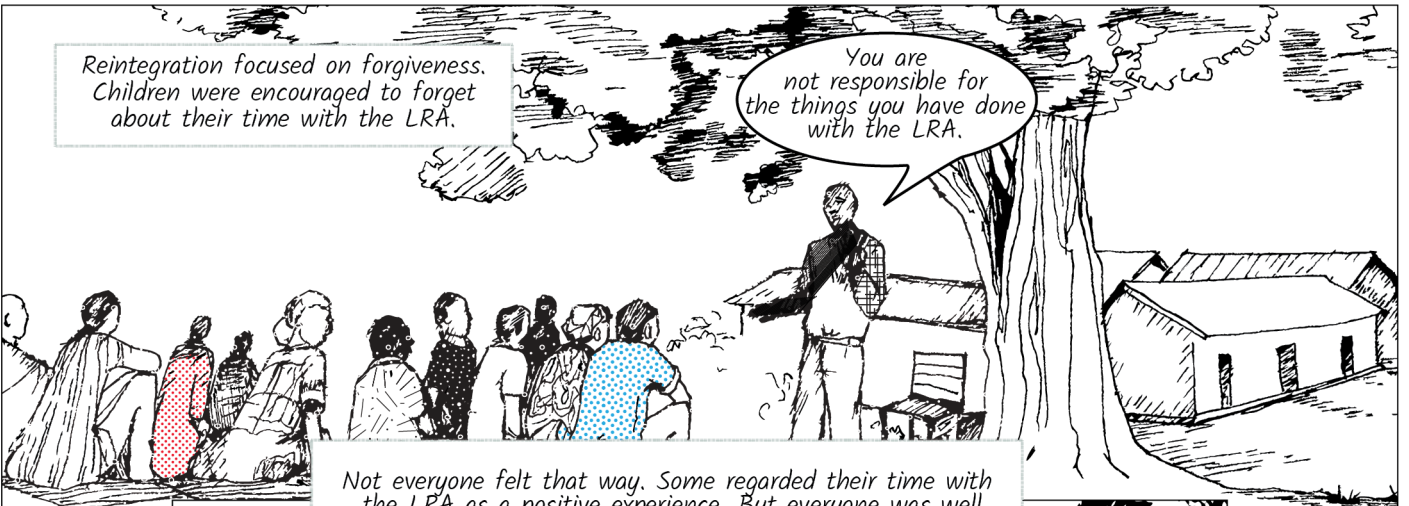


Daily life in the centers focused on nutritional and medical needs, sports, the arts, and vocational training.

