

Integration of the Sudanese “Lost Boys” In Boston, Massachusetts USA, 2002¹

By Martin Masumbuko Muhindi and Kiganzi Nyakato

I. Introduction

For many years, civil war in the Sudan, located in north-central Africa, has brought the Moslem northern part of the country in conflict with the non-Moslem south. These hostilities have caused many children in the southern Sudan to be orphaned. Around 1987, many orphaned ("lost") children fled on foot scores and hundreds of miles east to Ethiopia, where they were housed in refugee camps. While some then returned to the Sudan, many young Sudanese were transferred south to the Kakuma refugee camp in Northern Kenya. After several years while war continued in the Sudan, programs were organized to resettle many of the youths in the United States. This resettlement program of "Lost Boys" received wide publicity as the Sudanese youths arrived in the United States between 2000 and 2001. This study summarizes interviews in 2002 with Sudanese refugees settled around Boston, Massachusetts. (Only boys were studied; girls were settled separately, in far fewer numbers because the girls are easily and quickly integrated into the Sudanese community for their gender benefits to the families that take them in.) The study seeks to articulate the views of the "Lost Boys" of their conditions before leaving Africa and after arriving in the United States.

The main objective of this research was to investigate how Sudanese youth, formerly of Kakuma refugee camp, are resettling into American society and life in Boston. The study interviewed the key players involved with the migration of the Sudanese youth to the US: namely, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR Kenya and Washington DC); the International Organization for Migration (IOM Kenya), Government of Kenya; International Rescue Committee (IRC Washington DC and Boston); several US resettlement agencies; foster families; volunteers in Boston; and Christian organizations and individuals.

The study is interested in giving the Lost Boys the opportunity to tell their story. The press has repeatedly told their story. Their situation has been discussed and analyzed by professionals, policy makers, and institutional care givers. The boys have never told their own story. Should the data warrant it, these interviews of themselves might provide data for a publishable article. This is in keeping with the Conventions of the Rights of Children, particularly with reference to Article 12 (1) and Article 13 (1), where it is a recognized right for a child to freely express his or her own opinion on matters affecting the child and to seek, receive, and impart information and ideas.

¹ This research was funded by the Mellon-MIT Program on NGO's and Forced Migration

The data collected include their views of the full resettlement process. The study focuses on what has worked and not worked. It looks at the orientation, training, and expectations born in Kakuma Camp, and documents what happened to the boys, what they are doing now, and what problems they have encountered. The study identifies their recommendations for improved resettlement methods and strategies, explores their social, economic and psychological integration into US society, and documents their perceptions and opinions on the whole settlement process.

Generally the Sudanese youth have settled into US life and society well. The Sudanese refugees, like any other refugee group in Boston, face numerous resettlement and reintegration challenges. However, it is felt that they are managing much better than most, and this research examined the reasons behind the apparent success of their integration. Although they arrived with high expectations of immediately going to school and becoming professionals, the majority of them have adjusted to the reality of working first while saving for college.

II. Hypotheses and Key Issues

The authors' main hypothesis is that the resettlement process of the Lost Boys had significant problems that could have been avoided. In the conclusion are summarized some findings based on preliminary conversations with the Lost Boys about their experiences and the resettlement institutions.

III. The Research Team

The research team is particularly well suited to do this research because of its prior experience among Sudanese refugees. Martin Masumbuko Muhindi was involved with the Sudanese refugees from the time they were received in the Lokichoggio transit center in Kenya in 1982. Being part of the UNHCR protection staff and specifically this resettlement exercise in Kakuma Camp, he is personally known to and trusted by the majority of the Sudanese refugees. Martin was in Boston during the year of this research, studying in the MAHA (Master of Arts in Humanitarian Assistance) program at Tufts University. The second team member, Kiganzi Nyakato, worked for five years among vulnerable Sudanese refugee groups with the UN World Food Programme in Uganda, host to over 200,000 Sudanese refugees. She has experience in participatory interviewing and is conversant with Sudanese culture. She was also in Boston studying in the MAHA program. After arriving in Boston, the authors interacted with the resettled boys, their host families, and the NGOs providing the boys with services. They were involved in the Roca Community Center in Chelsea, which serves the largest number of Sudanese refugees in Boston. They hosted the boys at Tufts University and maintained weekly meetings with the boys in Boston.

IV. Research Methodology

This study deals with the institutions and people who were involved in the resettlement process in the United States, in the Boston area. It also surveys the opinions,

ideas, and concerns of the Lost Boys themselves. Both approaches were necessary to obtain an integrated view of the resettlement process. Approximately 20 boys were interviewed, a random sample generated from records of the International Rescue Committee, the International Institute of Boston, and Catholic Charities, from a complete listing of the 200 boys currently living in the greater Boston area. Also interviewed were some staff people, such as agency officials and foster parents.

Primary data from the Lost Boys were gathered through direct taped interviews. The researchers developed a questionnaire with open-ended questions. It was administered separately to each boy in the sample in his home, or at get-togethers, or any conducive setting where they could meet with the interviewers. These interviews were transcribed and used as primary data in the research.

V. Background and Findings

The story of the Sudanese youth has been told repeatedly by various news media and journalists, and individuals have even written award-winning books on the subject of the “Lost Boys.”² From individual accounts during interviews with the Sudanese youth, it is clear that what they experienced and suffered during their flight from the villages, journey to camps in Ethiopia, and eventual refuge in Kakuma Camp, can never be fully captured in words. In his own words, one recounted:

We walked from my home in Sudan; there were no cars. So we walked for two months to Ethiopia and then to Lokichoggio. I walked with my brothers and sisters and other people from my village. Some of us lost our lives on the way because there were many dangers; we had no food, there were many diseases, there was no water, and wild animals attacked us. Lions and hyenas especially fed on us. We were only kids, most of us only seven years old. We could not defend ourselves or each other.

After this harrowing ordeal, the Sudanese Lost Boys eventually found relative safety in the Kakuma refugee camp. They were settled into an unaccompanied minors program that placed the younger boys in Sudanese foster families; older boys were placed together in groups, and the girls were absorbed into the wider Sudanese community. After ten years, some Sudanese youth became politically involved in the community, others returned to south Sudan to fight in the war, and some married and moved into their own homes. They now faced other fatal risks; e.g., that of being forcibly conscripted into either rebel or government forces, or being harassed or killed by local Turkana³ competing with the refugees for scarce resources.

UNHCR and the US Immigration Service decided that the most “durable solution” -- to protect the Sudanese youth from these risks and to protect their lives -- was complete resettlement in the US. After a two-year interviewing process, the Sudanese

² Donattela Lorch, DC, Ellen Barry, Pulitzer Prize Winner March 2002

³ a tribal group that lives in the Northwest of Kenya near the border with Sudan

youth arrived in several locations throughout the US and were met by resettlement agency staff at local airports. The resettlement agencies later admitted that the placement was at first random, but later brothers or first cousins were kept together and those who had lived in minor groups in Kakuma Camp.⁴ The resettlement agencies in Boston had arranged for foster families to adopt the minors, and older Sudanese youth were placed in their own already furnished apartments.

1. Origins

A. Names and Ages of Sudanese Youth

All the Sudanese interviewed possess Christian first names and Sudanese middle names. They also have several aliases. Their middle names, they say, are their own names while the third name belongs to their fathers. This is equivalent to “son of.” The Sudanese are particularly proud of this third name, their father’s name, as it provides them with a much-needed sense of identity and family belonging.

The Sudanese respondents' ages ranged at the time of interviews (2002) from 15 to 25 years old. This means that they arrived in Kakuma camp between ages 5 and 15. Some minors were even younger. One Sudanese said that birthdays are not usually known or celebrated in traditional Sudanese culture. More important festivals are weddings, funerals, and others. So the ages are guess/estimates made by the agencies when the boys first were received, or by the Sudanese youth themselves when asked how old they were. Most of the boys said their birth date falls on the first of January of whatever year came into their minds at the time of the interview.

B. Origin and Tribal Affiliation

Most of the Sudanese youths who were interviewed originate from the Dinka tribe of Southern Sudan, with a few from other Sudanese tribes. These proportions reflect first, that the war in southern Sudan was being fought in their homeland, and second, as observed in a report by Radda Bannen, a Swedish child protection agency, that the Dinka caregivers who were employed by the receiving agencies to care for the children when they first arrived in the camps favored the Dinka boys over those from other tribes also affected by war in Sudan, the Nuer and the Equatoria tribes.

2. Experience during Years in the Refugee Camp in Kenya

A. Difficult Conditions and Insecurity in Kakuma Camp

All the Sudanese agreed that life in Kakuma Camp was very difficult and insecure. Many problems were intensified because of overcrowding. According to a

⁴ USCCB, Washington DC.

UNHCR official, the camp held 120,000 refugees, yet was originally intended for only 20,000 refugees.

Typically, one Lost Boy reported, “Kakuma Camp was not safe; the refugees were not safe. The local Kenyan people were very hostile; they were not friendly towards Sudanese and all refugees in general. They sneaked into the camps at night to kill or steal food.” Another Sudanese described his relief at leaving Kakuma Camp:

It was good to leave Kakuma Camp. Every place has something good and something bad. We were living in Kenya and we got everything free, for example, going to school. The Turkana used to shoot people in Kakuma Camp at night. They would shoot anyone: Ugandans, Ethiopians, and Sudanese refugees. I was happy to leave that insecurity. This was my main reason for wanting to leave Kakuma camp.

Another said that he feared for his life because the Turkana were hostile and particularly harassed the Sudanese. He wanted a better life in America.

All the Sudanese imagined “in their minds” that the US was a safer place. To give a deeper insight on what this personal safety means to them, one Sudanese said:

When we came [to the US] it was very confusing; we were afraid to walk around because of our color and because we feared that we would be abducted. But now we have learned that this is not the case here in Boston, and we now know that insecurity and constantly fearing for our lives are no longer issues in our lives. We don't have problems with the community here although some of us have been harassed by Latinos. But one of my brothers was knifed for no reason.

Food insecurity also played an important role in making conditions harsh for the Sudanese in Kakuma camp. A number of Sudanese told that they used to complain about the insufficient food rations, but UNHCR explained that there were too many refugees, and the agency was unable to provide enough food for all. A second comment on the food was its monotony: the diet consisted of only beans, maize meal, and vegetable oil.

B. Social Relationships in Kakuma Refugee Camp and their Continuance

The Sudanese remember that they led a traditional lifestyle in Kakuma Camp. This was a communal way of living, sharing, and assisting one another. One said:

We Dinka live in a social way and depend on one another. We help one another. For example, when we were walking, different agencies gave us food; the strong helped the weak and frail to carry it. We divided the work among us. We cooked and ate together.