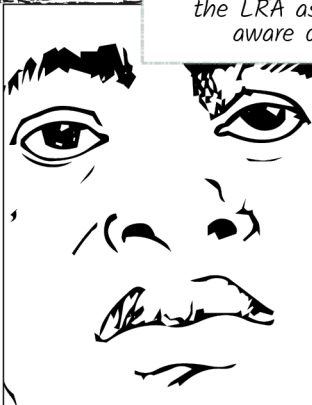


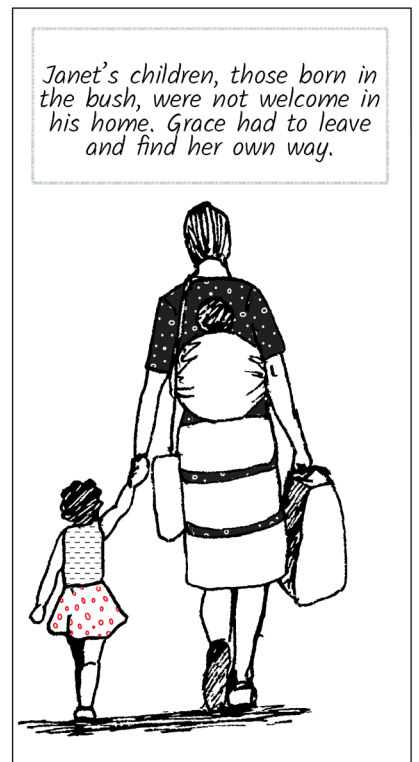
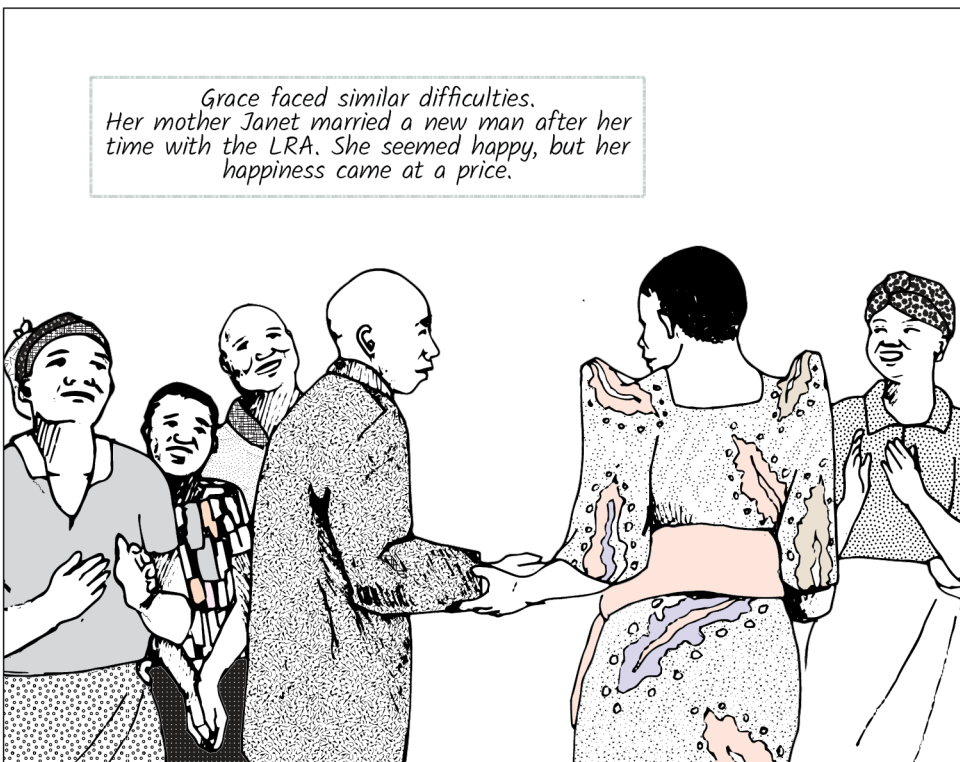
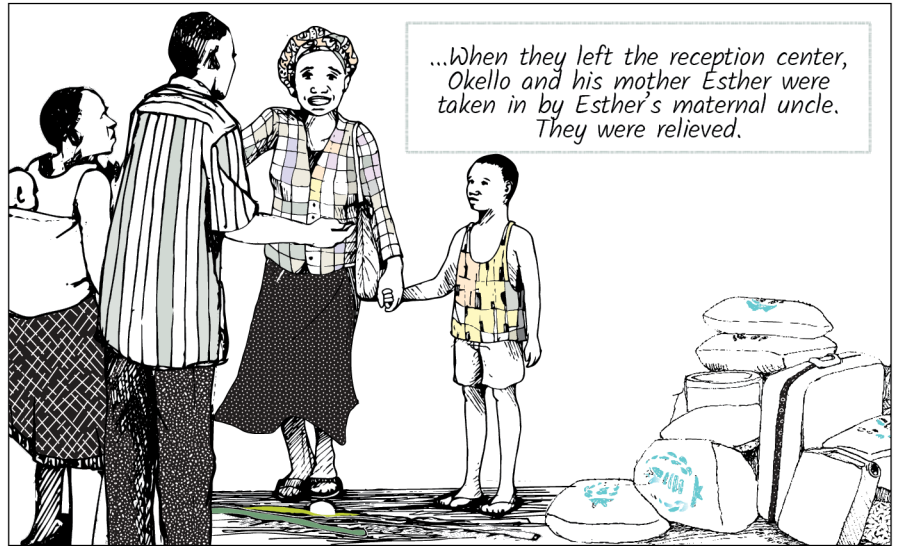
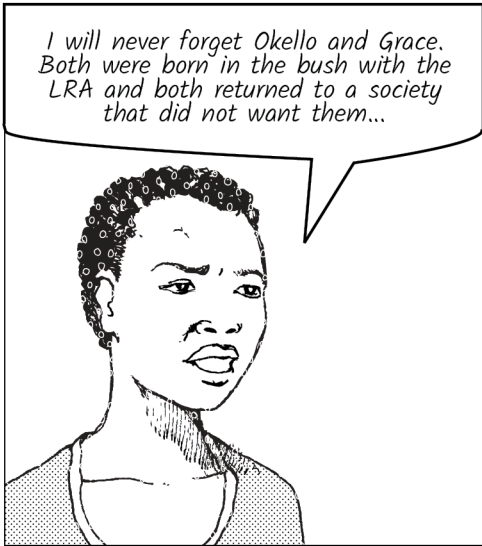
Reintegration focused on forgiveness. Children were encouraged to forget about their time with the LRA.