This conditioning has stood them in good stead in the US, where they have carried on the tight “family” groups, and in many cases these have provided emotional support and a buffer against culture shock. While older youth were in such communal groups, life in Kakuma Camp was different for minors. They were resettled into “foster families.” Five minors were placed in each Sudanese homestead. The main objective was that the minors could learn the Dinka way of life and culture. The minors formed very strong ties with the foster families.

A Sudanese minor who was interviewed told that he still communicates with the head of the family and sends him money sometimes. The two speak to each other on the phone regularly. A Sudanese former minor (he was not a minor when resettled in the US) told us that he lived with fellow minors in house groups while in Kakuma Camp; some of these are his housemates in Boston now. Another one remembered, “We lived together, we cooked for ourselves, went to school and did activities together. We built our own houses with the materials that the agencies gave us.” The common thread in all their accounts is the spirit of “togetherness” and equity. For example, one Sudanese said that they built houses, one at a time, until everyone got one. Another tells of how they used to comfort each other. They would tell each other not to feel bad and that things will be okay later. “If one of us received bad news, we’d sit together and talk about it or hold that person. We learned how to console and comfort one another.” Another Sudanese commented:

We are the same group of five, coming right from Kakuma Camp to Boston. [Internally] nothing has changed; we still help each other and share everything. For example, today I will cook, tomorrow my brother will cook, and the same with washing dishes. Some of us are not working, so when those who are working get their paychecks, we remove \$20-40 to give to our brother, to support him because he doesn’t have any money.

These attitudes have continued in Boston. The Sudanese youth all say that they are still very caring towards one another and meet to solve problems and help each other. This help may explain why, so far, they have adapted very quickly to life in the US and appear to have fitted in well.

C. Community Programs in Kakuma Camp

It is curious to note that the majority of the Sudanese interviewed do not really remember the community programs that were run by the camp agencies and UNHCR. The Sudanese speak of a Sudanese cultural training program that may have been specifically targeted at the lost boys. One Sudanese talked of a youth association program and club:

... but these were more concerned about Sudanese culture. They taught us about our culture and how to preserve it in our minds, how to put it into practice in our lives. We were also taught how children and young people should speak and address others in the community.

Another said that the Sudanese cultural program helped him to learn about and deal with his identity. He can now talk about his Sudanese culture. He also spoke of the language programs that taught English at all levels. Students were organized into talking groups. This facilitated dialogue throughout the multi-national community in Kakuma Camp, and in his opinion this was the best program for this reason. This intense interest in and appreciation for being taught Sudanese culture, or refreshing knowledge of it, may have occurred because the boys had matured to an age when they could appreciate it and were looking for that unique cultural identity, especially when surrounded by and living with peoples with differing traditions and cultures, as is the case in Kakuma Camp. Earlier in Ethiopia the Sudanese may have been too young or traumatized to appreciate a similar program.

Other programs were available in Kakuma Camp. One Sudanese youth was working with the IRC in the camp and actually trained as an assistant nurse to assist in community preventive medicine programs and to raise awareness about the spread of diseases. There were various sports activities and sports programs that helped pass the time in the camp.

D. School Education in Kakuma Camp

It is clear that the concept of education is exceedingly important to the Sudanese youth. One Sudanese said that from as far back as the boys can remember, the UN always told them, “Education is your mother and your father.” This is their slogan, and the respondent added, “They knew very well that we had lost our fathers and relatives. So wherever we went, they employed teachers to teach us under trees, no matter how small their budget. We always got education.”

It is clear, first, that as children they transferred their expectations of what their parents might have provided for them (had they been alive and with them) onto hopes of what education could bring them if they pursued it. Second, it is not surprising that the boys enjoyed going to school in Kakuma Camp. School broke the terrible monotony of life in the camp. One Sudanese minor said he enjoyed the education he received, even though there was a lack of trained teachers, equipment, and resources, in comparison with schools in the US. “But it was okay. One could pursue education if one wanted. It depended on a person’s interest; if you wanted to learn you enjoyed it.” Another Sudanese described going to school as an escape: “Life in Kakuma Camp was difficult because conditions were bad. I enjoyed education. I had nothing else to do but go to school.” There seems to be some confusion over what exactly the Sudanese were told while still in Kakuma Camp about education in the US. One Sudanese feels that the US government sponsored the resettlement program so that the boys could go to school.

E. Feelings on Leaving Kakuma Camp

At leaving, an overwhelming majority of the Sudanese reported feelings of sadness, depression, and inability to sleep especially in the week leading up to departure from the camp. “I felt sad and lonely because I was thinking about my people in Kakuma refugee camp. We lived in a group, and we used to share everything. When I came here I knew I would be dealing with new people.” Others speak of the relief they felt that they were actually leaving and yet guilt that their friends and relatives would remain behind in Kakuma Camp. “Yet I wanted to leave to get my education, and I wanted to leave the camp.” This same Sudanese thinks that everyone should have been resettled because they all experienced the same difficulties. “The chance to come to the US should have been extended to all without discrimination. I am not happy here because I am always thinking about my people back home. But I did not choose to be here and they did not choose to stay there. Somebody else made that choice.”

One Sudanese minor who was interviewed said that he did not feel much when he was leaving for the US. This may have been because he was younger and had known travel and uprooting from a very tender age. He remarked, “I did not know where I was going. Out of the middle of nowhere I was going to the middle of nowhere.” He reports that he was not excited but had made up his mind to try to get a better life for himself, no matter what it took and what he would have to endure. “When I left Kakuma Camp I thought that it was at least going to stay the same and at most I thought that things would be much better.”