You are not responsible for the things you have done with the LRA.



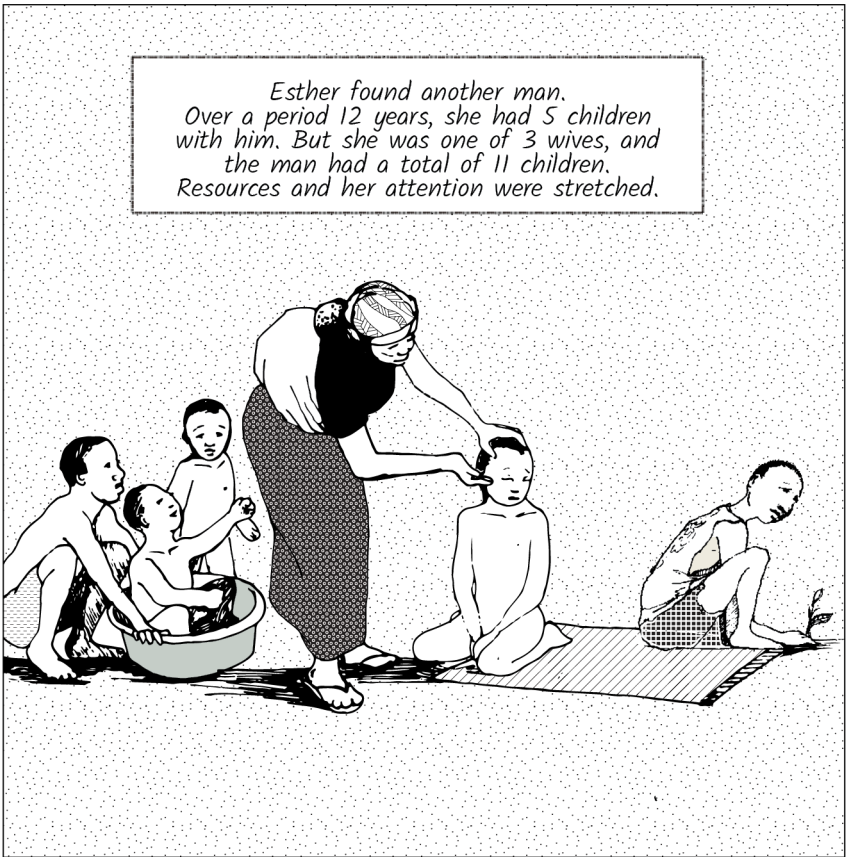
Not everyone felt that way. Some regarded their time with the LRA as a positive experience. But everyone was well aware of the answers their counsellors expected.