3. Expectations at Time of Transition to the US

A. Expectations when Coming to the US

The Sudanese had very high expectations when they came to the US. Sources of expectations include the cultural orientation given by the International Organization of Migration (IOM), which gave the Sudanese more ideas about what they would find in the US. One Sudanese youth recalls speaking to an American who told them that America is a land of opportunities, that lazy people cannot survive in the US. By this account, only hardworking people are wanted in the US because they have to work and go to school. The Sudanese youth said he has since observed that this is true. Some youths interviewed also spoke of Sudanese immigrants resettled earlier in the US who write back to Kakuma Camp with accounts and photographs of their lives in the US. Some such factors had raised expectations and created images independent from those of the official cultural orientation about what the youths would find in the US.

The most immediate expectation was to be secure and safe in the US by being out of Kakuma Camp. In the US they hoped for an environment in which to move freely, express themselves without fear, and pursue their dreams of education and professional careers. A Sudanese notes that he can now do what he likes: “We followed the rules when we were resettled. There are good conditions here; people are calm. So we can abide by the rules; people come to talk to us. I find the US as I had expected.” Another

Sudanese said, "I feel that I have a perfect life because I have a job and I go to school. I will become qualified. My life is better than when I was living in Kakuma."

A second major expectation was education. In fact some said education was their only reason for coming to the US.

We came here with the purpose of going to school. When we did the interviews with Immigration and Naturalization Services (INS) and Joint Volunteer Agency (JVA) we asked them whether we would go to school, and they told us that we would go to school. But when we came here, the situation is different. [About education] we have never even seen government officials.

Such quoted statements suggest that the image of schooling held by some of the Sudanese was very much what they were accustomed to in Kakuma Camp; namely, free, available, and dependent on the desire of the student. The comment concerning US government officials implies that the speaker expected officials to address or meet with the Sudanese lost boys, as perhaps Kenyan officials did in Kakuma Camp. It seems that the speaker did not know the difference in administrative structures of the US and the Kenyan governments. Whereas US internal resettlement agencies in Boston lobby and compete [i.e. have been competitively awarded contracts] for the care of refugees, their counterparts in Kakuma Camp are the UNHCR and other humanitarian agencies, not resource-short departments of the Government of Kenya concerned with the welfare of refugees. A few other youths interviewed were disappointed to find that going to school was not an immediate occurrence. One Sudanese youth expected to go to school on the same day that he arrived. He was initially disappointed but finally made it into school after living fourteen months in Boston. He had not expected that it would take so long. Another Sudanese youth expected to find people to help him to go to school straight away.

Overall, results of expectations of schooling in Boston have been disappointing. Now in the US the youths all hope that the obstacle of having no money will not stop them from achieving their dream of getting an education. In the interviews they showed a positive attitude in acquiescing to temporarily shelving their aspirations to go to school in order to work to pay bills and rent. One said, "I see things differently now that I have arrived in the US. I now know that I can only get education through struggling." Another youth disappointedly commented that if he had stayed in Kakuma Camp, he would have been in secondary school. But in Boston, he goes to work instead. "All I wanted to do was set my mind on school. Yet I am not able to go to school because, if I go, who will take care of my other concerns?" Another said he realized that because he is above eighteen in the US he has to take care of himself. This is a welcome change because he is in control of his life. "I know that I can go to school anytime later on. I just need to get a fixed job so that I can plan my time."

Some Sudanese youth found other aspects of US life different from expectations. One said he was not expecting to find drugs or people using drugs. He has also found that

American teenagers are extremely different from Sudanese teenagers in their priorities and ways of thinking.

In sum, during interviews the Sudanese immigrants in the US reported expecting to work, go to school, pay their bills, live their lives as good citizens, and ultimately contribute to the freedom struggle in southern Sudan. They are yet to establish themselves, but expect to do so in time and learn skills of time management. The Sudanese seem to have realistically reassessed their expectations, especially postponing their ambition to go to school in face of the need to stay self-reliant.

B. Priorities

According to their reports, the Sudanese youths came to the US with six priorities in mind:

1. The most important was to get out of the unsafe and life-threatening situation in Kakuma camp. Danger was caused mainly by Turkana harassment, murder campaigns, and risks of being abducted back to Sudan to fight in the war.
2. The second priority was to achieve freedom, by which the youths mean being able to move freely at all times, being actively involved in community activities, and expressing their opinions and views without fear. They say that freedom is possible because “the police and the government in the US are doing their work.” Actually freedom and personal safety seem closely related, and it is hard to differentiate the two issues when the youth describe their priorities.
3. The third priority is going to school, as already mentioned. Many of the Sudanese came intending primarily to further their education and go back home. “This is the major reason that brought us. I will go back to Sudan after I finish my engineering degree.”
4. A fourth priority is to get a good life, which for the moment means to have enough to eat and to be in control of their destinies. A "good life" would include ample time to visit one another, which is scarce now because of their busy schedules.
5. A fifth priority for the Sudanese is to send money back home to their people left behind in Kakuma camp.
6. The sixth priority is to return eventually to Sudan and as educated young professionals help rebuild Sudanese society.

C. Evaluations of Resettlement

1. Media Portrayal of the Lost Boys

The Sudanese immigrants have mixed feelings about how the media have portrayed them in the news (in newspapers and on television). Some say that even if the media have exaggerated their story, it was a good thing because the US community became interested and this interest has translated into support and help. One Sudanese minor said:

I think that the media have given the US society some idea about the Sudan and about how the Sudanese can fit into this society. People are aware of us; we can go to school or get jobs. I don't care if news people have exaggerated. They have spread information about us. The public now knows about us; that we are new and will eventually become a part of their society.