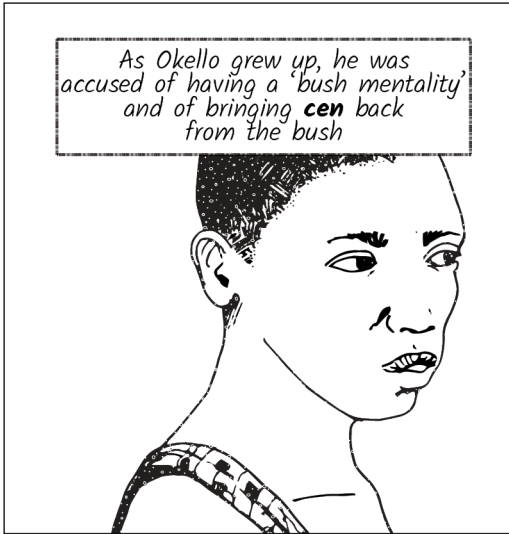




Okello and his mother also left their uncle in search of a new home



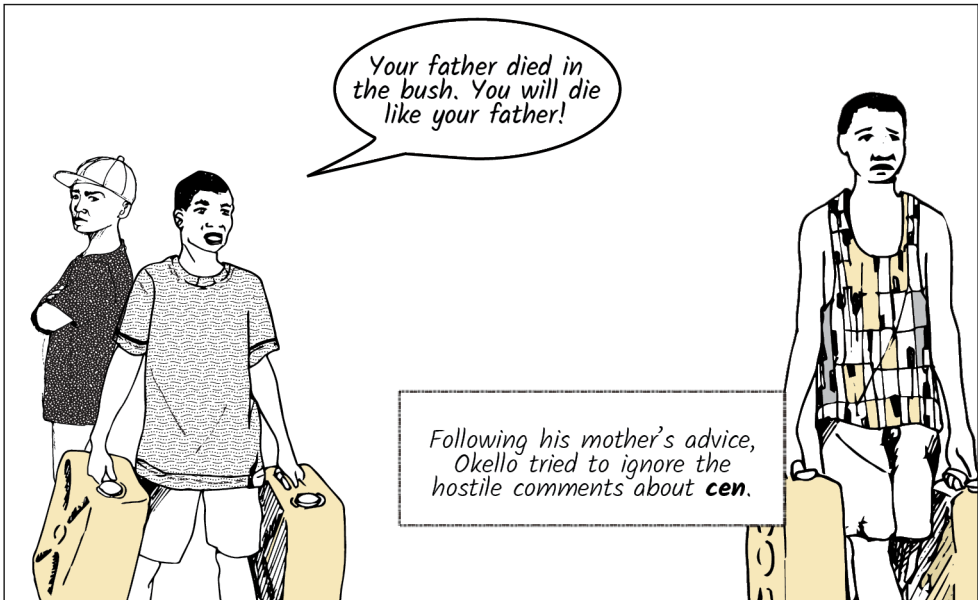
Esther found another man. Over a period 12 years, she had 5 children with him. But she was one of 3 wives, and the man had a total of 11 children. Resources and her attention were stretched.



As Okello grew up, he was accused of having a 'bush mentality' and of bringing **cen** back from the bush



Our father is wasting time taking care of you!

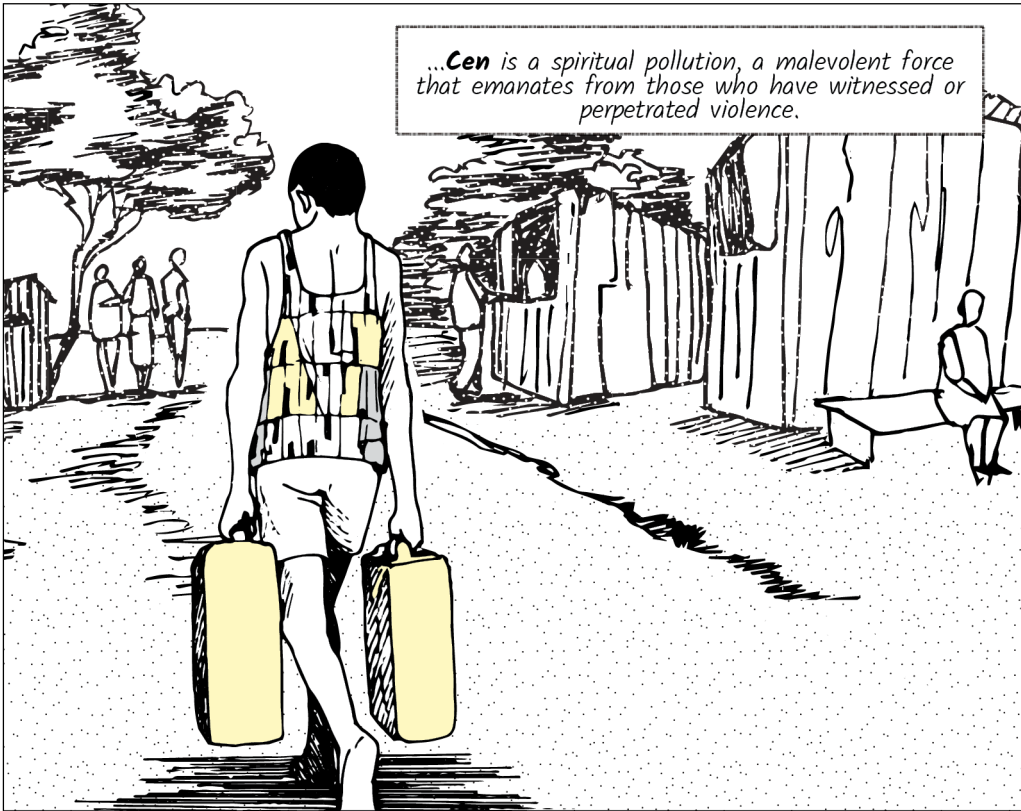


Your father died in the bush. You will die like your father!

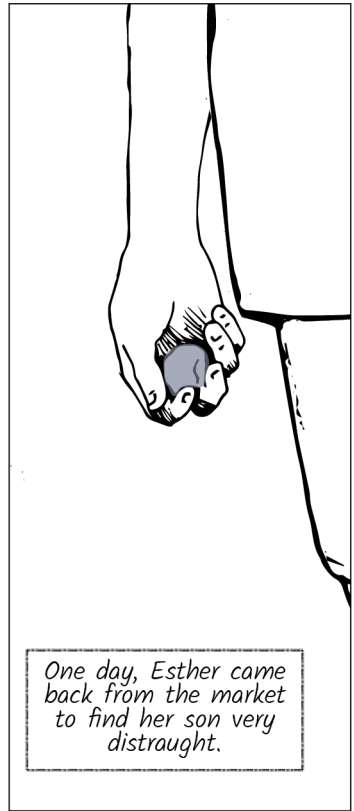
Following his mother's advice, Okello tried to ignore the hostile comments about **cen**.



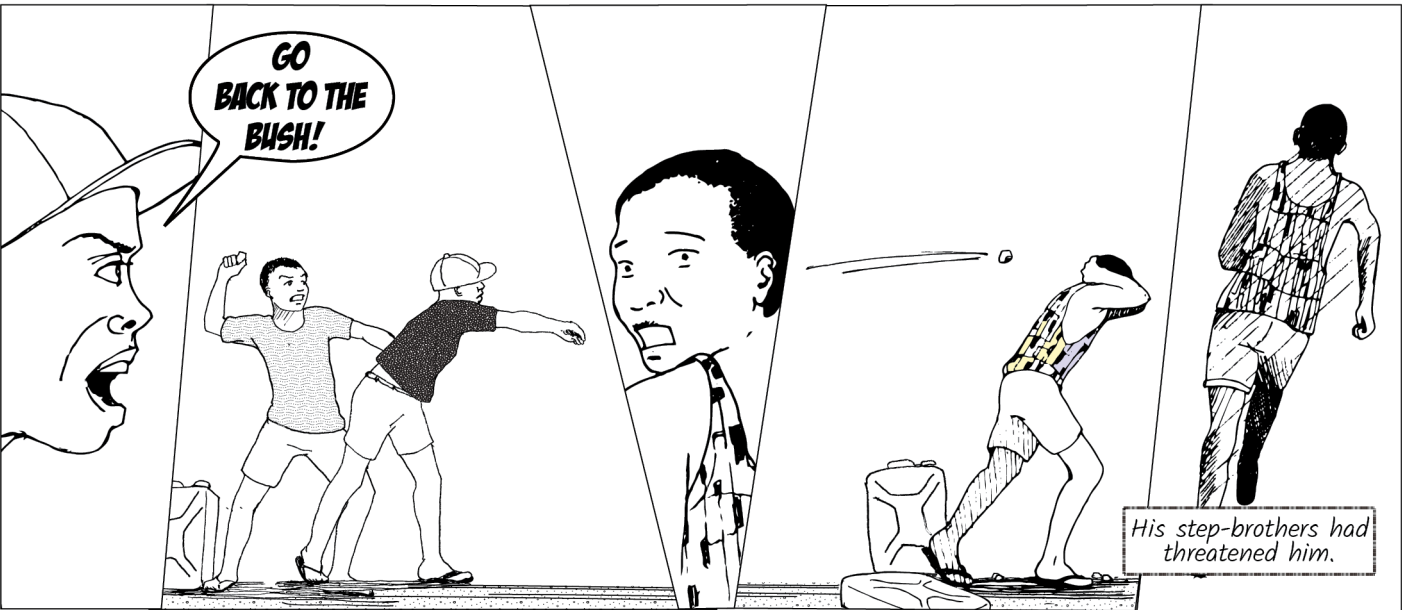
Fear of **cen** is part of why these children are rejected...