Another Sudanese commented that in spite of the accounts about them in the newspapers, some Americans, especially the younger ones, do not believe what happened to the Sudanese and ask them whether the story is really true. "They wonder why we came to the US. I think they really don't know what happened in Sudan." One Sudanese complained that some reporters don't respect their wishes. He said:

Some of the media people are good, while others are bad. They helped bring our issues and the problems of Sudan to prominence. Yet one time a journalist took our picture while we were eating, against our wishes, but he didn't listen to us. Sometimes I think that they benefited more than us. They should respect us and ask us before they take our pictures.

The majority of the Sudanese believe that the media should shift the focus of attention from them to the people who are still suffering in Sudan. "The media should let the world know that our people don't have food, medicines, and health services. Our people are dying everyday."

2. Title of "Lost Boys"

The Sudanese youth have mixed reactions to the title of "Lost Boys." Generally, they do not like the term because it describes them as children, and yet they consider themselves to be grown young men. One Sudanese wondered why anyone would want to call anyone "lost":

We don't know where the word "lost" came from. It resulted maybe because we lost our parents in the civil war in Sudan. When someone says that you are lost, then you don't know where you are going, and you have no people to stay with. But we have brothers and sisters. One should change the name to "orphans" because we have lost our parents. I am here

because of the "Lost Boys" title. We know that our people are not lost but have been killed. The title has negative connotations; for example, we know some people see the name and think, "This is a worthless person," and this gives us negative reactions.

Another Sudanese says he doesn't know why he became a "Lost Boy":

I heard that name [first] here in the US, but before I came here I was called a minor. I am a "Lost Boy" because that is the title that was given to me. I don't like the name because we are not lost. Being called lost means that you don't know where you come from. If I were to change the name I would make it the "Young Generation of Sudan."

One Sudanese who connects the title of "Lost Boy" with identity and a father-son relationship said:

If a child does not have parents, then that child is lost because he doesn't have a father. Some Americans want to know why we are lost. The title should be "Boys from Sudan" because it is true we have spent a long time without our parents. Parents and family should guide us. If a father were there to guide us then we would be called son of so and so. But we don't have that so we are "Lost Boys."

Some of them say that title is no longer relevant because it is a title of an incident, an event that happened to them. They are no longer lost boys: "I am not a boy, but I am called a boy. I would prefer to be called a young man or a gentleman." A Sudanese minor was of two minds over the title:

There is title for everything, but this title does not have to do with what happened to us. The Sudanese should find a title for us. On the other hand, many of us do not know what is in our country. How do we describe it? So we are lost because of not knowing what is in Sudan, or what is going on there. Neither do we know how we can help. So perhaps it is not a bad title.

Another Sudanese said that he is not lost because he knows his country and will one day go back to it:

My country is not the first country to go to war. There is war in the world. The title is not good. We are not ignorant. Lost things are not good because they are useless. I preferred being called an unaccompanied minor because that is what we were. They can call us "Boys of Sudan!"

Some other Sudanese, when commenting on the title, agreed that it bothers them to be called "Lost Boys." Because of the war in Sudan:

We lost our parents, families and children died. I am a "Lost Boy" because I am away from my family. If I could see them or communicate with them I would no longer be a Lost Boy. The title bothers me because we are like everyone else; one is either an American or Sudanese but not a "Lost Boy." "I would like to be called a "Sudanese Young Man."

To some the title reminds them of the painful events experienced in Sudan, which they do not want to remember.

Most Sudanese agree that they got to know that they were called "Lost Boys" only here in the US. One specifically recalled receiving a letter in the mail addressed to the "Lost Boys of Sudan." That was when he realized that he is called a "Lost Boy." He said, "I don't want to tell them to change the name because it helps feature our story and the plight of those left behind. But it is not a good name. I would appeal to the media to appeal to the world to help bring here those that remained too."

3. Issues and Problems with Resettlement Procedures

A. Comments on the Interview Process

The resettlement interview procedure seems in the opinion of the Lost Boys to have been very fair because it began with the original lists of minors from Ethiopia as a qualifying first round. The older Sudanese say they found their names put up on the notice board and assumed that the community elders forwarded their names. The second round of interviews involved verification of ration cards and names. At this stage, they say, fraud may have started because some minors had already left Kakuma Camp for Sudan or been killed. These complications are reasons, they think, that the resettlement procedure took a long time. Another Sudanese youth thought that the problem was at UNHCR. Some files were missing at UNHCR, but only Sudanese files disappeared:

Some of the Sudanese refugees have not come to the US because their cases were denied by UNHCR. There is some corruption because we found out that these lost files were being sold. With the INS interview, we knew that if you could not present your information well, then you failed. With UNHCR we were denied, whether the cases were wrong or right, and files would go missing.

For the minors, the interviewing was daunting if they could not speak English well. One of the older Sudanese said:

The whole process takes a long time. We started in 1999, and I came in 2001. There are still people who did the interviews with us who are yet to come. They kept extending the dates of interviewing and postponing. There was a long wait between the interviews.

It was not clear whether the reasons for the delays were explained to the Sudanese. There were too many interviews, and the process was fatiguing and stressful, especially when they were not sure whether or not they would qualify for resettlement. Of the people doing the interviews, the Sudanese thought that some had asked tricky questions to trap them.