...*Cen* is a spiritual pollution, a malevolent force that emanates from those who have witnessed or perpetrated violence.

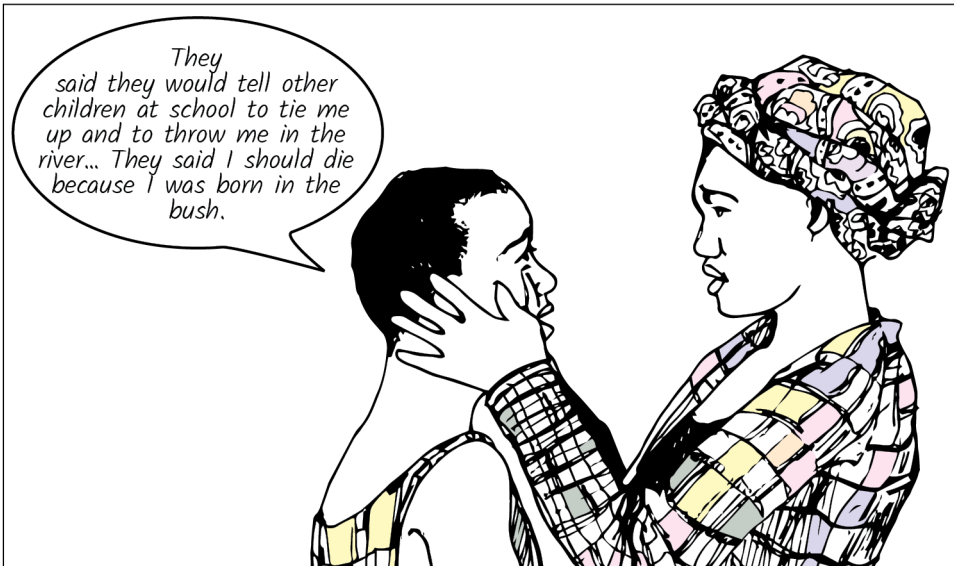


One day, Esther came back from the market to find her son very distraught.



**GO
BACK TO THE
BUSH!**

His step-brothers had threatened him.



They said they would tell other children at school to tie me up and to throw me in the river... They said I should die because I was born in the bush.



The following day, Okello left for his paternal aunt's home in Apaa.

Attending school was difficult for Grace. Her uncle was reluctant to pay her fees. At school, she was often made to feel like an outcast.



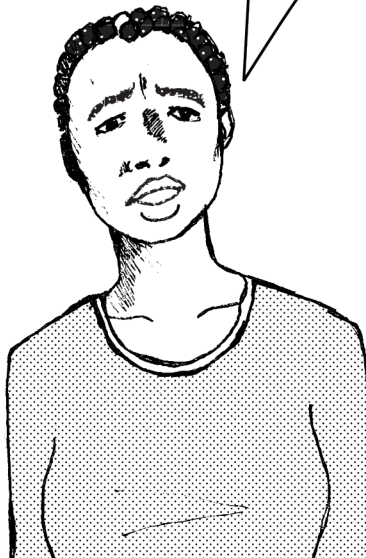
"You have bush mentality!"



Perhaps to escape, she eloped with a young man at the age of 14.