B. Resettlement Agencies

The Sudanese are grateful for the help that the resettlement agencies gave them when they had just arrived in Boston. However they say that the agencies cut off their help too prematurely. For example, one Sudanese said:

The IRC social workers welcomed us at Worcester Airport and took us to the apartment. They were few in the office, so maybe they could not help us much. They brought us money and took us shopping. But they are busy with their work. We spent a lot of time indoors; it was very difficult when we had first arrived. We could not go out because we did not know any place. We sat for three weeks in the apartment, just sitting there.

One Sudanese did not mince his words regarding the resettlement agencies, saying:

I think firstly the resettlement agencies need to be more concerned with us, do more follow-up. They need to do this especially after placing us in apartments and getting us jobs. Landlords become very aggressive when we don't have money, and we don't know how to deal with them. The resettlement agencies are not taking us Sudanese seriously enough.

C. Volunteers and Foster Families

This study emphasizes volunteers, who helped the more independent older youths, as contrasted to foster families, who sheltered younger boys, because the Sudanese minors (under seventeen) all live in foster homes and are less vulnerable than those on their own. The Sudanese spoke very highly of the volunteers and their kindness. They especially want them to know how much they appreciate their support, encouragement, and help since arriving in Boston. One Sudanese said of the volunteers:

At least in Boston we have the volunteers. They are the ones who 'gave much hand' when we had just arrived. They take us around and give us clothes. In my opinion, they work harder than the resettlement agencies because they take us around. There is a volunteer committee that helps us with our interviews. The committee is now involved in education and trying to contact institutions on our behalf. They are doing a lot of things for us. I can ring them up, ask them to come and take me around. They have taken on the responsibility of the resettlement agencies.

Speaking about foster families, one Sudanese said:

Foster families have helped minors very much. They have supported the Lost Boys. But they should let the younger Sudanese keep in touch with older Sudanese and the greater Sudanese community in Boston and in the US. In this way, the children will not forget about their culture and language. They should grow up as Sudanese.

Some foster parents who were interviewed, especially those parenting Sudanese girls, say that they want to encourage their children's ties with the wider Sudanese community and have varying experiences in forging these ties. One said that she let her "daughter" travel to meet family friends and relatives. But the "daughter" was very disappointed that their interest was in the dowry that she could fetch, and she was surprised to find a marriage partner waiting for her. This resulted in very serious disappointment for the girl because her relatives had not been as interested in her while she had been living in Kakuma Camp. She was depressed for many weeks. For this reason her foster mother is reluctant to expose her "daughter" again.

Another problem cited by the foster mothers is the inability of some of them to understand their children or get them to share their feelings. The children may be afraid of annoying their foster families into changing their minds about keeping them. One mother was frustrated that her children seem to tell many lies to her. She wanted to know if lying was normal African behavior. Some of the foster mothers interviewed wonder why the children refuse to comment about their former life in Kakuma Camp. This issue may need further investigation by the foster institutions. Possibly the mothers might require further training in handling emotionally insecure and possibly still-traumatized youngsters. It was not possible to find out how the foster families were selected, and how prepared they were to deal with sensitive children from a different culture.

4. Finances in the US

A. Sources of Income

Most of the Sudanese are working and earning hourly wages. The average is \$10–13 per hour, eight hours per day, for five days every week. Before the immigrants started working, for the first three months, the resettlement agencies gave them pocket money, travel cards, and food stamps. Their value was not clear. The youths are employed in factories, catering facilities, security firms, and stores. The Sudanese working at Logan Airport lost their jobs after the September 11, 2001 tragedy. One recalled, “My supervisor at Logan Airport told me that business was slow, and they will call me back if work picks up again. But they never called me back, and I did not ring to find out because I got another job.” Even the minor who was interviewed works part time, especially in the summer, to make money to send home. The older youths spend their money on paying rent, utility bills, food, an IOM \$35/month loan, and remittances to their families or friends in either Kakuma or Sudan.

B. Remittances

Almost all of the Sudanese (except for two who have no families) send money home to their relatives or friends. The pressure to send money home is very high. One Sudanese said:

Some of the guys in Africa, when they hear that you are in the US, they call you, asking for money and a lot of things. But you have no job and are almost being chased out of the apartment. People think that the US has everything. So when you say that you don't have something, they cannot accept it and call you a bad person. I feel guilty, you know, I cannot support my people back home even though I try as much as I can. But it is very difficult here.

A second Sudanese sends 30 per cent of his monthly income home to his parents. Another told us that a friend travels from Kakuma Camp to Nairobi to call him for money. So he has to send money to pay for the journey to and from Kakuma, in addition to the money he needs. "This can be \$50–100 every time. I use Western Union or a Somalian bank to send the money. I have sent him a total of \$1000 since I came here a year ago."

Again, the immense pressure for the Sudanese to send money home to their family and friends cannot be overemphasized. Most Lost Boys cannot think of failing to send this money home, no matter what their situation and circumstances are here in Boston. A Sudanese youth said that even if he had known how hard life was going to be in Boston, he would still have made the move to come. Some Lost Boys receive phone calls from people pretending to be their relatives. Even if these people were their true relatives, the Sudanese wonder why they never identified themselves while in Kakuma camp. The phone calls from people from home looking for their help have been so overwhelming that many of the Sudanese have changed their phone numbers since arriving in Boston. One Sudanese said he learned that his mother was alive in a Ugandan refugee camp when he received a letter from her asking him to send money. He in turn asked her to send a photograph of herself and a younger sibling. In spite of the photograph he is not sure whether she really is his mother, but he sends a little bit of money to her to help her.

5. US Responses to the Arrival of "Lost Boys"

A. Reactions from the US Community

The Sudanese found their reception by US society to be good, and welcoming. A welcome is very important to the Sudanese culturally. One Sudanese said that because Lost Boys were welcomed when they arrived, they felt safe and it was a good thing. In addition there has been a welcoming Sudanese caseworker working with IRC, the largest

resettlement agency in Boston. He too was a former refugee living in Kakuma Camp before resettlement in the US and can relate to them on a number of issues.⁵

Another Sudanese commented:

Sometimes you meet good people, and sometimes you meet bad people. Every country has bad people. We came in 2001 and were living eleven of us in two apartments. We went to church one Sunday, and we met people on the way who asked us why we were walking in a big group. They thought we were a gang. We answered by telling them that no we are not a gang, to walk together is our nature. We are used to walking together from the time we lived in south Sudan, and we like to be with each other.

More Sudanese say that the tragedy of September 11, 2001 affected them because Sudan was blacklisted as a country that harbors terrorists.

The worst thing that happened to us was when Sudan was associated with Osama bin Laden. It brought a bad record for us. Yet people don't know that there has been a 20-year war between the north and the south. The north is forcing the south to become Muslim and we refuse that. It is older people who know what is happening in Sudan.

The Sudanese minor reported that he likes what he has seen of American society. "I have found people sweet and happy. I have made many friends, some of who are teaching me how to begin to find a girlfriend. I'm learning many things from different people."

B. Discrimination

The majority of the interviews found that the Sudanese have not come across much discrimination, except for one knifing incident. Interestingly, discrimination is a phenomenon Lost Boys find difficulty in recognizing. For example, one Sudanese said:

Discrimination is very sensitive. I don't know whether I am being treated differently because everyone is different. The differences are more exaggerated when you are among strangers. Discrimination has many different angles and I cannot tell you what amounts to discrimination. America is a country of people with different skin colors, religions, and backgrounds.

One Sudanese said as a new person he cannot get everything that he wants straight away:

You feel frustrated. Not everybody is good. There are some guys not in the government, who just look at you and abuse you on the way. It is hard to describe what others feel; when I pass by them they call me black and

⁵ Mr. Marco Wek, Refugee caseworker, IRC Boston

make racist remarks. It is difficult to communicate. For example, in the shop I see an item I know but it has another name. I feel like I am in my own world and isolated. Some people say they cannot understand me yet I am speaking English. So one has to have courage and patience until you get used to the system and people.

The Sudanese evaluate themselves on their ability to work. As long as they have an opportunity to work, they consider themselves even with everyone else. One Sudanese noted, "I work as well as anyone else. So we are all at the same level. I work with people from many different ethnic backgrounds: African, Afro-American, Bosnian, and so on." Many of the Sudanese do not see any discrimination because of their belief that personal merit is judged from ability and willingness to work. The degree of exposure to discrimination seems depend on which neighborhood the Sudanese find themselves placed in. Unfortunately, some neighborhoods in Boston that have the cheapest rents, and therefore where resettlement agencies have placed the Sudanese, are also notorious for racial tension.

6. Allocation of Funds: Resettlement of Refugees or Support for Peace Negotiations in the Sudan

Almost all the Sudanese think that peace in Sudan is preferable to their massive resettlement in Boston. The Sudanese minor thought that their resettlement program was very expensive. They think that the US government could have used the resettlement money and resources to facilitate peace talks and negotiation between the Government of Sudan and the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA). Yet one of the Sudanese thought that there was little use of further peace talks because all the previous ones have not brought lasting peace. He said, "Resettlement is better because we know there have been several peace attempts. More educated southern Sudanese will provide a strong foundation for peace in Sudan. Because we are here many people are now aware of what is happening, and we have begun educating some people here." Another Sudanese was pessimistic about the pursuit of peace talks. He said he came to this conclusion because war is still going on in Sudan after nineteen years in spite of the efforts put into peace talks:

They should take the young people like us out to a place like the US where we can learn. This will put us in a position later on to go back and change things in Sudan. In 1992, there was a peace agreement, but due to a shortage of educated southerners we are still suffering.

Two other Sudanese spoke of the loss of life: peace would halt the useless killing of innocent people and give a chance for their human rights to be respected. Sudan, they think, has to find a way of finding peace. At least they were in a refugee camp. It is much worse for those still in south Sudan.

VI. Conclusions and Recommendations

1. The authors of this study think that the resettlement process was done very rapidly. Not enough preparation time was given to the Sudanese refugees prior to their departure from the Kakuma refugee camp. The volunteers and host families receiving them in Boston were inadequately prepared. The media played a large role in reinforcing the stereotype of “Lost Boys” and casting the boys as exotic and hapless victims.

2. The refugees lost friendship and coping networks when they were insensitively "divided" upon arrival in their resettlement states. Their most common complaints have been overwhelming loneliness and disconnection. They also complain about frustration over limited sources of income, while under considerable pressure to remit part of their incomes back to friends and family in Sudan and repay their flight costs to IOM. The authors of this study believe that better policies could have alleviated this situation.

The boys living together in the camps before the resettlement program should not have been separated. This separation had a negative impact on them. The trust and dependence that had been created between them was lost, and they had to begin dealing with adjustments immediately on arrival. This process took a big toll on their social and physical integration process that might have been avoided if the youths had been resettled in the same groups and shelter arrangements they were accustomed to in the camp. The boys established special bonds during their original journey away from Sudan, shared shelters in Ethiopian refugee camps, if and when they return to Sudan together, and traveled onward to Kakuma refugee camp in Kenya, where they lived together for ten years before the resettlement process commenced. These young people had established family bonds and trust that would have been a strength to exploit during the process of placement by resettlement agencies.