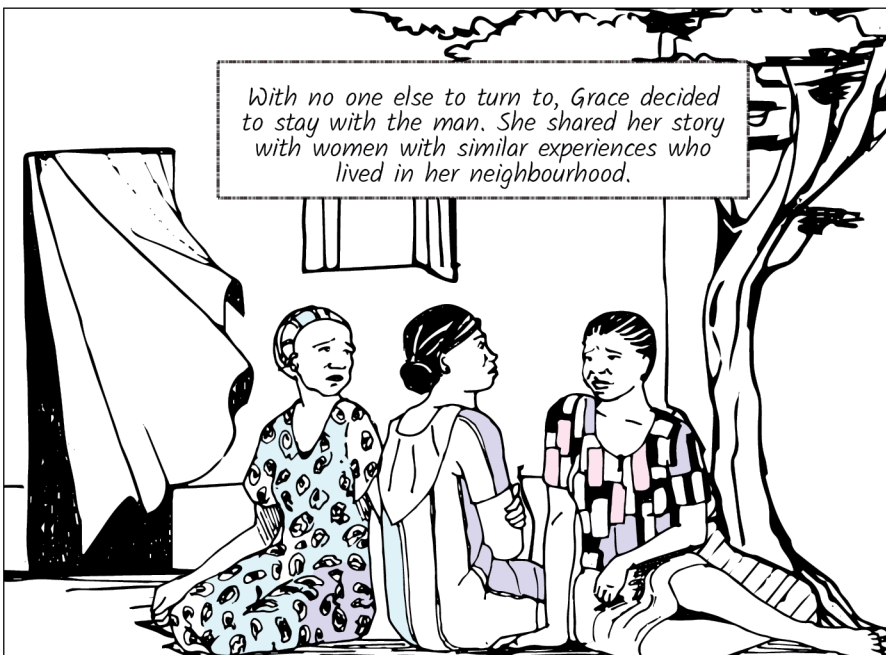
The relationship did not go well. Things went bad after he found out she was 'a child from the bush'...



...He started to beat her badly. While Grace was pregnant with his 2nd child, he took on another wife and seemed unwilling to care for Grace



With no one else to turn to, Grace decided to stay with the man. She shared her story with women with similar experiences who lived in her neighbourhood.



Accept your fate and stay quiet. Where else will you go?



Grace suffers from trauma. As a young child in the bush, she witnessed her babysitter being shot dead.



She also witnessed women being beaten. Now, she herself is being beaten by her husband.



And she has nowhere to go.



Rejected, she has pinned her hopes on her father, Dominic Ongwen, being released from imprisonment in The Hague. She longs to be reunited with him.



She has a picture of him on her phone symbolizing, perhaps, her hope for a better future.



Our approach to reintegration was overly simplistic, with devastating consequences.



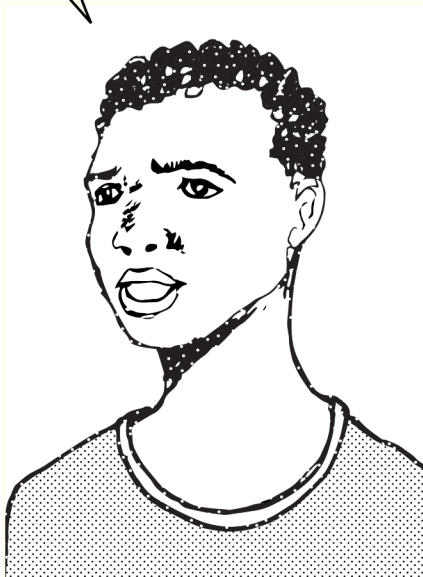
Seeing what has happened to Grace and Okello...



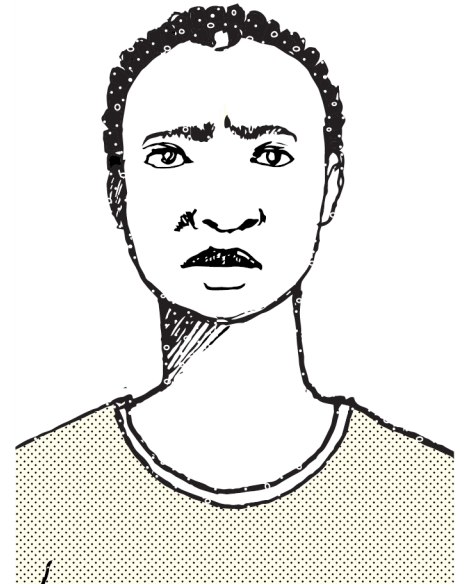
I realize their enduring distress is not exceptional. There are countless other women and children in similar situations.



I cannot say the care we provided has led to successful integration.



Why did we show so little interest in following up on the welfare of these women and children after they left us?



Okello hopes to go to school in Apaa, while also helping tend his uncle's land. But his uncle is unwilling to pay school fees, and Okello is forced to work long hours for little pay.



With little to hope for in his future, Okello asks...



Where will my future be?



END