3. The authors of this study believe that the special and unique circumstances of the Sudanese resettled refugees make them markedly different from other refugee groups that have been resettled in Boston. The authors hypothesize that the current psychosocial counseling being given to the Sudanese resettled refugees is not consistent with the counseling received in the camps. (This thesis will require consultation of the Sudanese resettled refugees' original records in Kakuma Camp, Kenya.)

4. An examination of the coordination plan devised by UNHCR/IOM and the U.S. Department of State would illuminate a number of issues; for example, how the Sudanese resettled boys were allocated to the different states, and which agencies were mandated to take care of the resettled boys. The authors' hypothesis is that this was not done in a way consistent with the needs of the refugees, but rather in accordance with the policies and traditions of the resettlement agencies.

5. The authors hypothesize that there have been wide disparities in how boys and girls have been resettled and treated. What has been the impact on the unaccompanied Lost Girls, 2,000 in number (compared to the 10,000 Lost Boys)? What do the differences

imply about UNHCR's gender sensitivity? Unfortunately, it was not possible to interview some of the Lost Girls.

UNHCR at the refugee camp in Kakuma branch office, Nairobi, and Geneva levels should have presented both Sudanese Lost Girls and Lost Boys as a single package caseload for resettlement, and not only boys, and girls later as an afterthought. This unforeseen error dimmed the chances of many Sudanese Lost Girls, who were eclipsed by the boys, although the girls met the requirements of the US government group resettlement program, yet never made it to the initial resettlement lists. The research team learned that the Sudanese community barred the Lost Girls from resettlement processes in order to trade them off in marriage for profitable dowries and use them for unpaid and unquantified domestic chores, without schooling opportunities, before marrying them off to the suitor with the highest bride price.

6. The authors were interested in exploring the impact of ethnicity among the resettled Sudanese. The resettlement of a specific nationality and group from within the same refugee camp to the US is a very sensitive issue and can have far-reaching consequences. Resentment was felt because the majority of the Lost Boys are Dinka, and their preferred status exacerbated ethnic tensions with the rest of the nationalities, e.g., Ethiopians, Somalis, Rwandese, Ugandans, Eritreans, Congolese, and Burundians, who also have unaccompanied minors.

7. While this study focused on the Lost Boys, a question that must be asked is whether this massive group resettlement is consistent with the resettlement cases of other persons who are not Sudanese facing similar security risks. Have the US and UNHCR set a precedent for other unaccompanied minors?

8. Following preliminary discussions with the Lost Boys resettled in Boston, it has been noted that the title "Lost Boys" has caused many problems for the young men, as they have been perceived to be incapable minors, when in fact most are young men with their own fully developed lives, some even with families and responsibilities. Being forced into a category without "agency" (i.e., a will and reasoning power of their own) they find very insulting and demeaning.

9. The agencies receiving this group of refugees seemed to have been inadequately prepared and to have had very little knowledge about this particular group of refugees. Their staff was ill prepared and knew very little about the caseload needs and therefore did not know how to deal with them. Problems of language, accent, color, way of dressing, transportation, shopping, types of food, and general culture shock became daily matters to deal with. Temporary hiring by the resettlement agencies of Sudanese residents in the US and social workers from the Kakuma refugee camp in Kenya would have been helpful in the successful integration process.

10. The UNHCR office in Washington should have played a better role in monitoring the Sudanese Lost Boys' resettlement program through advising and supporting the resettlement agencies in dealing more confidently with the refugee needs. The refugees

were mostly left under the guidance and support of the local volunteers, men and women who extended their time and resources to support the Sudanese boys.

Summary

The majority of the Lost Boys quickly adjusted to the new society and established new community relationships through learning institutions, residential neighborhoods, jobs, and places of worship. They quickly made friends with family members of the volunteers who worked tirelessly to support them.

Generally the Sudanese Lost Boys resettlement program is a success -- a humanitarian story that captured one of the largest and longest amounts of media attention in the recent history of resettlement in the US. Yet much-dramatized high expectations of coming from darkness in Africa and emerging in heaven the land of plenty flowing with milk and honey were diminished in real life with fading cameras. In total, however, the media played a very important role in the world especially in the US by drawing attention to the plight of the Sudanese Lost Boys. After watching and listening to the news many people were sympathetic, and thousands of volunteers came forward to offer their time to help the Sudanese refugees, partly because of their exotic nature, but quickly such energy waned. If proper and targeted training for these volunteers had been provided, many volunteers would have continued to give their support. Many volunteers continue supporting the Sudanese Lost Boys in all sorts of ways.

Concluding Note

There is need to expand this research to cover all other US states in which the Sudanese Lost Boys were resettled. Such study would collect deeper and wider participatory data. Conclusions would illustrate various experiences of the Lost Boys while they were resettled, finding new homes in the US and integrating themselves into a new culture and community.

Unfortunately this research team was not able to obtain any original records about the Sudanese boys to determine whether they are consistent with the identities of the same group of Lost Boys that met the US government resettlement priority requirements since their 1987 first flight from Sudan to Ethiopia, back to Sudan and to Kakuma refugee camp in Kenya. Radda Barnnen, a Swedish Child Protection agency had the original records that were passed on in bits to UNHCR in the Kakuma refugee camp.